Making Work Work: Improving Employment Outcomes for Autistic Adults

by Adam Berman

B.S. in Psychology, August 2008, University of Maryland, College Park
M.A. in Special Education, December 2011, The George Washington University

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Elisabeth Rice
Associate Professor of Special Education and Disability Studies

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CHAPTER 1

Background

Autistic people have issues with social skills, behavior, and communication (American Psychological Association, 2013) and have significant hurdles to sustained, paid employment (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009). All students with disabilities, including autism, have Individualized Education Plans (IEP) that provide accommodations for students. Part of the IEP is the transition plan, a federally mandated section for students with disabilities who are 16 and older (P.L. 108-446 (2004)). A transition plan is made for all students with disabilities to prepare them for life after high school. Even though the transition plan is meant to assist students with disabilities towards desirable employment and other post-secondary outcomes, students with disabilities graduate with significantly lower employment rates and are more frequently underemployed when compared to their non-disabled peers. Autistic students have even lower rates of competitive employment than students with other disabilities and make significantly less wages than peers with other disabilities. Poor employment outcomes for autistic students are a global problem; studies have shown that only 34% of adults on the spectrum had any form of employment (Howlin et al., 2004), 56% of autistic adults had any employment in Canada (Eaves & Ho, 2008), and only 6% of adults with ASD were currently competitively employed (Taylor & Seltzer, 2011). Autistic individuals also only earned on average $8.10 per hour; this was significantly less than people with learning disabilities, emotional-behavior disabilities, and speech-language impairments (Roux et al., 2013). Poor employment outcomes for adults on the spectrum are vastly different from the 3.5% unemployment rate for citizens in the United States (Bureau of Labor

Statistics, 2020). Despite large differences in employment between the general population and for autistic adults, interventions to improve transition outcomes are present. Interventions specifically for autistic students are small in number but more general research for students with other disabilities has shown supported employment experiences and self-determination interventions can improve postsecondary outcomes.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is defined as, "persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts" and, "restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities…" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). An autism spectrum disorder is a disability that impacts an individual's communication and social skills paired with rigidity and repetitive, non-adaptive behaviors. Autism spectrum disorders are often diagnosed early in life and impact the individual for the duration of their life; there is no cure for autism. Autism is also placed on a spectrum; some individuals require minimal or even no support whereas others need round-the-clock services. Autistic students often get lost in transitioning from high school as they are not taught effective communication or planning on what they want to do after graduation (Carley, 2016). Part of the problem finding post-secondary employment and activities is the underdevelopment of self-determination for autistic people. Self-determination is the ability to influence one's course in life (Wehmeyer, 2003). Key components of self-determination include informed choice-making, goal-setting, adaptive problem solving, and self-advocacy (Wehmeyer et al., 2010). Without self-determination skills, any person would struggle to find a desirable and appropriate job for themselves. With the communication and behavioral needs present in many people on the spectrum, self-determination is a skill that can be difficult to develop

(Wehmeyer et al., 2010). There are a growing number of autistic students that are currently aging out of the public schooling system and into adulthood. About 50,000 autistic students turn 18 each year in the United States (Roux et al., 2013, p. 931). Even with a rapidly growing number of autistic individuals graduating or aging out of public schools, there remains a dearth of research regarding adulthood for people on the spectrum (Roux et al., 2013). The transition from high school to post-high school life is difficult for many autistic children as issues with reciprocal social interactions and relationships, reading nonverbal behaviors and cues, repetitive behaviors, and obsessions all provide major obstacles to success (Pinder-Amaker, 2013). Sensory overload, processing and remembering verbal directions, fine and gross motor skills, and regulating emotions can further impede the goals of a successful transition for autistic people (Pinder-Amaker, 2013). Only 55% percent of young adults have worked outside of the home for pay at least once in the first 6 years post-high school (Roux et al., 2013, p. 932). Also, autistic adults with average IQ are, "three times more likely to have no daytime activities compared to those with an intellectual disability." (Taylor & Seltzer, 2011 in Taylor, Henninger, & Mailick, 2015, p. 785). Many autistic young adults are left behind their peers. People on the autism spectrum make significantly lower wages and are employed significantly less than their peers (Anderson, Larson, & Wuorio, 2011), whereas over two-thirds of adults without disabilities are employed (Shogren et al., 2016). The challenges for people on the autism spectrum are unique and warrant specialized support and services to help. Explicit instruction and additional interventions in self-regulation and social skills are needed for many autistic people (Wehmeyer et al., 2011). Personalized help and support can get autistic people more invested in their

employment and find higher-quality jobs. Cuts to employment services, vocational rehabilitation, special education, and welfare impact autistic people heavily because of how much help they need help from services to obtain a job, learn soft skills, and appropriate workplace behaviors. Without a financial safety net, autistic people face rampant poverty and risk losing their independence. Integrated employment experiences for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are associated with higher wages and increased self-determination (Shogren et al., 2016). Despite higher wages and increased self-determination, state governments do not have integrated employment as a funding priority (Shogren et al., 2016) nor had integrated employment rates improved over time (Domin & Butterworth, 2013). Autistic people who do not have intellectual disabilities are inherently disadvantaged when it comes to employment (Howlin & Moss, 2012).

Most of the research base on autism and employment are case studies and are not generalizable to the larger autism population (Wehman et al., 2014). Even though state funding does not provide for many integrated employment experiences for autistic students and students with intellectual disabilities, recent researchers have shown providing employment experiences for students with disabilities in high school improved workplace behaviors, wages, and hours worked (Schall et al., 2015). Whether it is through structured programs such as Project SEARCH, a specific high school employment program for students with disabilities that teaches them vocational skills in a real-world setting, or through general supported employment programs, autistic students found competitive employment experiences after high school where they earned above minimum wage and held onto their jobs for an extended period (Schall et al., 2015). One

benefit of specific employment programs such as Project SEARCH was the fact that students on the spectrum earned significantly higher wages ($9.89) than the students in the supported employment program ($8.82) (Schall et al., 2015). Even with the scarcity of generalizable research into interventions for students on the spectrum, the current direction into employment research seeks to develop meaningful interventions that provide tailor-made support and an inclusive learning environment to improve the lives of autistic individuals.

Problem Statement

Autistic people are often unemployed or underemployed; they work fewer hours and earn less money than neurotypical people and peers with other disabilities (Chiang et al., 2013). People on the spectrum find community employment elusive, are competitively employed at much lower rates than people with other disabilities, and often earn less than minimum wage (Chiang et al., 2013). Over half of ASD individuals do not participate in post-secondary education or employment (Chiang et al., 2013). The lack of intervention studies (Taylor et al., 2012) does not help the employment or general inclusion of autistic people. Even today, there is a desperate need for autism and employment research (Wehman et al., 2014). Autistic people need help to address behavior and communication, making competitive employment particularly hard to find. Competitive employment gives autistic individuals more independence, more engagement with the general community, higher self-esteem, and improved social status (Feinstein, 2019). Employment also has positive impacts on physical and mental health

for ASD people (Feinstein, 2019). Even with competitive employment, many people on the autism spectrum struggle to keep their jobs as employers are unwilling to provide meaningful supports and accommodations. This study will fill a gap in the literature by researching multiple self-determination characteristics and their impact on competitive employment. Research specifically supporting people on the spectrum gain and keep competitive employment is in short supply and this study will add to this research base. By studying multiple self-determination characteristics and their impact on competitive employment, a gap in the literature will be addressed. The present study will find specific relationships between individual self-determination traits and employment to direct future research towards self-determination and employment interventions. Guiding research towards intervention will make autism and employment research more generalizable and provide meaningful programs and knowledge for schools and vocational support services. The present study will also gather the voices of autistic adults, which is lacking in the research. Lack of vocational support and services for teenagers makes many autistic children unemployed adults. The scant amount of personal input into the transition process leaves out the voices of autistic individuals. The research into autism and employment should account for the unique experiences and perceptions of ASD people to improve the research base and transition process (Sosnowy et al., 2018).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the proposed mixed methods study is to test how the self-determination construct can predict more successful employment outcomes for autistic people. Self-determination is defined through Causal Agency Theory as agentic action, volitional action, and action-control beliefs (Shogren et al., 2015). While studies discuss

how specific behaviors impact employment for autistic individuals (McConnell et al., 2012), self-determination components are not analyzed in a predictive fashion. The present study will measure how all self-determination factors combine to influence employment and how each factor individually impacts multiple employment outcomes.

Researchers measuring employment outcomes did not measure the quality of employment. Most employment experiences were measured via quantitative measures such as national surveys, data from vocational rehabilitation, and standardized cognitive and language assessments (Sosnowy et al., 2018). Definitions of good employment outcomes versus poor employment outcomes vary heavily between individuals on the spectrum (Sosnowy et al., 2018). What counts as successful for one autistic person does not qualify as successful for another person. Familial and individual wishes for transition into adulthood are unique and hard to standardize (Sosnowy et al., 2018). The interview in the study aims to explore how autistic people are satisfied or dissatisfied with their jobs and what services and supports benefit them the most in terms of employment. The interview will take into account the individual and cultural differences of each person interviewed and how their unique needs impact satisfaction with employment. Much of the research into employment outcomes for autistic people have not taken into account how they feel about their work nor does it connect satisfaction between supports and services and employment outcomes (Sosnowy et al., 2018). The research base has assumed that all ASD people strive for the same employment goals when this is not the case (Sosnowy et al., 2018). The interview will explore how self-determination components and personal traits impact employment outcomes and employment satisfaction. The research will combine both quantitative and qualitative research

methods to strengthen the research base on autism and employment. Through quantitative research, the research will analyze the specific relationships between self-determination skills and employment outcomes. The researcher will use qualitative research to add voices from the autism community to confirm or disconfirm what skills, interventions, and practices are truly helpful in finding and keeping satisfactory employment. By including both research methods, the present study will potentially show how using and developing self-determination skills improves employment outcomes and satisfaction while including a typically ignored voice in the research.

Subjectivity Statement

Autism and employment are topics of study that are personally close to the principal researcher's life. As a child, the lead researcher was diagnosed with autism at the age of 2 and told that mainstream life would be permanently out of reach. Despite the grim prognosis, the researcher succeeded in K-12 education and earned both his bachelor's and master's degrees. Even with his educational success, the researcher has been unable to find a career that matches his strengths and talents. The researcher has endured many difficulties when it comes to employment such as mismatching talents to jobs and facing employer mistreatment concerning his autism symptomology. The researcher will use his personal experiences to include the voices of many more autistic people who also have difficulty finding and keeping jobs. The personal experiences and personal knowledge of the researcher are important to consider for the present study; knowledge of self is a requirement for performing valid research no matter the methods used (Mertens, 2009). Also, the researcher acknowledges that many people in the autism

community prefer identity language first when describing autism (i.e., autistic person rather than a person with autism) and will use this language throughout the paper.

Research Questions

A total of five research questions were developed by the researcher to address the shortcomings of past research. The current research questions seek to answer how the skills, personalities, and preferences of the autistic individual affected employment. The researcher anticipated that the mixed methods study will answer all five questions; the quantitative and qualitative methodologies will play key roles in triangulating information to provide complete answers to the questions.

1. What self-determination capacity variables predict gainful, high-quality employment for autistic students?

2. How do the individual capacities (volitional action, agentic action, and action-control beliefs) of self-determination affect employment outcomes for autistic people?

3. What self-determination skills do autistic people value the most in finding and maintaining high-quality employment?

4. What makes autistic people satisfied with their employment?

5. What do autistic adults say about employment and self-determination that would explain the regression analysis?

Questions 1 and 2 will require the regression analysis to answer; both of the questions ask how self-determination skills predict employment outcomes. Questions 3

and 4 will be answered via the interviews. Questions 1 and 2 are predictive and will use the SDI: AR to find how the three self-determination skills: volitional action, agentic action, and action-control beliefs affect income and vocational independence. Income and vocational independence are important measures of employment but are not the only measures of outcomes. Job satisfaction, accommodating workplaces, and benefits are also valid measures of employment outcomes. Questions 3 and 4, through interviews, will explore what autistic adults value in their employment and what variables make them satisfied with their jobs. Question 5 requires the use of both the interviews and regression to answer; autistic adults may corroborate the results of the regression analysis and add more information on how Causal Agency Theory plays a key role in employment satisfaction. Interviewees may also add conflicting information about the regression analysis and disagree that self-determination can predict satisfactory employment. The autistic adults may also provide new information that the regression analysis did not consider but is nonetheless important to employment satisfaction.

Potential Significance

The present study will build upon the current research base. By analyzing self-determination variables in the study, teachers and policymakers will know what interventions and practices will benefit autistic people the most and why specific interventions work through the framework of self-determination. A focus on developing strong self-determination skills through individualized and practical interventions will improve skills necessary for the world of employment. By analyzing the predictive relationship between self-determination factors and employment outcomes, the knowledge base on employment outcomes will expand and self-determination

interventions will be proposed to improve employment for ASD people. The interview will call into question program cutting and austerity plaguing services for people with disabilities. Including the voices of ASD, adults will help change how the current research defines successful employment outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

The present study uses the causal agency theory of self-determination (Shogren et al., 2015) and critical disability theory as a theoretical framework (Goodley, 2013). Causal agency theory analyzes what makes actions and people self-determined; the theory posits people can only act in a self-determined manner if they act according to their preferences, believe their actions can meaningfully impact their future, and take actions to reach their goals (Shogren et al., 2015). Through Causal Agency Theory, the present study will analyze how autistic individuals have planned out their employment and what actions they have taken to achieve their employment goals and successful employment outcomes.

Critical disability theory posits society is structured for and by individuals without disabilities and this societal architecture negatively impacts people with disabilities (Goodley, 2013). The phenomenon of disability is looked at by society as a tragedy that results in systemic discrimination from employment and the community at large (Goodley et al., 2019). The dominant understandings of disability view people with disabilities as tragic and pathological; critical disability theory questions dominant views on disability (Goodley et al., 2019). Critical disability theory aims to question dominant views of disability and analyze critically how present societal structures implicitly impact people with disabilities. To question present societal structures is what makes critical

disability theory critical; how does our current system negatively affect people with disabilities in education, employment, and community participation? People with disabilities are limited by the structure of society, not because of any personal failings but because the demands of living in the community are based on non-disabled peoples' skills. To address issues of employment for autistic people, a critical lens towards the structure of employment is used to see how people with disabilities often do not get the support, welfare, and services required for employment success.

Summary of Methodology

The study is a convergent mixed methods study where one quantitative and one qualitative method of research will be included (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). For the study to be a convergent mixed methods design, both the quantitative and qualitative parts of the study will carry equal weight and one part of the study will not drive the other part of the study (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). The researcher will use the already made surveys for the quantitative part of the design and interview subjects without relying on one to determine the other. The research design will incorporate a predictive analysis and a semi-structured interview. The predictive analysis will analyze the relationship between individual self-determination skills and employment outcomes. Two surveys will be administered to measure self-determination skills and employment outcomes. To measure self-determination skills, the Self-Determination Inventory: Adult Report (SDI: AR) will be administered to autistic adults in a major Mid-Atlantic Metropolitan area. The SDI: AR is a computerized survey that measures volitional action, agentic action, and action-control beliefs of adults on the spectrum (Kansas University). Wages and vocational independence were used to determine employment outcomes for

adults on the spectrum. After administering the survey, the predictive analysis will measure how each self-determination skill can predict employment hours and wages.

To address issues of job satisfaction and valuing subject self-determination, a semi-structured interview will be administered. Themes of valuing employment in the general community, individualized help and work, need for support and services from the government, and natural supports are likely to emerge.

Limitations

Measuring postsecondary outcomes for autistic students is challenging because there are many different ways to measure successful outcomes. For individuals on the spectrum, interviews can be quite challenging to complete and analyze. With neurotypical populations, the non-verbal cues given throughout the interview process can indicate discomfort or lack of truthfulness in answering questions. For autistic people, normally dismissive or unopen body language cannot be read the same way as it is for neurotypical populations. This could potentially limit how the researcher interprets and gets interview data because a person on the spectrum may have 'off' body language without trying to convey anything or may resort to going silent answering the question. The interview process may also make my subjects overly nervous because of the one-on-one nature of the interview. Due to this personal setting, my subjects may shut down and not fully answer my interview questions or provide scant information.

Autistic people have very unique needs; each autistic person has their strengths, limits, and concerns. The unique nature of autism may limit the generalizability of the study as the researcher could get people on the spectrum saying that working part-time at a lower-wage job could make them satisfied. Despite the societal implications of low-

wage and part-time work, my interviewees could be happy with these settings due to a calm work environment, regular schedule, knowing all the tasks at the job, or for a variety of other reasons. There is a potential that my interview and predictive analysis produce conflicting results due to the nature of autism.

The self-determination factors used in the study do not include opportunities to use self-determination skills or self-regulation. Self-determination opportunity was originally considered for this study as using these skills is just as important to being self-determined as having the skills in the first place. The opportunities factor could not be included because of the lack of valid and reliable measurements available for this factor. The self-regulation factor was not included because current measurement tools use fill-in-the-blank style answers to measure this factor. Due to the open-ended nature of the self-regulation factor in self-determination assessments, different scoring criteria would have been used to measure this factor. The different formatting of the self-regulation factor would have made analysis too difficult when compared to all other factors.

Delimitations

The present study will only consider employment outcomes, as focusing on post-secondary education and independent living will make the study too broad. Even though self-determination can affect education and independent living, measuring all forms of post-secondary outcomes will overwhelm my subjects. Employment is the focus of the study because autism is a disability that affects each individual differently; some autistic people may not need 2 or 4-year college to have successful employment; some autistic people may need assistance to maintain successful employment even with post-secondary education. Even people with master's or doctoral degrees on the spectrum may need help

with independent living skills. Even though employment has differences between each autistic individual, the demand for benefits, livable wages, and support are universal.

Only adults over the age of 18 will be selected to participate in the study. Participants, however, will have no upper age limit. The subjects in the study will have a large age gap, affecting the services available, education and training received expectations and knowledge regarding autism. For many older adults, knowledge about autism was limited at their time of transition, and many laws demanding transition services for students with disabilities were non-existent. The lack of knowledge and resources available could significantly impact self-determination skills and employment outcomes; younger adults on the spectrum could have more support and knowledgeable professionals to help build self-determination skills and procure better employment. Due to the age gap, vast differences in employment expectations and satisfaction may present themselves.

Only subjects with at least a part-time job or past employment will be selected to highlight current struggles within the general working community. The selection of employed subjects with autism will be difficult as many adults on the spectrum are currently unemployed. A bias may present itself as a result of this delimitation because I am selecting a small sample of people on the spectrum for the interview. Unemployed autistic people may have different takes on successful employment than those that are employed or have been employed.

Key Terms

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): A disability that impacts an individual's social, communication, and behavioral skills. ASD symptomatology typically includes rigid

adherence to schedules, sensory sensitivities, inappropriate behaviors, non-verbal communication difficulties, and issues establishing relationships with peers (American Psychological Association, 2013).

Austerity: Government practices that cut funding of government programs. Typically, social service programs and welfare are deemed too expensive for the budget and are cut or eliminated to cut government spending (Bates et al., 2017).

Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE): Employment for people with disabilities set in the general community that pays at least the federal minimum wage (Wehman et al., 2018).

Customized Employment: Employment strategy used for people with disabilities. With this strategy, vocational professionals and employers work together to create a job for a person with a disability that accounts for the individual's strengths, weaknesses, preferences, concerns, and the employer's needs. Through this process, a job is specifically created for the person that meets the needs of both the individual and employer (Job Accommodation Network, 2018).

Executive Functioning: An overarching term for a collection of skills needed for planning, organizing, evaluating, regulating, and acting in one's life. For autistic people, there are typically some areas of concern with these skills that impact independent living, education, and employment (Lara & Osborne, 2017).

Hidden Curriculum: The soft skills needed for people to be successful at work. These skills refer to social skills and vocational skills that are frequently not taught explicitly because many people learn them naturally. For people on the spectrum, these skills are not learned naturally and need to be explicitly taught (Carley, 2016).

Individualized Education Plan (IEP): A written document used by United States public school systems to describe the present levels of performance, goals, accommodations, and services for students with disabilities, including autism. Public schools serving students with disabilities as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) must annually review the IEP to ensure sufficient progress is made and change goals and services to respond to student needs (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2000).

Job Accommodations: Supports provided on the job for people with disabilities to make performing the job easier or to make doing the job possible. An accommodation can address a variety of issues and can range from a change in the workspace, work schedules, and tools used to complete the job (Job Accommodation Network, 2018).

Neurotypical: A person without a mental or cognitive disability (National Autistic Society, 2015).

Person-Centered Planning: A planning model for people with disabilities and their families to emphasize an individual's needs, desires, strengths, life history, and challenges. This model of planning is done in conjunction with service professionals and allows for the individual and their family to express their wishes in a way that is culturally respectful and considers the needs of the person. Old planning models would typically have service providers perform most of the planning for the person with a disability (Cornell University Yang-Tin Institute, 2019).

Self-determination: The concept in which individuals can decide upon their actions, develop desirable long-term goals, and plan actions to achieve their goals. An individual

decides upon plans and goals in professional, financial, and personal aspects of life and does so independently (Shogren et al., 2015).

Sheltered Workshop: A place of employment specifically for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities that are segregated from the general community. These segregated workplaces pay below minimum wage for work performed (US Department of Labor, 2020).

Soft-Skills: Skills in the workplace that are social. Oftentimes, people on the spectrum excel at the core skills of a job but struggle with social skills in the workplace. Communication with colleagues and teamwork are some examples of these skills (Lara & Osborne, 2017).

Successful employment outcomes: An employment outcome is determined after someone graduates from school or training. Outcomes include wages, hours worked, job satisfaction, benefits received, and job retention (Chiang et al., 2013).

Supported Employment: A job model for people with disabilities to get additional support in the workplace. A job coach is frequently involved in supporting a person to learn job tasks, manage work expectations, and help to learn appropriate behaviors at work (Schall et al., 2015).

Transition Plan: Part of the IEP that describes how students with disabilities will adjust to life after graduating from public schools. The plan is required by IDEA to be a part of the IEP for students starting at 16 years old. A transition plan includes an assessment of career goals, interests, and planned activities to achieve these goals (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2000).

Underemployment: The practice in which people are overqualified for the job they currently have. Overqualification typically refers to having higher levels of training and education for the job that a person is currently performing (Kim & Allan, 2020).

Vocational Rehabilitation: A service provider through a state's government that helps students with disabilities transition to life after high school. This service can help students with disabilities find job coaching, connect people with disabilities to employers willing to work with them, improve life skills, and provide training for employment (Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, 2020).

Vocational Skills: Skills people need to find and keep a job. These skills can refer to job-specific abilities for a specific job or are more general and refer to good work habits that help people stay on the job (Wehmeyer, 2007).

CHAPTER 2

Introduction

Autistic students have many disadvantages when they graduate from high school and enter the adult world. Autism symptomatology, lack of support and services specifically designed for autistic people, and unaccommodating workplaces have negatively impacted adult outcomes for people with this disability (Booth, 2016). The literature on autism and postsecondary outcomes has found some strategies that help people succeed. Interventions including IEP participation, self-determination skill development, and job preparation programs can help people on the spectrum succeed after high school. Even with interventions available, autistic students have fared significantly worse in employment and wages earned than counterparts with other disabilities. Socio-economic class and race further impair outcomes for students on the spectrum.

The framework guiding the present study shows the systematic problems autistic people face in society. A critical disability lens puts into view how society is designed only for those without disabilities and how current policy trends further disadvantage people with disabilities.

To counteract the inherent disadvantages people on the spectrum have in today's society, Causal Agency Theory frames the present study on how people build self-efficacy and empowerment. Self-determination skills can be taught to autistic individuals; these skills can help people set goals, find their passions, and determine a course of action to reach employment goals. Through self-determination, people on the spectrum

can overcome the systemic flaws of our society and find gainful post-secondary outcomes.

The researcher used the George Washington University Library's EBSCO host education source database. The researcher used a combination of search terms to find conceptual articles, literature reviews, and research studies related to the current study. The following terms were entered:

autism AND employment outcomes AND transition produced 208 results
Autism AND self-determination AND transition included 208 results
autism AND self-determination AND Employment Outcomes which yielded 14 results
autism AND interventions AND employment outcomes were used and included 156 results
Causal Agency Theory AND self-determination included 19 results
Critical Disability Theory AND Author (Goodley) yielded 6 results

Studies included in the literature review for the present study were from the year 2000 or more recently. Articles for the current study were from peer-reviewed journals. Books relating to autism and employment were also included in the literature review for the study.

The literature review will begin with the conceptual framework of the current study. The framework for this study is a combination of critical disability theory and Causal Agency Theory. Through both theories, the phenomenon of autism and insufficient employment outcomes can be framed as a societal problem and teaching self-determination skills is dire. The researcher will then begin with a literature review of autism and postsecondary transition. Through the review, the researcher will highlight the

lack of satisfactory post-school outcomes for autistic people and symptomatology that impacts employment outcomes such as executive functioning skills. The researcher will then discuss systemic issues that negatively affect autistic people such as the job hiring process that disadvantages this population coupled with a lack of support and government services and how current society's values exacerbate the cutting of employment services and interventions. Employment variables and employment models will also be included. In the literature review, the researcher will then elaborate on what constitutes self-determination and why it is an important factor in postsecondary outcomes. Employment outcomes for autistic people, variables affecting employment, the consequences of unemployment, and benefits of employment will also be addressed. Current research into transition interventions for autistic people and people with disabilities will be reviewed. The researcher will conclude the review with inferences for the present study.

Conceptual Framework

The present study will include critical disability theory and Causal Agency Theory. Critical disability theory questions society at large and how its structure is meant only for able-bodied people (Goodley et al., 2014). Critical disability theory is intersectional; society today favors those who do not require protection from discrimination, welfare, services, and supports (Goodley & Lawthom, 2019). People needing help are seen as undesirable and burdensome because the ideals of rugged individualism and bootstrap theory demand people help themselves in times of struggle. Through the present study, critical disability theory will guide the interview portion of the study by asking questions regarding job happiness, helpful supports and services, and how workplace attitudes affect employees with autism. The questions provided by the

survey in the study do not highlight the exclusion and oppression faced by many people on the spectrum; the interview will call into question the ideals of society that impact autistic people. Emphasis on helpful supports and services will show the need for government help despite societal distrust of the institution. Workplace attitudes and job satisfaction will further highlight how present attitudes governing society negatively impact employees with autism and create a hostile environment for people with disabilities.

Causal Agency Theory will guide the survey for the present study. Causal Agency Theory categorizes self-determination into three components of volitional action, locus of control beliefs, and planning (Shogren et al., 2015). The components of self-determination have previously been operationalized through surveys such as the ARC's Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer, 1995) and the American Institute of Research's (AIR) Self-Determination Survey. With the ARC's Self-Determination Scale, a 72-item survey and short answer questions measure four components of self-determination including autonomy, psychological empowerment, self-regulation, and self-realization (Wehmeyer, 1995). The limitation with the ARC's scale is the formatting of the survey, the self-regulation section uses only short-answer questions whereas the other three sections use survey-style questioning. The difference in formatting makes measurement for the current study difficult and the length of the assessment makes it inaccessible for autistic people who may have comorbid attention issues. The AIR's Self-Determination Survey measures opportunities and capacities at school and home (Wolman et al., 1994). The AIR survey covers a variety of settings, some of which do not apply to the intended population of the current study. The present study will use the Self-Determination

Inventory: Adult Report (SDI: AR) survey to inform questions regarding how autistic people plan, view themselves, and achieve their employment goals. The SDI: AR is a computerized, quick survey on how autistic adults view themselves in achieving their goals, making long-term plans, and how much their actions can impact their lives (Shogren et al., 2015). Surveys have used Causal Agency Theory to measure the construct of self-determination; questions regarding autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment, and self-realization probe how autistic people view their actions, act by long-term goals, and how they plan to achieve goals. Employment is a complicated process that requires even neurotypical people to prepare, set career goals, and act in ways to ensure desired outcomes (Carley, 2016). For autistic people, the employment process presents many challenges. Planning, acting in accordance to desired outcomes, and preparation all require autistic people to use their often-weak executive functioning and social skills (Lara & Osborne, 2017). Of particular concern is how issues with social skills negatively impact the development of self-determination skills; autistic people often do not have the social capital to find others to help them create meaningful employment plans nor make connections to ease the transition from school to employment (Lara & Osborne, 2017). Autistic people are often lost after high school; no one will help them make plans or propose meaningful actions towards successful employment. Surveying the volitional action, agentic action, and action-control beliefs of adults on the spectrum will highlight how deficiencies in schools have left many autistic people behind in employment. Soft skills that need explicit instruction for autistic people (that neurotypical people naturally learn) are not taught and impacts employment (Lara & Osborne, 2017). The survey will highlight how autistic people with more self-

determination fare better with employment than people with fewer self-determination skills.

One caveat of Causal Agency Theory is that it does not account for opportunities to use self-determination for individuals on the spectrum (Shogren et al., 2015). Self-determination skills often require explicit instruction and part of teaching self-determination is direct practice. Without instruction, autistic students will not learn how to make goals, make plans to achieve goals, act independently, nor believe they can achieve their goals. People with disabilities, including autism, often do not develop self-determination skills because they rely on parents or professionals to make goals and decisions without their input (Wehmeyer, 2007). Professionals and adults may believe they are protecting autistic people from bad choices but in reality, they are hindering the growth of self-determination skills (Wehmeyer, 2007). Even when it comes to employment, professionals and adults make choices for autistic people without their input (Wehmeyer, 2007). A lack of opportunity means autistic people fall further behind their neurotypical peers. Many of the choices parents and professionals make frequently do not agree with the individual's preferences (Wehmeyer, 2007). In time, people on the spectrum have no skills to establish career goals because they are accustomed to their parents or others making career goals for them. Providing people with disabilities choice-making opportunities helps reduce problem behaviors and increase motivation (Wehmeyer, 2007). Even if interventions are given to autistic students, the scourge of low expectations takes away the power for these students to decide upon goals; parents and other adults instead make the goals. In response to excessive forced dependence, the conceptual framework for the present study must account for opportunities to practice

self-determination. The interview for the current study will ask autistic people how they feel professional and familial input impacts their lives. By asking about professional and familial input, autistic people may give insight into how others may make them feel more or less self-determined. Self-determination opportunities are an overarching concept for Causal Agency Theory; without the chance to act and establish goals, self-determination will not develop.

Figure 1

Functional Model of Self-Determination

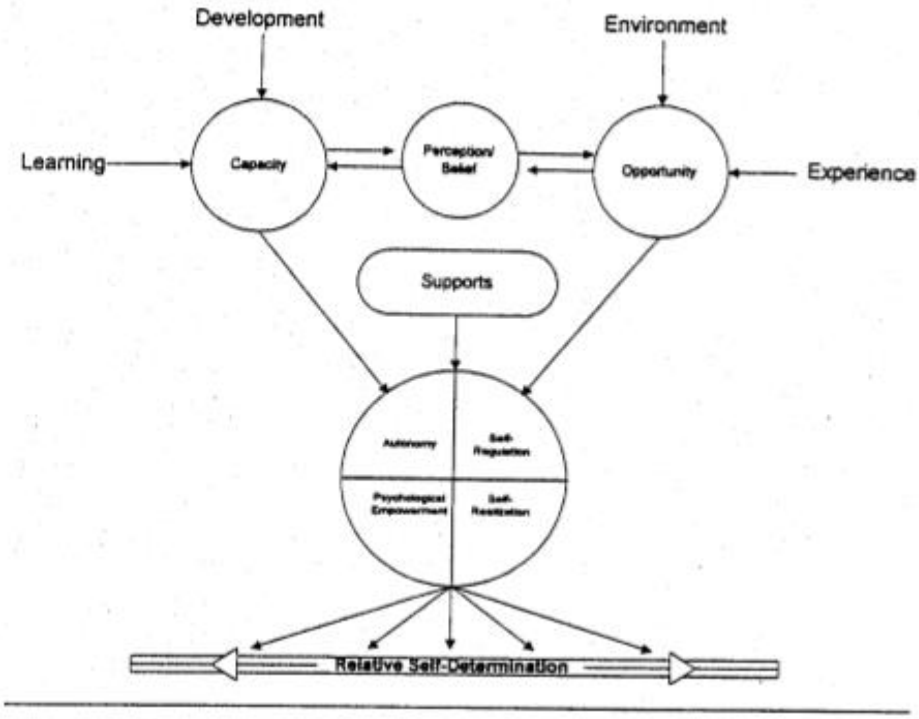


Figure 2

Causal Agency Model of Self-Determination

Autism and Postsecondary Transition

Postsecondary Outcomes for Autistic People

Training for students and young autistic adults was lacking; many training programs in the workplace were not particularly effective for autistic people (Booth, 2016). Typical workplace training required intense social interaction, group work, and taking in a lot of verbal information (Booth, 2016). Lack of focus on vocational training throughout high school and college programs focusing heavily on academics left autistic

people further behind in getting and keeping a job (Carley, 2016). Schools and colleges often assumed their students had the social skills they need to get and keep jobs. Autistic people often lacked the social and vocational skills to help them succeed in finding and keeping a job. Even for college-educated autistic people, employment was only at 50%. College-educated autistic people experienced rampant unemployment for a multitude of reasons including a lack of proper and customized job skills training, lack of explicit social skills teaching, demands for interviewing during the job hiring process, and difficulty networking (Carley, 2016). While rigorous education helped with academic skills, it did not teach the explicit social or vocational skills people on the spectrum need. Lack of social skills is frequently a negative cycle for autistic people. Poor social skills limited friendships, intimate relationships, and professional relationships. Particularly for professional relationships, knowing other professionals in a career field helped significantly in finding jobs. Autistic people, due to limited social resources, did not benefit from networking connections professionally (Carley, 2016). Even with a job, autistic people frequently had difficulties fitting in with the unwritten social norms and social rules of the workplace. The so-called 'hidden curriculum' of how to interact with others at the workplace and navigating the workplace culture was difficult for autistic people (Feinstein, 2019). Social skills were vital to the employment chances of people with disabilities; autistic people that had better communication and social skills were more likely to be employed than those with poorer communication and social skills (Feinstein, 2019). Social skills are linked to employment; following standard social conventions and special workplace social skills help people fit in with their bosses and colleagues. The employee who does not follow social conventions impacts workplace

culture and will eventually get fired. Many employers agreed that teamwork, verbal communication, problem-solving skills, and decision-making skills were more important than technical knowledge (Bissonnette, 2013). Teamwork, communication, and social skills are a struggle for many people on the spectrum. In today's job market, service providers and employers demanded that autistic people make themselves more marketable to the job market (Barnes & Mercer, 2005). Instead of employers providing support and help for potential employees with autism, bosses want autistic people to come into the labor market where no accommodations are needed.

Executive Functioning and Autistic People

Executive functioning skills play a major role in the employment difficulties of autistic people. Job searching requires candidates to keep track of job postings, write and update a resume and cover letter, schedule interviews, match jobs with current skills sets, research an employer, dressing appropriately, and prepare for potential interview questions (Bissonnette, 2013). Common mistakes job seekers with autism made include applying for jobs without reading job descriptions, looking for too many different types of jobs, inflexibility accepting entry-level positions, a poorly written resume, not working while looking for work, not responding to potential opportunities, not preparing for job interviews, and not making a job search a priority (Bissonnette, 2013). Typical issues associated with job searching are connected to executive functioning skills. Autistic people typically benefited from additional preparation to anticipate interview questions, responding to job opportunities promptly, working while job searching, and having an appropriate job searching strategy (Bissonnette, 2013). Some people with an autism spectrum disorder often prioritized finding any job over finding a job that matches their

skills and limitations (Bissonnette, 2013). Some autistic people usually have marked strengths but this led to an overreliance on interest areas where seemingly interesting jobs may have many undiscovered drawbacks for the person (Bissonnette, 2013).

Flexibility is another executive functioning skill that impacts job searching. Accepting entry-level positions and responding to job opportunities impacted how job seekers with autism find jobs (Bissonnette, 2013). Autistic people have different communication skills than their neurotypical peers which impact how autistic people network. Networking impacted the job searching process; autistic people typically placed more focus on their technical skills and interests to help them find a job (Bissonnette, 2013). Many jobs, however, are found through the help of other people in the respective field or even in the community. Lack of networking limited job opportunities for autistic people (Carley, 2016). Even for autistic people who had social capital, not responding to presented job opportunities or refusing to 'take advantage' of personal connections impacted the job search. As a result, autistic people over-relied on only one type of job searching strategy that was ineffective (Bissonnette, 2013). Including more than one job-searching strategy improved the odds of an autistic person finding a job, especially since few jobs were advertised online (Bissonnette, 2013). Many jobs required a person to be in the know about a specific company or personally know others; without these connections, the autistic person was left not knowing about the existence of unadvertised jobs.

The demands for teamwork and effective communication are major barriers for employees with autism. Workplaces often idealized projects requiring a team of colleagues to complete and yet they did not provide training on teamwork skills for employees on the autism spectrum (Booth, 2016). Many social skills must be taught to

autistic people; neurotypical people learn social skills through their daily interactions and autistic people may not pick up on social skills in this way. Even though training teamwork skills would benefit employees with autism, caution must be exercised on how to deliver the training (Booth, 2016). Employers often made the mistake of providing training only to the employee with autism, assuming that they are the only ones lacking teamwork skills (Booth, 2016).

On top of social and training barriers, austerity measures across the globe have negatively impacted society's most vulnerable populations including people with disabilities (Booth, 2016). Cutting costs to fight budget deficits often focused on cutting social services that provided autistic people with employment support services and training; leaving them without services or having families pay out of pocket for services (Booth, 2016). Without support, many autistic adults resort to unpaid or volunteer work.

Job Process and Autism

Interviewing is particularly challenging for autistic people. A job interview requires a person to interact with one or more interviewers face-to-face for an extended period. The interview experience is anxiety-producing for anyone but is worsened for autistic people because of the demand for strong non-verbal communication skills, reading between the lines of given questions and responses, generating socially appropriate responses, socially appropriate dress, and enduring an extended social interaction (Feinstein, 2019). An interview is especially difficult for autistic people with low self-esteem; job interviews require people to sell themselves and present themselves in the best light possible (Feinstein, 2019). An autistic person may have taken a 'truthful' approach to interview questions, which potentially made themselves look worse than they

are to job interviewers (Feinstein, 2019). Interviewees on the spectrum have interpreted interview questions too literally. Questions during an interview often require non-concrete answers. Asking about what a person on the spectrum might bring to the job or why they applied for a job often got inappropriate or meaningless answers (Feinstein, 2019). Autistic people will sometimes 'wing it' on job interviews and have not sufficiently prepared for them (Bissonnette, 2013). The lack of preparation caused interviewees to forget the details of the interview or forget how to answer questions outright (Bissonnette, 2013).

Job and career selection have also hurt many autistic people looking for jobs. Oftentimes, autistic people have chosen a career based upon their interests without considering potential drawbacks. (Lara & Osborne, 2015). Dream careers for autistic people are often found at young ages because of their technical knowledge and interest in the field. Dream jobs, much like for neurotypical people, can be a mismatch for the autistic person. An autistic person that likes superheroes but dislikes writing may choose to become a writer because he is a Marvel superfan. Another autistic person will want to become a veterinarian despite being grossed out by touching bodily fluids. School professionals often used these hard-to-obtain dream jobs as the basis of a transition plan while not at all accounting for various preferences, skills, and personality traits that impact performing the most essential of the job's functions (Lara & Osborne, 2017). Often, autistic people focused on a specific detail of their dream job but forget that this 'dream' job required skills outside of the person's interests (Bissonnette, 2013). The prospective Marvel writer may know all about the comics but cannot write for extended periods. More effective transition planning addresses these desires and uses them to help

guide employment but will also take into account the deficiencies of the student as well. The comic book fan that wants to work for Marvel Studios may be better suited for set design at a studio rather than writing; the squeamish prospective vet may be better suited for working the front desk at a vet's office.

Educational accountability has also negatively impacted transition planning and post-secondary outcomes for many autistic students. Federal education laws such as No Child Left Behind demanded that teachers working in schools meet specific qualifications. Teacher education and preparation are demanded of all teachers under federal laws. Federal laws demanded additional teacher qualifications but these additional demands impacted vocational educators because they are only trained in vocational skills (Lara & Osbourne, 2015). Woodshop, baking, mechanic, and cosmetic educators found in vocational schools could no longer teach in public schools across the country and are instead now found in special day programs for students with extensive special needs (Lara & Osbourne, 2015). Many autistic students still qualify for public schooling and general diplomas; limiting their educations to solely academic ones that do not teach independent living or vocational skills.

The Demand for Employment and Austerity

Western countries demand that all people work. Austerity measures that had cut welfare rewarded independence, self-sufficiency, and being always available for work (Bates et al., 2017). People with disabilities, including autism, face many challenges towards society's ideal citizens. Many autistic people are excluded from the workplace. Autistic people are seen as burdensome or needing too much help in the workplace. Accommodations to help autistic people such as separate workrooms, job coaching,

sensory breaks are seen as burdensome (Booth, 2016). Accommodations and supports for autistic employees are viewed as overly needy and hurting the company's bottom line (Barnes & Mercer, 2005). Being seen as too burdensome hurts the employment of autistic people and cast them to the margins of society where the benchmark of employment often eludes them and poverty is rampant (Barnes & Mercer, 2005). Employment is seen as the ultimate goal for every citizen and the benefits of employment include better health outcomes, access to more relationships and community participation, higher social status, and positive self-identity (Sayce, 2011 in Bates et al., 2017).

Even for autistic people not placed into sheltered workshops, jobs are scarce and do not match well with the individual's strengths and needs. Many people with disabilities, autism included, rely on jobs through the community or government-funded programs. The demands for 'fiscal responsibility' have cut welfare and services for people with disabilities first and often (Bates et al., 2017). For supported employment, 1:1 support has frequently been helpful to the person with a disability. Job cuts and slashed funding has affected not only people with disabilities but also their support staff (Bates et al., 2017). With budget cuts, people with disabilities have often resorted to volunteer work and lost their independence by moving back home (Bates et al., 2017). Jobs through the community and government went away or became volunteer positions where people with disabilities could not make a living wage. Through cuts, people with disabilities were forced to give up working entirely or go work for corporations that prefer bottom line thinking (Bates et al., 2017). Unpredictable work schedules, subcontracting that has excluded employees from benefits like time-off and healthcare, and production quotas hurt autistic people.

Employment Models

The view of people with disabilities as burdensome is damaging to the quantity and quality of employment for autistic people. In the United States, sub-minimum wage jobs still exist for people with disabilities, and placement into sheltered work environments out-paces community-based employment (McDonnell & Hardman, 2010). Sub-minimum wage jobs are placed in secluded workshops away from the mainstream community. People with disabilities such as autism are often paid based on piecemeal work that pays well below minimum wage and isolates them from the community at large. Sub-minimum wage jobs have been justified for people with disabilities as necessary; they have been the only way for people with developmental and cognitive disabilities to have a measure of productivity and receive necessary services at a convenient location (McDonnell & Hardman, 2010). Not only are sheltered workshops justified; they are good for business as people with disabilities are stereotyped as unproductive and therefore should not be paid a minimum or living wage. Despite sheltered workshops being good for the bottom-line, skills taught in a sheltered setting did not translate to community-based employment and there was very little chance of the person with a disability to obtain an inclusive employment placement from the sheltered setting (McDonnell & Hardman, 2010).

The sheltered workshop model did not benefit people with disabilities; the supported employment model was a better model of employment for this population. People with disabilities, including autistic people, were better served by supported employment structures because the programs provided community-integrated, competitive employment for this group (McDonnell & Hardman, 2010). Along with

community-based employment and competitive wages, people with disabilities were provided additional benefits such as paid vacation, sick leave, and work breaks (McDonnell & Hardman, 2010). Supported employment assumed self-determination, and people with disabilities were able to choose desired employment and supports (McDonnell & Hardman, 2010). Through supported employment's values and practices, people with disabilities were more successful on the job than those who were placed in more secluded settings (McDonnell & Hardman, 2010).

Autistic People and Desirable Employment

Research surrounding employment for autistic people has focused on interventions and demographic variables affecting employment. The research that surveyed the voices of autistic people is lacking but was extremely valuable in gauging how the transition to employment works (Sosnowy et al., 2018). Participants in a 3-year employment transition program for autistic people discussed what they felt were important factors that made employment successful. Accommodations for sensory needs, well-established work schedules, co-worker education regarding autism spectrum disorders, and straightforward communication were vital to the success of the program participants (Hedley et al., 2017). The participants in the program also took pride in their work and gained some form of financial independence (Hedley et al., 2017). A common theme for young autistic adults is the desire to live away from home despite currently living with their parents but feeling hindered by their unemployment (Sosnowy et al., 2018). Young autistic adults felt that they were successful with their employment because it was in their field of interest or provided specific accommodations (Sosnowy et al., 2018). For autistic people, self-determination helped with employment success. The

employee with autism felt better about working when they advocated for and received working accommodations. Accommodations for employees with autism varied widely; separate workrooms, lighting changes, fixed schedules, frequent breaks, and direct communication styles were just some of the helpful accommodations available (Booth, 2016). The current employment gap for autistic people and people without disabilities drastically affects the social life, health, independent living, and self-image of autistic people, especially because employment is seen as a desirable goal in this group (Feinstein, 2019). Even though many people on the spectrum desire more social opportunities and independence, poor employment outcomes make it difficult for them to achieve these goals.

Valued Variables in Employment

Many studies on autism and employment-focused on hours worked and wages earned. Even though employment and wages are important, they do not capture the complete picture of meaningful, fulfilling employment. Autistic people value things other than salary and working hours. Employees with autism valued having their work appreciated, having their place of work provide accommodations tailored to their needs, and having work that matched their skills and interests (Scott et al., 2015). For autistic people, managing the social and communicative aspects of the job greatly influenced finding and keeping work (Scott et al., 2015). Employees with autism appreciated opportunities to use self-determination skills to benefit themselves. Successful employment for autistic people must focus on meaningful input from the person at all stages of the employment process (Scott et al., 2015). Even with addressing employment needs and desires, autistic people still noticed that employment was far from desirable.

Bullying, anxiety from work-related stress, and disclosure of autism remained issues that affect these employees (Scott et al., 2015). Structured work environments were also valued by autistic people, breaking-down tasks into simpler steps and having workplace goals provided them with focus and motivation to perform (Scott et al., 2015).

Autistic people also valued opportunities to assess their job skills and preferences. People with disabilities were accurate in evaluating their job skills and preferences when given opportunities for work trials (Hall et al., 2014). People with disabilities were quick to notice what jobs they liked best and matched what they were good at (Hall et al., 2014). Enhancing self-determination opportunities as early as high school was positively linked to employment outcomes, independence, and better self-perception (McDonnell & Hardman, 2010). Autistic people are not given extensive opportunities to explore employment in high school or leave it to parents and school professionals to decide their fate. The qualitative aspect of the present study will probe autistic people about how they find desired employment experiences and evaluate what could have been done better to help them.

Self-Determination

History of Self-Determination

Self-determination in special education is a fairly new concept. Before self-determination was applied to people with disabilities, self-determination was used in philosophical, psychological, and political realms (Wehmeyer, 1999). The concept of self-determination was not used as it is today; self-determination would describe how

individuals were motivated to perform tasks and how nations used their sovereignty (Wehmeyer, 1999). Early developments of self-determination as an educational construct were influenced by non-educational uses of the term. Conferences introducing the idea of educational self-determination framed it as the ability for students to determine their futures (Wehmeyer, 1999).

In psychological contexts, self-determination theory examines, "how biological, social, and cultural conditions either enhance or undermine the inherent human capacities for psychological growth, engagement, and wellness, both in general and in specific domains and endeavors." (Deci & Ryan, p. 3, 2017). Self-determination theory posits that people feel truly motivated to feel competent, autonomous, and belonging (Deci & Ryan, 2017). Within everyone's environment are conditions that help or hinder an individual's self-determination. A healthy environment develops a person's feelings of competence, autonomy, and relatedness and an unhealthy environment lessened these feelings (Deci & Ryan, 2017).

Even though early designs on self-determination were not directly applicable to education purposes, ideas from these early designs have informed the present-day construction of self-determination theory. Volitional and agentic action are linked to autonomy and competence. People with disabilities are self-determined if they feel that can decide on their own goals and make meaningful decisions to reach these goals. A healthy environment spurs development of autonomy and competence, is full of choice-making opportunities, and provides positive feedback and acknowledgment of an individual's viewpoints (Deci & Ryan, 2017). A healthy educational experience provides people with disabilities opportunities to decide their coursework, future career goals, and

provides positive feedback when they have success. Self-determination is a skill that is taught; not innate and only possessed by specific individuals.

Later definitions of self-determination focused on how people with disabilities act as a causal agent and make decisions without undue external influence (Wehmeyer, 1999). The functional model of self-determination posited that people with disabilities act autonomously, have self-regulated behaviors, act in a psychologically empowered manner, and act with self-realization in mind (Wehmeyer, 1999). People with disabilities were functionally self-determined if they can act in autonomous, self-regulated, psychologically empowered, and self-realized ways. Behavior that was based according on one's preferences and interests and was done independently is considered autonomous behavior (Wehmeyer, 1999). A person who could examine their environments, decide upon possible behaviors on how to act in a situation, and reevaluate their actions acted in a self-regulated manner (Wehmeyer, 1999). A person who believed they have meaningful control of their lives acted in psychologically empowered ways (Wehmeyer, 1999). A person who had a reasonable and fairly accurate self-knowledge base and used this information to reach goals in the most effective way possible acted in a self-realized manner (Wehmeyer, 1999). Central to the functional self-determination model was causal agency; a person with a disability was a causal agent in their lives if they made or caused meaningful things to happen in their lives (Wehmeyer, 1999). A self-determined person acted with intent to change their lives and shape their futures (Wehmeyer, 1999).

Self-determination is not a specific set of behaviors and instead is a wider range of behaviors that performs a function for the person to achieve an individually determined goal (Shogren et al., 2015). The component skills for each of self-

determination's four domains can be taught to students; elements such as choice-making skills, decision-making skills, problem-solving skills, goal-setting skills, self-observation, self-evaluation, self-instruction, self-advocacy, and self-awareness are skills that can be taught to increase self-determination skills in students with disabilities (Wehmeyer, 1999). The results of the functional model of self-determination produced the ARC Self-Determination Scale to assess people with disabilities self-determination skills and teaching methods such as the *Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction*. (Shorgren et al., 2015).

The functional model of self-determination shares some philosophical similarities with psychological self-determination. Even though the functional model of self-determination focused more specifically on students with disabilities, both models address environmental concerns regarding the development of self-determination. Past research using the functional model of self-determination had shown that environmental factors can have a significant impact on the development of self-determination (Stancliffe & Wehmeyer, 1995). In the psychological model of self-determination, the environment could either spur or hinder self-determination from developing (Deci & Ryan, 2017).

While the functional model provided great headway into research on self-determination skills and self-determination interventions, it is not aligned with current research into positive psychology (Shogren et al., 2015). The older idea of seeing disabilities as a deficit does not build the strengths and positive traits of a student with a disability. Students with disabilities are often told of their weaknesses without focusing on strengths, leading students to believe they do not have much to say about their futures nor reach meaningful goals in their future. The growth of positive psychology in special

education sees that all students with disabilities have individual strengths and that educational programming and transition planning should incorporate a student's strengths as means to garner educational and post-school success (Shogren et al., 2015).

The new model of self-determination that incorporates positive psychology features is Causal Agency Theory. Causal Agency Theory builds upon the foundations of previous self-determination models, especially since the functional model's main focus was on causal agency (Shogren et al., 2015). The current self-determination model focuses on actions, implying that all people, including those with disabilities, can plan out and deliberately build the skills necessary to become a self-determined individual (Shogren et al., 2015). While the functional model resulted in much research into building self-determination through practice and intervention, its main focus on behaviors rather than planned action made it seem that students were passive recipients of self-determination rather than building it themselves (VandenBos, 2007).

Causal Agency Theory posited three essential characteristics of self-determined actions: Volitional action, agentic action, and action-control beliefs. Volitional action assumed that people can act based upon their preferences, agentic action assumed a person can act in accordance to advance their own goals, and action-control beliefs assumed a person believes that they have the power to meaningfully impact their lives rather than being influenced by forces outside of themselves (Shogren et al., 2015).

Self-Determination Defined

Self-determination has three major components. The three components include volitional action, the ability to act based on one's preferences, agentic action: The idea that individuals act to achieve their own goals, and action-control beliefs: The views that

people have in how much their actions affect goal attainment (Shogren et al., 2015). Shogren's (2015) model of self-determination defined the present construct and has guided current researchers in how to assess it. Evaluating self-determination skills in people with disabilities uses multiple criteria. Past assessments have used the functional model of self-determination to measure the construct. Autonomy was the ability to act according to one's wishes and take care of one's self (Wehmeyer, 1995). Self-regulation referred to people being able to make decisions and behave despite issues that can negatively affect decision-making and behavior (Wehmeyer, 1995). Psychological empowerment was the belief that the person's actions can meaningfully impact goal attainment and that their planning and actions can have positive impacts on their own lives (Wehmeyer, 1995). Self-realization referred to people with disabilities acting in a way to achieve their goals and attain self-fulfillment (Wehmeyer, 1995). Other self-determination measures such as the American Institutes for Research (AIR) Self-Determination Scale, aimed to measure if people have the opportunity and capacity for self-determination. Even if a person with a disability has all of the self-determination traits listed in the ARC's Self-Determination Scale, an individual cannot be self-determined if they have no opportunities to be self-determined. Capacity is also important; a person with plentiful and meaningful self-determination opportunities will not act self-determined if they have no self-determination skills. The AIR Self-Determination scale operationalized self-determination into thinking (expressing and identifying interests, needs, and goal setting), doing (making choices and plans to meet goals and taking action), and adjusting (evaluating and changing the course of action if necessary). (Wolman et al., 1994). For each dimension, the AIR evaluated the ability,

knowledge, and perceived ability of the student and evaluated how the student felt about the opportunities provided to them at both school and home (Wolman et al., 1994).

Self-determination has been linked with more positive post-secondary outcomes for high school students. Individuals with more self-determination experience had more positive employment experiences, more community access, more life satisfaction, and higher attainment of career goals than those with less self-determination experience (Shogren et al., 2012). Despite this finding, self-determination for autistic students was less conclusive, as many self-determination traits in autistic students did not improve employment outcomes (Zalewska et al., 2016). Only psychological empowerment significantly improved employment outcomes for autistic students (Zalewska et al., 2016). Students with higher levels of psychological empowerment had more conducive action-control beliefs; thought that studying, practicing interview and social skills, and applying to many jobs could lead to positive employment outcomes. Students with lower levels of psychological empowerment believed studying, practicing various soft and work skills, writing a good resume, or applying to jobs would not lead to positive employment outcomes. For students with intellectual disabilities, more self-determination skills predicted more employment and more employment benefits including vacation time, health benefits, and sick leave at work (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003).

The overall benefits of self-determination on employment are numerous for all types of students with disabilities. People with disabilities who were more persistent and willing to seek out training opportunities for better employment were more likely to work more hours and had better pay at their jobs (Lindstrom et al., 2011). People with disabilities who were better at goal setting also were more successful in life after

secondary school (Goldberg et al., 2003). Students that knew how to set meaningful yet specific goals found more success in life after high school than students who did not know how to set meaningful goals (Goldberg et al., 2003). People with higher levels of self-determination could create an attainable and specific plan for their future, follow through on it, and more accurately evaluate the progress made towards the goal. The most successful students could create incremental plans to meet their goals (Goldberg et al., 2003). Besides employment, students with intellectual and learning disabilities with more self-determination were more willing to live away from home, start a checking account, and have paid employment one year after leaving high school (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). Self-determination also helped with getting benefits such as paid sick leave and vacation at the job for people with disabilities (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997).

Teaching individual components of self-determination could help people with disabilities. Attainment of both academic and transition goals improved when self-determination skills were taught (Shogren & Ward, 2018). As early as high school, people with disabilities could learn self-determination through self-directed IEPs (Izzo & Hood, 2016). Students who were taught the self-directed IEP process gained knowledge into transition and experienced more positive post-secondary school outcomes (Izzo & Hood, 2016). Person-centered planning, a planning method used to shift the leadership of transition meetings towards people with disabilities and their families, also improved student self-determination (Wehmeyer, 2007). Long-term post-school outcomes were different for students who had person-center planning versus more traditional planning methods (Holburn et al., 2004), and those who experienced person-centered planning were more able to live in community-based housing (Wehmeyer, 2007). Teaching self-

determination skills are valuable; people with disabilities felt their input into their own lives was meaningful and they obtained a sense of empowerment.

Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy is the process where one stands up for themselves and speak for their own needs (Wehmeyer, 2007). Self-advocacy is a component of self-determination and makes one a causal agent towards their own goals (Wehmeyer, 2007). For effective self-advocacy, a person must know their rights, strengths, limitations, communication skills, and leadership skills (Izzo & Hood, 2016). Self-advocacy alone, however, does not make one completely self-determined but the knowledge a person needs to be an effective self-advocate helps with self-determination. People on the spectrum that are self-advocates will talk to employers about accommodations they need at the job and address concerns at work. Many autistic people and other disabilities, however, take passive roles in their lives and often rely on professionals and parents to advocate for their best interests (Wehmeyer, 2007). Learned helplessness for autistic students and disabilities, in general, begins in school, even for the transition meetings the students are required to attend. Current transition IEP processes put students with disabilities in the role of a passive observer as special education teachers will talk the most and students attending the transition meetings would only talk 3% of the time (Martin, Marshall, & Sale, 2004 in Wehmeyer, 2007). Self-advocacy for autistic students and other disabilities should be taught explicitly but students say the IEP process was a missed opportunity (Wehmeyer, 2007). Little or no preparation was afforded to students with disabilities to discuss plans for the transition meeting and students were left out of the discussions during the transition IEP meetings (Van Dycke, Lovett, Greene & Martin, 2006 in

Wehmeyer, 2007). The lack of student participation in the transition process was troubling because this process did not have students practice vital self-advocacy skills in a safe environment (Izzo & Hood, 2016).

Lack of preparation for IEP meetings by special educators puts autistic students and other disabilities in spots where they cannot use self-advocacy. Students with disabilities did not develop the skills to effectively talk about their futures (Izzo & Hood, 2016). Many students with disabilities also had no coherent plan for life after high school. To make students with disabilities and autism better self-advocates, assertiveness training built up effective communication skills but required extensive modeling, feedback, and practice (Roffman 1994 in Wehmeyer 2007). Self-advocacy, like communication in general, required explicit training and practice for autistic students to learn because they did not learn it the same way as their neurotypical peers. Even with assertiveness training and improved communication skills, the autistic person still required self-determination training.

Self-Determination and Personal Characteristics

Literature has evaluated a wide array of personal variables that can affect self-determination skills. One of the most consistent factors affecting self-determination skills was participation in classes and activities with neurotypical peers. Participation in general education classes (Shogren et al., 2013) and social activities with peers (Shogren et al., 2018) had positive impacts on self-determination. Social activity participation had positive impacts on autonomy and self-realization (Shogren et al., 2018). Participation in the community at large allowed for people with disabilities to choose who they formed

relationships with and what activities they wanted to pursue. Rather than rely on staff or adults to find activities for the person with a disability, the person had more choices on what to do and who to meet. Participation in general education classes built independence in students with disabilities and allowed them to socialize and learn with their peers (Izzo & Hood, 2016). Through community and general education participation, students with disabilities developed their social skills, interests, and progressed towards goals with more independence. Future goals and goal-setting experience also affected the development of self-determination skills (Shogren et al., 2013). Students with goal-setting experience had experience with informed decision-making and worked with their family, teachers, and community supports to develop meaningful, person-centered goals (Shogren et al., 2013). Meaningful goal-setting experience must be person-centered to truly maximize the development of self-determination. Having the person with a disability being the main focus of planning built that person's agency and gave them a voice in goal setting. Focus on the person's interest areas and wishes for improved planning and goal attainment (Izzo & Hood, 2016). With more success, people with disabilities were more likely to make more goals and felt that their actions could affect their future. Positive goal setting experience built up self-efficacy beliefs and made self-determination a positive practice.

Other factors thought to affect self-determination skills such as race and gender had inconclusive support (Shogren et al., 2018). Socio-economic factors played a role in self-determination skills as students receiving free and reduced meals had fewer self-determination skills than their peers who did not receive free and reduced meals (Shogren et al., 2018). Many demographic variables did not have as much influence on self-

determination skill development as goal setting experience and mainstream community participation. By giving frequent opportunities to develop self-determination skills, people with disabilities will practice these skills and will build their abilities for self-determination. Through increased opportunities and addressing systemic educational gaps for lower-income students, people with disabilities would develop better self-determination skills (Shogren et al., 2018). Providing more opportunities and access to quality education could build self-efficacy beliefs that the person's decisions and actions have a meaningful impact on their goals and lives (Shogren et al., 2018).

A limit to factors affecting self-determination is how the community at large impacted self-determination skill development for better or worse (Shogren et al., 2018). It could be theorized that impoverished communities lacking services for people with disabilities would negatively impact self-determination skill development whereas a community full of supported employment experiences and community activities would help develop self-determination skills (Shogren et al., 2018). Additional research into community differences, especially differences in community socio-economic status, would prove useful in determining what community resources are particularly helpful in building self-determination skills for people with disabilities. Analyzing how household income and receipt of poverty alleviating services impacts self-determination development could reveal additional relationships (Shogren et al., 2018).

Factors impacting self-determination skill development in autistic people specifically do not have much research. Based on past research on self-determination skill development, people on the spectrum would most likely benefit from full inclusion both in school and in the community-at-large (Shogren et al., 2015). Autistic people,

however, have unique needs that may impact complete, meaningful inclusion. Social skills and communication issues may hinder the development of self-determination. It is typically harder for people who are less verbal to speak up for their wants and needs than those who are more willing to speak (Zalewska et al., 2016). Impacted social skills limit social opportunities for autistic people. Communication differences may also limit how the person works with a team in developing and assessing goals. With a lack of communication, professionals and other adults assume that an autistic person does not have preferences and will therefore not have opportunities to practice choice-making and self-determination skills (Wehmeyer, 2007). To improve the self-determination skills in autistic people, future research must be performed on social skills interventions that make general education inclusion more successful (Zalewska et al., 2016). Through community service projects, autistic people can build their social skills by working and building rapport with other people in the community (Zalewska et al., 2016).

Though not a specific intervention, giving opportunities for choices in the lives of autistic people improved engagement and behavior (Wehmeyer, 2007). Providing meaningful choice-making opportunities was critical to building self-determination and improving learning (Wehmeyer, 2007). Choice-making for leisure time, shopping, and employment all had positive effects on self-determination skills for autistic people (Wehmeyer, 2007). Self-advocacy training can help people on the spectrum better communicate their plans and goals for the future. With these interventions, autistic people can have more access to the general community and have successful self-determination experiences.

Employment for Autistic people

Employment Outcomes

This study will operationalize employment outcomes as the number of hours worked, wages earned, and amount of time a job was kept. Autistic people that are employed make less money than people with other disabilities. For autistic adults that were employed, wages were significantly lower (mean of $8.10 per hour) than for adults who had emotional disabilities ($11.90 per hour), learning disabilities ($11.20 per hour), and speech/language impairments ($12.00 per hour) (Roux et al., 2013). When comparing the odds of ever being employed between autistic students and students with other disabilities, students with intellectual disabilities were 4 times more likely than autistic students to ever have been employed (Roux et al., 2013). Students with emotional behavioral disabilities, speech/language impairments, and learning disabilities were 6-12 times more likely than autistic students to have ever been employed (Roux et al., 2013). Even if autistic individuals are employed, they faced high levels of job-switching, underemployment, temporary work, lower-paying jobs, and part-time hours (Baldwin et al., 2014).

Demographic Variables Affecting Employment

Being white and from a family with a high income significantly affected employment status in a positive direction (Roux et al., 2013). Being an ethnic minority and not being from the highest income bracket (>$75,000 for a family) negatively influenced employment status for autistic individuals (Roux et al., 2013). There were significant differences between the employment of autistic individuals from the highest

income bracket (85%) and the lowest (<$25,000) income bracket (12%) (Roux et al., 2013). Autistic individuals that have been out of school the longest fared better in finding a job than those individuals who more recently graduated from high school (Shattuck et al., 2012). Autistic individuals who were less verbal or had more cognitive needs were less likely to gain employment than those with less cognitive needs and more verbal communication skills (Shattuck et al., 2012). Autistic individuals with a driver's license or knowledge of public transportation also had significantly better employment outcomes than autistic people without a driver's license or knowledge of public transportation (Zalewska et al., 2016). Employment and weekly hours worked are greatly affected by the receipt of post-secondary education and college services. However, the problem for most autistic students is that they attended any type of post-secondary education less than their typical peers (Taylor & Seltzer, 2011). Of particular concern is the lack of consistent engagement in post-secondary school activities for autistic people. Only 25% of autistic adults had consistent employment or education participation and an additional 40% of autistic people had sporadic activities (Mailick, 2014). Without consistent activity, autistic people encountered more frequent transitions than their neurotypical peers (Anderson et al., 2015). As a result of extra transitions, autistic people were hindered in accomplishing their goals for adulthood and needed additional support in achieving these goals and adjusting to frequent transition periods (Anderson et al., 2015). Difficulty in reaching post-secondary education in turn negatively affected the employment prospects of these students. Despite the number of transitions and additional difficulties autistic people had in maintaining employment and education, they still expected themselves to become financially independent adults (Anderson et al., 2015).

Parental expectations also impact employment outcomes for autistic students. Parental expectations, when serving as a mediator, predicted employment outcomes when combined with familial background and functional performance (Kirby, 2016). Parental expectations impact how parents view their student's transition IEP meetings and how they will plan for the future. Lower expectations for autistic students limited high school employment opportunities, independence, post-secondary education opportunities, and how the school will prepare the student for life after high school (Kirby, 2016). Parents are a vital part of the IEP team and communicating lower expectations for their autistic child impacted what services school and vocational professionals delivered and how these services were delivered (Kirby, 2016). Despite the potential differences in services received by autistic students, no significant wage, hours worked, or independent living differences were found between autistic students that received an academic or functional skills curriculum (Bouck & Joshi, 2014).

Costs of Unemployment

Unemployment for neurotypical people is perilous and has many consequences. Autistic people also feel the brunt of unemployment. Many autistic people who face extended unemployment felt worthless, unproductive, ashamed, unmotivated, purposeless, anxious, and depressed (Carley, 2016). Even for neurotypical people, unemployment was linked to higher suicide rates, trauma, and forgoing medical care (Carley, 2016). Compounding the high unemployment rates of autistic people and how unemployment even affects neurotypical people, autistic people were at high risk of suicide, suicidal ideation, trauma, and physical and mental illness (Carley, 2016). The problem of unemployment compounds itself even more for people on the spectrum when

health insurance was tied to employment, preventing the unemployed from getting the help they needed (Carley, 2016). Even with depression and anxiety, common comorbid conditions for autistic people, getting out of the unemployment rut is made more challenging and was further exacerbated by not getting employed in the first place. The cycle of unemployment puts a strain on job skills and relationships as well (Carley, 2016).

Compounding mental health issues with no mainstream community integration led to many autistic adults depending on parents or siblings for extensive help. Only 9% lived in a home they purchased, 35% lived in a group home or supervised living situation, and 47% lived with parents (Farley et al., 2017 in Feinstein, 2019). Many adults on the spectrum did not have the opportunities to integrate into their communities and often, much of their social time was with parents or other family members. Unemployment for autistic people puts aging parents in a position of being a large part of the person's social circle and support system (Feinstein, 2019). When parents age, a serious issue of support is raised; who will take care of the unemployed autistic person financially and socially? Again, a vicious cycle of unemployment continues; the autistic adult cannot fully engage with their community and make social connections to help them gain employment and independence which results in the adult remaining reliant on their parents for financial and social support, limiting the desire and opportunities to integrate into the community. Unemployment even for neurotypical people puts a strain on friends and family (Carley, 2016). For autistic people, limited social capital made unemployment even harder.

The cycle of unemployment and dependence is oppressive for many autistic adults; 41% of autistic adults were unemployed for a period longer than 10 years and

59% believed they could never get gainful employment (NAP, 2017 in Feinstein, 2019). Despite the pessimism surrounding employment, 70% of autistic people preferred employment (NAP, 2017 in Feinstein, 2019).

Benefits of Employment

Employment offers many benefits for autistic people. Independence, improved self-esteem, and more community engagement opportunities resulted from employment (Feinstein, 2019). Gaining and keeping competitive employment is built on a person's skills and view of themselves. By succeeding at an interview, the autistic person learns they can have a successful social interaction that leads to the desired outcome. Employment in the general community allowed for autistic people to talk to and work with other members of the community, potentially leading to new relationships and social activities (Lara & Osborne, 2017). A job gives people structure to their days which benefited autistic people (Lara & Osborne, 2017). Supported employment also improved the cognitive functioning of autistic people (Tincani & Bondy, 2014). Volunteering, even though it is not paid, was also a good way for autistic people to get more involved with their community and form positive relationships (Lara & Osborne, 2017). Even programs that prepared autistic students for future employment built self-esteem (Morgan & Riesen, 2016). Competitive employment did not necessarily solve all of the person's finances but it did allow for the person to buy things they wanted and pay for activities they wished to do (Lara & Osborne, 2017). Staying employed requires the autistic person to learn job skills that they must eventually perform without assistance, further building upon independence and self-esteem.

Interventions

Employment Interventions

Interventions for autistic students can be both formal and informal. Some students may need infrequent services to teach them how to appropriately answer job interview questions and write a resume. Other students may need direct experience in an internship or apprenticeship to learn workplace behaviors and job skills. As part of transition planning, some autistic students may get job or internship experience in high school to develop social skills and strong work habits. Project SEARCH is a nationwide program for autistic students that connects them with local businesses such as hospitals. Project SEARCH provided high school students on the spectrum with a supported internship experience that led to jobs that pay at least minimum wage (Schall et al., 2015). When compared to autistic students that only received supported employment, students that received both supported employment and Project SEARCH made significantly more in wages ($9.82 per hour) than autistic students that only received supported employment ($8.82 per hour) (Schall et al., 2015). Students that received Project SEARCH and supported employment also had significantly higher retention rates at 12 (84%) and 18 months (84%) on the job than autistic students who received supported employment only (55% at 12 months and 55% at 18 months) (Schall et al., 2015).

General education inclusion also predicted better employment outcomes for students with disabilities (Flexer et al., 2011). Students with disabilities who were in general education classes at least 80% of the school day were 2-4 times more likely to find competitive employment one year after graduation than students who were placed into less inclusive settings (Flexer et al., 2011). Additional research must be performed

on general education inclusion and employment for autistic students because of how many students on the spectrum also have intellectual disabilities. How does inclusion impact students with both autism and intellectual disabilities? What does the coursework look like for autistic students alone versus students with both autism and intellectual disabilities?

Community-based employment preparation programs improved self-esteem and understanding of workplace culture and expectations (Luecking, 2009 in Morgan & Riesen, 2016). Job shadowing, participation in paid, competitive employment during high school, and job rotation sampling were examples of community-based employment (Morgan & Riesen, 2016). Job shadowing allowed students with disabilities to participate and observe employees on a typical day on a specific job. During job shadowing, students can ask employees what education/training was needed for the job, what tasks were completed during a typical day, and how current employees got the job (Morgan & Riesen, 2016). Career-technical education and work-study programs also helped students with disabilities obtain employment one year after high school graduation but the results for African-American and female students varied from other students involved in these programs (Flexer et al., 2011).

Supported employment also exists for people with disabilities, including autism. Supported employment used a job coach to teach autistic people job tasks and responsibilities (Morgan & Riesen, 2016). Supported employment paid people with disabilities at least a minimum wage (Morgan & Riesen, 2016). Supported employment benefited not only people with disabilities but society in general. People with disabilities in supported employment spent more time and advanced more on the job than people

without it (Feinstein, 2019). Through supported employment, governments saved on welfare spending (Feinstein, 2019).

Customized integrated employment (CIE) can also improve employment outcomes for autistic people. CIE is employment for people with disabilities who are placed into jobs in the community that pay wages comparable to employees without disabilities working in the same field (Morgan & Riesen, 2016). To help autistic people succeed at a job integrated into the community, jobs are specifically crafted for the autistic person to complete. The sensory and support needs of many autistic people require job alteration. An autistic person working at a retail store may have their job customized so they will not have much face-to-face customer interaction but will instead work in a back room organizing inventory. Even with a change in job responsibilities, the autistic person will still earn similar wages to their colleagues. With CIE, autistic people earned, on average, $9.27 per hour, worked an average of 22 hours per week, and held onto their jobs for an average of over 4 years (Brooke et al., 2018). Customized employment requires a working relationship between support professionals, clients, and employers because agreements are made on job duties, forming individual work goals for the employee, and meeting the needs of both the client and employer (Morgan & Riesen, 2016). A working relationship with an employee and employer to find how an individual's strengths was necessary to serve the prospective employee and respond to the needs of the employer (McDonnell & Hardman, 2010). While customized employment is based in the community, it requires service providers to build relationships with both the person with a disability and the employer to craft a specific job for the person (McDonnell & Hardman, 2010). Much like with supported

employment, people with disabilities in customized employment get paid at or above minimum wage, received workplace benefits, and rely less on segregated services (McDonnell & Hardman, 2010).

Both supported and customized employment employ people with disabilities in integrated community settings. The person with a disability works alongside members of the mainstream community and earns at least a minimum wage or better (Morgan & Riesen, 2016). What makes the employment of the person with a disability in supported or customized employment different from their typical colleagues is the supports the employee with a disability receives. Job coaching, tasks based on unique strengths and interests, and vocational agency connections are just some of the supports that people with disabilities have in employment (Morgan & Riesen, 2016).

Better job searching strategies also improve employment outcomes for job seekers on the spectrum. Many job seekers with autism have special interest areas that may not lead to meaningful employment or employment that matches well with their abilities and limitations. Starting the job search off with a career interest inventory helps autistic people limit their job search to jobs and career fields that appeal most to the job seeker and are responsive to the strengths of the individual (Bissonnette, 2013).

Even with a job, adults on the autism spectrum are less likely to retain their jobs than their neurotypical peers. Equitable treatment in the workplace, especially in the United States, is difficult to attain for employees with autism. Many states have laws and regulations that strip unions of power in the workplace. Autistic people particularly suffer from right-to-work laws; unions would typically negotiate with employers regarding workplace conditions and accommodations for all employees and speak up to employers

that have abusive practices towards their employees (Booth, 2016). In right to work states, the employee with autism is expected to speak out against unfair or discriminatory treatment with their employers without any help (Booth, 2016). American employees with autism are unable to effectively receive accommodations and protect themselves from workplace abuses due to the individual demands placed on them. An employee with autism would benefit from progressive policies including collective bargaining, neurodiversity training for colleagues, self-advocate representation in unions, and universal design of workers' rights materials and documentation (Booth, 2016). Through unions, employees with autism would have a network of colleagues, professionals, and the larger community to speak out against discriminatory treatment and advocate for improved workplace conditions and accommodations.

Community-based education programs also helped autistic students learn what it takes to get a job. Many autistic people benefited from coaching in work soft skills such as meeting potential employers, writing resumes and cover letters, and dressing appropriately. A community-based program took the time to teach autistic people what to wear for an interview, prepare for face-to-face meetings with potential employers, and have regular field trips to employers (Lara & Osbourne, 2015). Extensive research into the company would be taught so autistic students researched the prospective workplace to prepare for meetings with the employers (Lara & Osbourne, 2015). Community-based instruction simulated real-world experiences and helped autistic people to see the relevance of classroom transition lessons and use those lessons in a practical setting (Morgan & Riesen, 2016). An added benefit of community-based education was showing

the complexity and dynamic nature of the community environment (Morgan & Riesen, 2016).

Many autistic people may lack self-awareness when it comes to their skills, which made the job search very difficult (Bissonnette, 2013). Career assessments and exploration activities helped many autistic people find a career that suited them best. Career exploration is different for autistic people than it is for neurotypical peers; autistic people have unique social, executive functioning, and sensory needs (Bissonnette, 2013). Career and job exploration activities must respond to the unique needs of the autistic person for success. Having the autistic person explore job settings, job tasks, social demands, communication demands, changes throughout the day, and workplace supportiveness helped autistic people choose appropriate jobs at settings more responsive to their unique needs (Tincani & Bondy, 2014).

Self-Determination Interventions

Many skills that improve postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities were teachable (McConnell et al., 2012). Teachers and professionals often thought that only the highest functioning of people with disabilities could obtain post-secondary education or gain meaningful employment. Students with any disability, including autism, could learn many positive character traits and gain the knowledge necessary for life after high school. Many of the skills and traits related to improved post-secondary outcomes are related to self-determination skills. Disability awareness, self-awareness of strengths and limitations, conscious actions related to one's strengths and limitations, goal setting, proactive involvement, knowledge, utilization of resources, and self-advocacy all helped students with disabilities achieve optimal postsecondary outcomes

(McConnell et al., 2012). Teaching components of self-determination improved a wide range of outcomes. Teaching self-management and self-regulation skills improved critical learning skills, teaching social-problem solving improved employment outcomes, and teaching goal-setting improved workplace productivity (Wehmeyer, 2007). For autistic students, it was particularly important to know what their strengths and limitations were and how to act accordingly. Autism is a condition that impacts every person differently; one autistic person will have vastly different skills than another autistic person. The idiosyncratic nature of autism should guide teachers working with students who have autism. Teaching students about having autism and what autism means to each student would set the foundation for future self-determined action; using an asset-based approach to teach disability awareness for students is particularly enticing (Izzo & Hood, 2016). Through learning how autism impacts the student, they would use the information they gathered to plan their future. The student that does not like loud noises will knowingly choose not to work in a busy retail store once they are out of high school and will choose a different job that is in a quieter environment. Autistic students who articulated desired outcomes and based their future on what they accurately know about themselves would find a job they would enjoy doing and could do with reasonable if any help. Teaching students about their autism, like other disabilities, must be done explicitly and positively (Izzo & Hood, 2016). Autism for many students has been frequently framed as very limiting without many positives. Teachers should point out for autistic students also have strengths just like other students and also have unique challenges much like their neurotypical peers.

Through positive but grounded teaching of disability awareness, autistic students would more likely develop the persistence to reach their goals. By teaching disability awareness, people learned what situations to avoid and how to explain their disability in a variety of settings (McConnell et al., 2012). Self-awareness made it more likely for people with disabilities to not just see themselves as the disability but as a complete person with unique strengths, needs, and limits (McConnell et al., 2012).

Persistence is another trait that improved post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities (McConnell et al., 2012). Students that were persistent in the face of adversity would more likely positively view themselves and believed they deserved positive outcomes. Autistic people frequently faced additional adversity due to their disability. More persistent students studied for longer periods on difficult subjects (Skinner, 2004). In college, students with disabilities adapt to their struggles by changing professors, majors, classes, and finding resources to help them with difficult classes (Goldberg et al., 2003; Sarver, 2000).

On the job, knowing and utilizing resources was crucial for autistic people and other disabilities (McConnell et al., 2012). When starting a job, many autistic people had the services of a job coach to help them navigate and adjust to the job site. Over time, the job coach phased out their services and expected the autistic person to perform job tasks independently. Autistic people on the job could replace the departed job coach with supportive colleagues (McConnell et al., 2012). Finding natural supports at work not only improved performance for autistic people but also created a sense of belonging where personal relationships were formed.

Self-determination skills in high school also affected post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. Models that analyzed the relationship between self-determination and adult outcomes for students with disabilities showed a significant relationship between self-determination skills, employment, and community engagement (Shogren et al., 2015). Surprisingly, self-determination skills were also linked to significantly lower levels of financial independence (Shogren et al., 2015). Learning self-determination skills helped students with disabilities. Even with behaviors that were not seemingly independent, self-determination helped people with disabilities identify when they needed additional help and support (Shogren et al., 2015). Building upon self-realization and psychological empowerment helped people learn about the goals they wanted to work for and believed that, with effort, their goals were achievable (Shogren et al., 2015). Even with less financial independence, people with disabilities showed positive self-determination traits by recognizing the need for help (Shogren et al., 2015). Part of self-determination is self-regulation and knowing what resources are necessary for success. People with disabilities that are more self-determined may have realized they were not making enough money to afford rent, groceries, utilities, and other expenses and actively chose to still live with their families. Even with a lack of financial independence, people with disabilities with high levels of self-determination recognized when help is necessary.

Self-determination is a skill that can be changed through intervention. Knowledge of transition meetings and self-efficacy beliefs had the most impact on self-determination skills, eclipsing other factors such as general intelligence, gender, and age of student (Lee et al., 2012). General intelligence did not affect self-determination skills after

implementation of an intervention, showing self-determination skills could be trained and developed for students with all types of disabilities (Lee et al., 2012).

Specific research into self-determination interventions for autism remains sparse and developing self-determination skills in autistic people presents unique challenges. Autism is a disability that affects social skills and behaviors (American Psychological Association, 2013). Common issues for autistic people impact self-determination skills. An autistic person may have their goals ignored due to differing communication styles, limiting autonomy, and being placed into an undesirable environment. Autistic students had significantly lower levels of autonomy when compared to their peers with intellectual or learning disabilities (Chou et al., 2017). The undue loss of autonomy caused autistic people to develop a prevalent feeling of learned helplessness and over-reliance on caretakers and service providers to make living, employment, and community engagement decisions for them. Considering that people on the spectrum have unique communication and sensory needs, decisions made by parents and service providers were done without vital input from the person themselves.

Schools have implemented programs to help build self-determination skills for students with disabilities. *Whose Future is it Anyway?* (Wehmeyer et al., 2011) was a self-determination program that taught students with disabilities about self-advocacy and decision-making. The *Whose Future is it Anyway? the* program trained students with disabilities to set goals for life after high school and participate in transition IEP meetings. The goal of *Whose Future Is It Anyway?* was increasing meaningful student participation in educational decision meetings and processes (Wehmeyer et al., 2004). The students that received *Whose Future is it Anyway?* showed significant gains in

acquiring more opportunities and building capabilities for self-determination (Wehmeyer et al., 2011).

The Self-Determination Career Development Model (SDCDM) was another intervention for self-determination. The SDCDM specifically focused on employment issues for people with disabilities and taught students how to independently solve problems and go through a problem-solving process for job-related issues (Shogren et al., 2016). The results of SDCDM showed that participants in the program built up their autonomy in making decisions and analyzing choices (Shogren et al., 2016). The SDCDM was an off-shoot of the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI). The SDLMI had students focus on current problems that prevented them from getting to the desired state; students are taught to evaluate where they are currently, where they want to be, and what steps will help close this gap (Wehmeyer, 2007). Previous literature had shown the SDLMI was effective, 55% of student goals were achieved and significant progress was made towards an additional 25% of student goals (Wehmeyer, 2007). The literature does not specifically discuss autistic students using the SDLMI but the principles of the SDLMI could benefit students on the spectrum. Autistic students benefited from explicit teaching of self-monitoring, evaluating of progress, and long-term goal setting difficult (Tincani & Bondy, 2014). Through the SDLMI, autistic students could potentially improve their goal setting and self-evaluation.

For students with disabilities, transition planning that incorporates more student and family input improved transition outcomes. Person-centered planning improved self-determination and produced more positive outcomes such as community living over institutionalization (Wehmeyer, 2007). Self-directed and student-led IEPs also led to

increased learning of self-determination skills during IEP meetings when chosen over special educator-led IEP meetings (Wehmeyer, 2007). The research on person-centered planning and student-led/self-directed IEP meetings was conducted for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities and not for autistic students specifically. Of particular importance was the amount of input the students had in person-centered planning and self-directed/student-led IEPs. Like most students with disabilities, students on the spectrum were put into passive roles in determining their future and parents and professionals often made these decisions for them (Wehmeyer, 2007). Despite the parents' and professionals' best efforts, they oftentimes made plans that did not best fit the student. (Wehmeyer, 2007). Because autism affects communication, explicit teaching of communicating about post-secondary outcomes through person-centered planning or self-directed/led IEPs provided the model where students on the spectrum could more comfortably discuss their future (Wehmeyer, 2007). Person-centered planning and self-directed/led IEPs provided autistic students a voice in a typically voiceless meeting and built the person's capacity to set and accomplish goals (Wehmeyer, 2007).

While the interventions for self-determination improved skills for students with disabilities, there has been no specific self-determination intervention for autistic students. Students on the spectrum should learn about self-determination skills in unique and structured ways. Autism affects communication skills (American Psychological Association, 2013) which require teachers and professionals to approach self-determination skills differently from neurotypical students or students with other disabilities. Communication skills must be taught in conjunction with self-determination. Teaching people with disabilities how to communicate their feelings, need for help, and

asking for information developed self-determination (Tincani & Bondy, 2014). Self-determination interventions specifically tailored towards autistic students should include a communication component. Social skills coaching focused on job-appropriate communication, working with colleagues, and appropriately asking for help from colleagues and supervisors help autistic students learn necessary self-determination skills at the workplace.

Community service programs for autistic students also affected self-determination skill development. Much like a job site, a community service program aimed to teach autistic students and other disabilities how to work as a team, build relationships with staff and peers, analyze the quality of their work, and explore potential new career fields (Zalewska, Cohen-Hall, & Fesko, 2017). Benefits from community service programs were similar to high school job experience; both helped with career development, taught work soft skills, and provided experience working with others (Feinstein, 2019). Self-evaluation for community service experiences and jobs was particularly important; students with disabilities should tell if they enjoyed or did not enjoy the experience (Zalewska, Cohen-Hall, & Fesko, 2017). Through this evaluation, students with disabilities committed to a newly discovered career path or found another career path.

Self-determination skills also improved employment outcomes for autistic people that were employed or in post-secondary training. Many autistic people, even if they were employed, frequently had part-time work where they were overqualified (Baldwin et al., 2014). Autistic people with extensive job training and post-secondary education still had sporadic work history and worked in jobs that paid minimum wage. Even people on the spectrum with college degrees could benefit from self-determination training as many of

them reported that they did not seek support at work for difficulties related to their autism even though they wanted more support (Baldwin et al., 2014). Employed autistic people also reported that they typically did not receive any support in finding their current job (Baldwin et al., 2014). Through communication and self-determination training, more autistic people could ask for vital job seeking and job support.

Self-Determination Skill Development

People with disabilities, including those on the spectrum, face many difficulties developing self-determination skills. For many people with disabilities like autism, fewer opportunities are provided to them in school and the community. While many schools provided career-development supports such as resume writing practice, career interest inventories, and presenters from local businesses, schools frequently did not provide the career training activities most helpful to students with disabilities (Carter et al., 2010). Programs such as community mapping, mentorship programs, and internship programs were lacking, negatively affecting the career development of students with disabilities (Carter et al., 2010). Students were better able to make long-term career goals when they received support that explored the community and provided hands-on experience with a potential career. More traditional transition activities at many schools took a one-size-fits-all approach and assumed the student transitioning out of high school has all the knowledge and self-determination skills to succeed with minimal support (Carter et al., 2010). A one-size-fits-all approach had dire consequences for students with disabilities because the programs provided in this approach did not actively develop self-determination skills nor allow true hands-on experience and job support coaching. Access

to hands-on experience, deep exploration of transition resources within the community, and supported internships must be provided.

Job placement and support programs can also have a drastic effect on the development of self-determination skills. The lack of choices provided in school negatively affected people with disabilities. Adults with disabilities were not provided much chance to make meaningful job and career choices; jobs were often dictated by an assessment that did not consider the individual's preferences (Agran & Krupp, 2011). Providing meaningful choices for job placement for people with disabilities not only developed self-determination skills but also improved productivity, motivation, job satisfaction, and engagement (Agran & Krupp, 2011). People with disabilities that made meaningful choices were more invested in their choices; because they made the choice based on personal preference and were more likely to believe they had the skills to succeed at the chosen job (Agran & Krupp, 2011). Improved satisfaction, engagement, and productivity improved self-efficacy beliefs which in turn made people with disabilities more confident in choice-making (Agran & Krupp, 2011).

Along with meaningful choice-making, having the person with a disability identify a support network will develop self-determination skills. Interventions such as Circles of Support helped people with disabilities identify people in their community as resources to aid them with a wide array of issues (Hetherington et al., 2010). Families can only do so much for a person with a disability; seeking out people to help with the transition into employment was helpful. Both parents and students with disabilities desired individualized supports and personal relationships with school staff (Hetherington et al., 2010). Forming personal relationships between families and school professionals

led to better goals and activities to reach these goals (Hetherington et al., 2010). A person with a disability chose the people that became a part of the support network. Identifying a support person in itself is a self-determination skill because it relies on the person with a disability to form a meaningful relationship with a chosen person, ask the person to help, and know what that person can do to help. Finding supportive school professionals allowed for parents and students to advocate more for transition goals rather than battling school districts just to get minimal transition supports (Hetherington et al., 2010). Through a personalized and caring relationship, families were more effective in planning and discussing life after high school for their students with a disability (Hetherington et al., 2010). Through finding support, the person with a disability received services to build job skills and work with the person to make informed decisions.

For people with disabilities, developing self-determination skills and improving employment outcomes must be treated as a deliberate and conscious effort. Hands-on experiences, meaningful choice-making opportunities, job support, and community exploration developed self-determination and improved employment outcomes. Internships and job experiences in high school developed job soft skills and formed student preferences for specific job types. Community exploration helped students find support services that aided them in achieving their post-secondary goals. Meaningful choice-making built informed decision making, which in turn, taught students with disabilities how to make better decisions regarding independent living, recreation, and employment as adults.

Critical Disability Theory for Post-Secondary Outcomes

Critical Disability Theory and Employment

Critical disability theory is important to consider when analyzing the employment of autistic people. The current employment situation coupled with austerity measures economically and socially has limited all people with disabilities, including autism. The rising gap between the wealthy and poor and the economic impacts of today's policies have favored able bodies and reinforced not just ableism but exclusionary and oppressive practices towards non-dominant groups (Goodley & Lawthom, 2019). The contemplation of disability concerning society as a whole is to question systemic inequalities that have limited education, employment, and basic human rights people with disabilities face every day (Goodley et al., 2019). A significant factor in systemic inequality was austerity. Austerity, the demand for always-available work, rugged independence, distrust of the government, and bootstrap theory all favored a very limited group of privileged in-group members of society (Goodley & Lawthom, 2019). People with disabilities, including autism, benefited from many supports and services that go against individualistic messaging and were often the services first cut by governments looking to save money (Goodley & Lawthom, 2019). What was helpful for people on the spectrum was deemed unnecessary and unnatural in austerity; autistic people need to pull themselves up by the bootstraps and help themselves to find and keep gainful employment. Critical disability studies acknowledged the struggles of other disadvantaged groups; women who faced repeated harassment at work, minorities who faced frequent discrimination in finding and keeping work, and those living in poverty that had no escape from their situation were similarly affected by austere policies

(Gammon, 2012). People with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups did not get protections from discriminatory practices, got little help in finding or keeping employment, and did not receive welfare to alleviate their poverty. Austerity policies had limited the view of what is considered normal; the completely independent, self-sufficient, and the able-bodied worker was rewarded with participation in the labor market, and those not in the same mold were actively excluded. Critical disability theory aimed to question the, 'capitalist conditions of alienation' (Goodley, 2013, pp. 632). The disabled body was excluded from mainstream employment and society because people with disabilities benefited from interdependence, from supports and services, and from an environment that saw disadvantaged people as human and not producers.

Critical disability theory is intersectional because people with disabilities face exclusion and oppression like other disadvantaged groups (Goodley, 2013). Welfare and intervention cutting practices affect a much larger scope of people than just people with disabilities. Critical disability studies analyze how cuts to employment interventions and government services justify ableism, homophobia, racism, sexism, and practices that negate the existence of societal 'others' (Campbell, 2009 in Goodley, 2013). Understanding the exclusion of all societally disadvantaged groups is key to critical disability theory; the processes to discriminate against people with disabilities are similar to the discrimination and exclusion faced by other minority groups (Goodley, 2013). Instead of placing the burden of fitting into society on people with disabilities and other minority groups, critical disability theory questions the societal conditions that make exclusion so prevalent (Goodley, 2013). Attitudes promoted by present-day society are

seen as creating the environment for othering societally disadvantaged peoples; a society that favors rugged individualism and austerity naturally leaves behind ‘others’.

The individualism and independence rewarded by austerity policies eschew the interdependence so many disadvantaged people rely on (Gammon, 2012). People with disabilities often get welfare, personal care support, and job coaching. Without these services, people with disabilities continue to struggle in mainstream society and employment. For individualistic policy, the addressing of inequalities and service provision is seen as an attack on individualism and freedom (Hayek, 1960 in Gammon, 2012).

Present-Day Policy in Practice

Governments all over the world have embraced cuts to welfare and services for people with disabilities. Welfare reform in the United States changed the delivery and structure of welfare. Welfare was no longer based on need or necessity but on the notion that welfare was very temporary and people with disabilities must work after a set timeframe (Soldatic & Chapman, 2010). On top of welfare, government funding cuts for a wide range of public services such as transportation and personal care support negatively impacted employment for people with disabilities (Soldatic & Chapman, 2010). The new workfare mantra became the dominant idea for welfare policy; people with disabilities must work to receive benefits (Soldatic & Chapman, 2010). Under this workfare state, unemployment had been painted as an individual failure. Support for people with disabilities ranging from personal care assistants at home to job coaches at work was and still is dwindling; support professionals and their organizations received and still receive less money as austerity became the guiding principle of service

provision. Support needs for people with disabilities were often ignored in workfare states and the employers had become the new customers of new welfare-to-work programs. Austerity cuts funding to organizations that provided supports and services to people with disabilities. A lack of funding for disability support organizations limited quality opportunities and vital supports to succeed in the community for people with disabilities (Bates et al., 2017). Through cuts, austerity put the burden of 'fitting in' on the person with a disability. People with disabilities must fit into the workplace without necessary supports or face unemployment. Facing unemployment and underemployment pushed people with disabilities further away from mainstream society as prosperity and security elude them (Bates et al., 2017). Critical disability theory viewed unemployment and underemployment as part of a larger network of issues; people with disabilities faced dire employment outcomes because of contextual factors such as education, transportation, cultural attitudes towards social justice and inclusion, and physical and mental access to employment (Barnes & Roulstone, 2005). For people on the spectrum, colleagues and employers saw their social needs and support as going against the grain of the individualistic workplace. The employee with autism must socially fit in; needing social coaching and support was and still is often seen as unproductive and weak. If the employee needed too much social help, sudden unemployment was and is currently the 'best' way to handle the employee.

On top of government cuts to welfare and social services, many jobs available to people with disabilities faced stagnated wages and poor working conditions. When work pays unlivable wages and bullying, abuse, and squalid conditions are commonplace, employment has not been an enticing option for people with disabilities (Barnes &

Roulstone, 2005). Unfortunately for many workers, protections for workers were and are currently set aside for profits. The current unionization of workers in the United States is at 10.3% of all workers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Employees historically and currently have little power to fix wages that are too low and conditions that make it difficult to work.

The intersectional effects on welfare and social service cuts were widespread as many other people were negatively impacted by austerity measures. Social service cuts not only affected people with disabilities but also increased poverty for women (Gammon, 2012); black people lost out on more significant income if social grants were cut (Moodley & Graham, 2015). An educational system that was not properly funded resulted in many parents losing the funds necessary to send their children with disabilities to school (Graham, Moodley, & Selipsky, 2013). Poorly funded schools could not serve students with disabilities as transportation cuts, inaccessible buildings, and lack of specialized help were and still are issues that affect school completion for students with disabilities (Graham, Moodley, & Selipsky, 2013). Lack of school funding compounded the effects of poverty; students with disabilities could not achieve a high level of education which in turn limited their employment to low-paying jobs. Many people with disabilities were further put into poverty because they had medical needs that cost additional money on top of rent and food (Graham, Moodley, & Selipsky, 2013). Lack of school funding made it necessary for many people with disabilities to rely on welfare but the welfare provided did not offer sufficient support to enable people to pursue anything other than survival. As welfare was minimized and personal care assistants became harder to find, the person's family often filled the gaps that welfare and social services

should have covered. Many family members who cared for people with disabilities lost out of their income and social opportunities (Graham, Moodley, & Selipsky, 2013).

Intersectionality with Critical Disability Theory

To study critical disability theory is to study inequality in many forms. While people with disabilities are the focus of critical disability theory, it is not self-contained to people with disabilities (Goodley et al., 2019). Issues facing people with disabilities are often a question of social justice in society at large (Goodley et al., 2019). Critical disability theory looks at what is valued in society, especially in the working world, and questions how society and work are structured to favor an already privileged class. Fighting for social justice not only benefits people with disabilities but also helps women, minorities, LGBT people, and working-class individuals. The call for workplace protections, dignity, livable wages, adequate services, and access helps all people that face oppression and exclusion. Fighting for anti-discrimination laws for people with disabilities also builds upon anti-discrimination policies for other groups. Sufficiently funding social services and welfare not only helps people with disabilities but also provides help to other living in poverty (Goodley et al., 2019). Critical disability theory does not just fight for people with disabilities; it pursues a socially just society that includes all people.

Inferences for the Present Study

Literature regarding autism, self-determination, and employment discussed interventions, supports, services, and skills helpful to autistic people seeking and keeping employment. The problems they present study will address are how to improve job

satisfaction, post-secondary outcomes, and address the many post-secondary employment needs for autistic people. The research on autism and employment outcomes frequently used wages and hours worked as measures of successful employment. Wages and hours were and still are important aspects of quality employment but they are not the only factor in measuring desirable employment. Even with good wages and full-time hours, employees with autism had frequently struggled to socially fit into the job and faced employers that have negative perceptions regarding accommodations and supporting these employees. Finding a supportive job environment is difficult for many people on the spectrum and the lack of services and protections for workers makes finding fulfilling jobs more difficult. The overall workplace culture, coupled with individualistic policy and ideals, goes against supporting autistic people on the job. Individualized job crafting, job coaching, flexible work environments, and vocational programs help autistic people find and keep desirable jobs. Government programs, worker protections, and worker self-determination builds employee skills and protects autistic people from unfair and discriminatory treatment at the workplace.

Research into personal characteristics and skills for autistic people showed that many factors impacted employment. Variables such as familial socio-economic status, race, gender, and expectations affected employment for people on the spectrum. Self-determination skills also impact employment outcomes for people on the spectrum. Unlike demographic variables, self-determination skills could be taught to autistic people as early as grade school and had many positive benefits in later life. With many variables affecting employment, the present study could face unexpected hurdles in evaluating self-determination skills for autistic people because factors outside of research control will

inevitably affect the employment of the subjects. Self-determination research for students with disabilities shows that it was a teachable skill and these skills improved employment outcomes.

The literature on employment for people with disabilities also showed employment opportunities and meaningful transition planning in high school positively affected employment. Students in high school that learned work-related skills through direct experience were more likely to keep jobs in the future. Students who were heavily involved in their transition planning meetings were more invested in their futures and were more likely to succeed than students who were uninvolved with the transition planning process.

Even with the interventions, accommodations, supports, and programs available to help autistic people find employment, there had been and are currently many obstacles preventing access and availability to supports for autistic people. Funding cuts, negative societal attitudes towards helping disadvantaged people, lack of protections for workers, and policies that favor the rich harmed and still harm autistic people. Services and supports that should be available were deemed ‘too expensive’ and provided ‘unfair help’ for autistic people. Welfare and government services are still seen as going against the grain of rugged individualism and needing this help is akin to admitting core character flaws. Taxing wealthier people is seen as stealing one’s hard-earned wealth and straight redistribution of income.

The problems addressed by the present study will evaluate the links between the teachable self-determination skills, opportunities to practice self-determination skills, and successful employment. Showing how teachable self-determination skills affect

employment will improve the expectations of all autistic people and disabilities in general; employment outcomes will be seen as more mutable to teaching and intervention rather than a measure of family privilege. Showing the value of interventions such as student-led IEPs will further improve student self-determination and employment outcomes. Problems addressing job happiness and needs for supports, accommodations, and services will be addressed through an interview. The interview will tackle problems such as why employees with autism often feel dissatisfied and isolated at their jobs. Subjects will potentially also address how government cuts to supports and services negatively impacts their employment satisfaction.

Possible research questions arising for the study include: What self-determination skills most affect employment outcomes? What interventions best teach self-determination skills that will improve employment? What is the best way to provide opportunities to practice self-determination that will help for post-secondary life? What is the relationship between wages and hours worked and job satisfaction for people on the spectrum? How do supports and services help develop self-determination skills that will improve employment outcomes? What are positive and negative practices schools do in terms of self-determination and employment? How does the current economic system impact autistic people building self-determination and finding desirable employment?

Possible theoretical frameworks guiding the present study are Causal Agency Theory, critical disability theory, and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Causal Agency Theory addresses the components of self-determination and what it means for a person to be a self-determining individual. Self-determined individuals can, according to Causal Agency Theory, believe their actions have meaningful impacts on

goal accomplishment, act in a goal-oriented way, act according to one's preferences, and choose their own goals (Shogren et al., 2015). Causal Agency Theory posits that truly self-determined people build their own employment goals and work towards achieving these goals. Autistic people are frequently not allowed to create their own goals or determine their paths based upon their interests. Casual agency theory gives importance to both self-determination skill development and self-determination opportunity; without the chance to determine one's own goals or the skills to act in a goal-directed manner, desirable post-secondary outcomes are difficult to achieve.

Critical disability theory will also guide the present study. Autistic people often want to work in the mainstream community but the boundaries placed on them by the general community have negative impacts on employment outcomes. Boundaries such as cuts to supports and services, negative societal attitudes towards supporting those that need additional help, and lack of worker protections make it harder for autistic people to achieve successful employment. Most studies did not discuss job happiness; the present study will address issues of job satisfaction and belonging through questioning access to supports and services and how employers and colleagues treat autistic people at work.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model can explain how the macrosystem of American society impacts autistic people and other disabilities. The macrosystem, according to Bronfenbrenner, is the set of values and ideals that people in a society use to base actions and policies (Bronfenbrenner, 1978). Today, the United States values rugged individualism, pulling oneself up by the bootstraps, natural distrust of government, and admonishing welfare or any form of help. The individualistic values of today permeate throughout American society; it is what guides politicians to pass tax cuts, cut services,

and ignore systematic problems faced by autistic people and workers in general. Citizens take up individualistic values; employers view employees that need supports with disdain, communities are stripped of employment services, and the general population views the unemployed autistic person as lazy. Through the Ecological Model, the interview in the present study can make the connection between service cuts and hostile attitudes towards autistic people and translate it into what autistic people face every day in terms of employment outcomes. The systematic problems of austerity policy will potentially emerge and combine with critical disability theory to show how societal structure and values disenfranchise autistic people and other marginalized groups. The macro values of American society are rooted in ablest thought which creates policies and practices that harm people with disabilities.

A mixed-methods design is possible for the present study as both quantitative measures and qualitative measures will provide valuable information concerning employment for autistic people. For the quantitative methods, a predictive analysis between self-determination skills and employment outcomes can evaluate the relationship between self-determination and wages and work hours. Self-determination, however, is a complex factor that is defined by multiple skills. Self-determination must be broken down into measurable variables to define the construct more clearly. Self-determination in many studies is measured by the ARC Self-determination Scale and breaks the construct into self-realization, psychological empowerment, self-regulation, and autonomy. With the ARC scale, self-determination is operationalized using the functional model of self-determination. While the functional model of self-determination has been used in past research, the current study will use the Causal Agency Theory of Self-

Determination to measure the concept. Volitional action, agentic action, and action-control beliefs will be measured for the current study. By measuring all three of the self-determination constructs from Causal Agency Theory, relationships can be analyzed between self-determination skills and measurable employment outcomes. Each variable within the constructs can be tested to see which self-determination skills affect which employment outcomes and how much they impact them.

A semi-structured interview can be used to gather data not measured through surveys and numbers. The interview can address the lived experiences of autistic people and how they feel about employment. Autistic people can potentially bring up how happy they are with their jobs and what services and supports they want or benefit from. Subjects may bring up a gap between what is needed and services and supports provided by the government. Employment outcomes cannot solely be measured by wages and hours worked; employment is not worthwhile if people cannot get meaning and happiness through employment. No surveys or established measures currently address happiness with employment; the interview can bring new information into research on employment for autistic people. An ethnography of autistic people can also be done. The ethnography can address the autism culture of employment and the hardships autistic people face in employment and society in general. Themes of oppression, societally enforced poverty, and marginalization can emerge from the ethnography, leading to critical disability theory's questioning of mainstream society. A culture and knowledge base surrounding autistic people will emerge and show how today's policies and values make them poor, hopeless, and oppressed.

CHAPTER 3

Introduction

Autistic people often fell far behind their peers in general mainstream participation. Employment is a particularly important area that not only provides money for people to buy what they want but is also a gateway to general community participation. Autistic people were often unemployed or underemployed, limiting the wages they earned which shut them off from being a part of the general community. The review of the literature showed autistic people benefited from career planning and interventions in high school. Self-determination skills training was also beneficial to autistic people as it improved employment outcomes. Even though many demographic factors such as race and socioeconomic status impacted post-secondary employment, all autistic people could learn self-determination skills to improve employment. However, specific self-determination skills had not been individually weighted into its impacts on post-secondary employment nor had much personal input been given by autistic adults on their employment status. The purpose of the proposed study was to measure the impacts of individual self-determination skills on employment and capture the voices of autistic people discussing their employment and what was most helpful to them.

The purpose of a mixed-methods study was to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data rigorously, integrate the two forms of data into a coherent answer to the research questions, organize the procedures into a specific

research design that provides the logic and procedures for conducting the study, and frame these procedures within a uniting philosophy (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018).

The collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data were done for the proposed study as the past literature was limited in its corroboration between numerical data and the views of the autism population. Addressing the needs of the autism population is addressing the needs of an oppressed, underrepresented population in employment research and society in general. Research should adopt the goal of creating a more just and democratic society; the research should espouse this goal through the entire research process (Mertens, 2003). Through interviews with autistic adults, I gave this underrepresented population a meaningful voice in the literature.

Research Questions

Both the regression analysis and interviews will be utilized to answer the following research questions for the present study:

1. What self-determination capacity variables predicted gainful, high-quality employment for autistic students?

2. How did the individual capacities (volitional action, agentic action, and action-control beliefs) of self-determination affect employment outcomes for autistic people?

3. What self-determination skills did autistic people value the most in finding and maintaining high-quality employment?

4. What made autistic people satisfied with their employment?

5. What did autistic adults say about employment and self-determination that explained the regression analysis?

Recruitment

Subjects for both the survey and interview were recruited from the National Autism Society of America (ASA). Participants from various autistic adult programs in the ASA were recruited. The ASA is a national autism organization founded in 1965 and advocates for policies to help all autistic people and their families (Autism Society of America, 2020). The researcher recruited subjects through cluster sampling of various ASA locations and emailed surveys to these locations. Interview subjects were chosen randomly from the completed surveys. To link the surveys to the interviews while protecting subject privacy, emails were reported for both the surveys and interviews and were used to identify subject data. No actual names were used for the present study because the information shared in both the survey and interview contained personal information such as income.

Human Subjects Statement

The present study: Making Work Work, used human subjects for data collection. The current study assessed how specific self-determination factors impacted employment outcomes for autistic people. Surveys and interviews were conducted for the current study and collected personal data from autistic people. The subjects were autistic adults over the age of 18 and were currently employed had previous employment. Subjects were identified via the emails they included in their surveys and interview responses. Subjects were recruited via the ASA's autistic adults' programs. Informed consent was obtained

from each subject before their inclusion in the study and subjects could revoke their consent at any time during the study. There was a minimal risk for subjects included in the study. To protect subject confidentiality, surveys and interviews only had email identifiers on them to prevent information from being traceable to subjects. Subject emails were used for the delivery of surveys and conducting interviews over WebEx or Zoom. The laptop containing subject data and interviews was encrypted. The survey data was stored in Redcap. Interview data was encoded and stored in Rev. A power analysis was done via G-Power for the current study and obtained an effect size of $F^2=0.15$ $\alpha=0.01$, and $1-\beta=0.99$, 205 subjects will be were needed for the survey. Subjects did not receive any direct benefit from participation in the study. Subjects completing surveys were rewarded a $25 Visa gift card. Subjects that complete an interview also received a $25 gift card. The survey and interview data were destroyed after analysis of all data and completion of the study.

Mixed Methods

Organization

For the study, I used a convergent mixed method design to collect both quantitative and qualitative data for my research questions. A convergent mixed methods design incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data sources and collects data from both sources simultaneously (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The purpose of a convergent mixed method design was to gather data from quantitative and qualitative sources and use the data to obtain a more complete understanding of the problem in the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). For the present study, quantitative analysis

gathered survey data on self-determination skills and employment outcomes. Semi-structured interview questions further analyzed data gathered in the survey.

Data Collection

The present convergent mixed-methods study used both surveys and interviews to collect data about self-determination and employment. For the interview portion of the present study, interviewees were selected from the survey participants. It is recommended to collect qualitative data from participants of the quantitative portion of the study if the purpose of the study is to corroborate results (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). Using parallel questioning was important to the present study as a means to both compare and corroborate results from both the surveys and interviews (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). The surveys asked about locus control-beliefs, agentic action, and volitional action. The researcher created interview questions addressing these self-determination factors.

Quantitative Design

For the present study, predictive analysis analyzed the relationship between self-determination abilities and employment outcomes. For self-determination abilities, the variables of volitional action, locus of control beliefs, and planning were analyzed together and individually to see which of the variables predicted employment outcomes best. The successful employment factor included variables of wages, hours worked, and benefits. All data collection for the predictive analysis was done via survey and survey items are from already established materials. There was no intervention employed in the present study and no comparison groups were used. The participants in the present study were autistic adults that were at least 18 years old and were currently employed or ever

had been employed. The sample for the present study was gathered through a national autism organization and the survey was delivered electronically. Electronic delivery made it more likely for participants to respond as handwriting is difficult for many autistic people. The electronic design also alleviated the problem of losing the survey since many autistic people are also disorganized. Power analyses through G-Power were done for the present study for a medium effect size ($F=0.15$), conservative α ($\alpha=0.01$), and a power of $1-\beta=0.99$. Based on the 3 predictors tested and the total of 11 predictors included in the current study, a sample size of 205 subjects was needed. SPSS software was used to find statistically meaningful relationships between self-determination abilities and employment outcomes. Survey questions were coded into corresponding skills and responses were recorded through SPSS.

Measures

The present survey used was a recently created self-determination scale. The Self-Determination Inventory: Adult Report (SDI: AR) used the causal agency framework to measure self-determination factors (University of Kansas, 2017). The SDI: AR based its questions on the three foundations of causal agency: Volitional Action, Agentic Action, and Action-Control Beliefs (University of Kansas, 2017). The assessment acknowledged that self-determination is a complex skill requiring many sub-skills for people to use. The subskills assessed included autonomy, self-initiation, self-direction, goal-directed thinking, self-realization, psychological empowerment, and control-expectancy (University of Kansas, 2017). The survey was friendly for autistic adults as it took only 10 minutes to complete and did not contain any long-written responses. Survey items were answered through a sliding scale that was adjustable by the subject. Items were

presented as one-sentence statements adults could slide to show varying degrees of agreement. Agreement/disagreement with items produced an overall self-determination score out of 100 (University of Kansas, 2017). The overall score was composed of the three essential characteristics of self-determination: Volitional action, agentic action, and action-control beliefs (University of Kansas, 2017). Each of the three essential characteristics' scores was determined by construct scores for each characteristic.

Employment outcomes were measured through two questions regarding income and vocational independence. Past literature had measured employment outcomes using income data and hours worked. Both income and vocational independence via the Taylor Vocational Index was used in the regression analysis as outcome variables for employment outcomes. Income was split into 4 categories where respondents indicated whether they made less than $25,000 per year, $25,000-$49,999 per year, $50,000-$74,999 per year, or more than $75,000 per year. The Taylor Vocational Index measured vocational independence on a 1-9 scale where 1 indicated no current employment or education and 9 indicated more than 10 hours per week of work in the community or full-time education. The present research study sought input from autistic individuals regarding their self-determination skills and employment outcomes. A survey that could be independently finished was vital to the study; especially because autistic individuals often have other people speak for them (Wehmeyer, 2007). An independent survey was best for autistic people to both measure and discuss their self-determination skills and employment outcomes.

Self-Determination Inventory: Adult Report (SDI: AR)

The Self-Determination Inventory: Adult Report (SDI: AR) was a survey published by the University of Kansas in 2017. The survey created reports for autistic adults, school-aged autistic students, and parents and teachers for autistic children. For the present study, the adult report was used and adults on the spectrum completed the survey independently. Being a relatively new assessment, the SDI: AR has not yet been used extensively to test the construct of self-determination. Current research on the SDI primarily focused on the

student report and reliability and validity constructs are reported with the student report (SR) in mind. For the SDI: SR, confirmatory factor analysis was used to test the model fit of the assessment. The SDI: SR had a good model fit with a $\chi^2(34) = 63.861$, CFI= .976, RMSEA= .075, SRMR= .038 (Shogren et al., 2015). Interestingly, the SDI: SR still had good model fit without self-regulation included in the test as well with $\chi^2(22) = 36.472$, CFI= .988, RMSEA= .065, and SRMR= .024 (Shogren et al., 2015). Reliability coefficients for the assessment without the self-regulation factor were ^{r}= .71 to .87 for students with disabilities and ^{r}= .69 to .85 for students without disabilities (Shogren et al., 2015). The SDI was based extensively on previous self-determination scales that were more established such as the ARC Self-Determination Scale (SDI). The SDI is a measurement tool for identifying volitional action (decision making), agentic action (acting to accomplish goals), and action-control beliefs. The researcher contacted researchers who created the SDI and found that there is no current reliability and model fit researcher into the SDI Adult Report. This could potentially limit the study as the reliability and validity measures did not directly cover the scale being used for the present

study but the SDI Student Report was created by the same research team and used the same formatting and questioning as the Adult Report.

Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9)

The PHQ-9 is a self-administered questionnaire that evaluates an individual's depressive symptoms. There is a total of 9 items in the PHQ-9 scored from 0 (not at all) to 3 (nearly every day) (Kroenke et al., 2001). Major depression is indicated in the scale if the individual scores 5 or more items as occurring at least for half the days and other depression is noted if 2-4 of the items are scored for at least half of the days (Kroenke et al., 2001). The PHQ-9 is included in the present study because many autistic people also have co-morbid depression (Park et al., 2019). To ensure that depression is not influencing employment outcomes for autistic people, depression will be included in the study as a covariate that will be measured by the PHQ-9. The internal reliability of the PHQ-9 was $\alpha = 0.89$ in a primary care study and test-retest reliability was $\alpha = 0.84$ (Kroenke et al., 2001). The construct validity for the PHQ-9 was measured via correlations with mental health ($r=0.73$), social functioning ($r=0.52$), general health perceptions ($r=0.55$), role functioning ($r=0.43$), physical functioning ($r=0.37$), and bodily pain ($r=0.33$) (Kroenke et al., 2001).

Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7)

The GAD-7 is a self-administered questionnaire containing 7 items used to measure anxiety symptoms (Spitzer et al., 2006). The GAD-7 items are measured on a 0 (not at all) to 3 (nearly every day) scale (Spitzer et al., 2006). The internal reliability for the GAD-7 is $\alpha=0.92$ and the test-retest reliability is $r=0.83$ (Spitzer et al., 2006). The construct validity of the GAD-7 shows correlations with mental health ($r=0.75$), social

functioning (r=0.46), general health perceptions (r=0.44), bodily pain (r=0.36), role functioning (r=0.33), and physical functioning (r=0.30) (Spitzer et al., 2006). Concurrent validity with other scales of anxiety is strong with the Beck Anxiety Inventory (r=0.72) and the anxiety subscale of the Symptom Checklist-90 (r=0.74) (Spitzer et al., 2006). The GAD-7 will be included in the current study for autistic people because of the elevated co-morbidity between autism and anxiety (Park et al., 2019). To validly measure the relationship between autism, self-determination, and employment outcomes, anxiety symptomology must be controlled for in the predictive analysis; anxiety symptomology can potentially impact employment outcomes.

Flexibility Scale (FS)

Flexibility is an important skill for people that involves cognitive shifting to focus on different tasks and mental operations depending on changing situational contexts (Bertollo et al., 2020). For neurotypical adults, cognitive flexibility allows for handling the many responsibilities of life and adapting to rapidly changing circumstances. The cognitively flexible adult can handle additional work on the job, correctly change their focus onto higher priority tasks at work, and perform many different tasks at work in a short period. Improving cognitive flexibility for autistic people improves both childhood and adult outcomes; social skills and executive functioning improve when autistic people get interventions addressing cognitive flexibility (Kenworthy et al., 2014). Cognitive flexibility falls under the larger concept of adaptive behavior, the ability for people to adjust to different and difficult situations in healthy, appropriate ways. Given that flexibility plays an important role in outcomes for autistic people, the Flexibility Scale (FS) will be used to measure the construct. The FS is a 27-item scale with 5 subscales

measuring Routines and Rituals, Transitions/Changes, Special Interests, Social Flexibility, and Generativity (Strang et al., 2017). For the current study, the Transitions/Changes and Social Flexibility subscales will be administered. Based on the literature review for the current study, employment for autistic people is most impacted by the transition from high school to post-secondary life and the need to adapt to suddenly changing roles and expectations. The transition from high school to adulthood tests social flexibility; people who once had a cadre of services being delivered and a set routine of school every week suddenly are released to find their services and jobs with varying demands and times.

The FS subscale of Transitions/Changes has a significant, positive correlation with the Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised (ADI-R) items measuring repetitive and restricted behaviors and interests but the Social Flexibility subscale has a positive but non-significant correlation with the ADI-R items (r=0.169 for Transitions/Changes and r=0.087) (Strang et al., 2017). However, positive, significant correlations were found between the Repetitive Behavior Scale (RBS) and both Transitions/Changes and Social Flexibility (r=0.689 for Transitions/Changes and r=0.546 for Social Flexibility) (Strang et al., 2017).

Community-Based Functional Skills Assessment for Transition Aged Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder

The Community Based Functional Skills Assessment for Transition Aged Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder was developed by Virginia Commonwealth University in conjunction with Autism Speaks. The Community Based Functional Skills Assessment for Transition Aged Youth with Autism is a broad tool assessing employment and career

development, social-communication skills, health and safety, self-advocacy skills, community participation, financial management, transportation skills, leisure activities, and home care skills (VCU, 2014). The assessment had been used for autistic people ranging in ages from 12 to post-high school (VCU, 2014). Performance scores were recorded in a Likert scale format ranging from 1 (the person does not perform the skill at all) to 5 (the person can perform the skill independently) (VCU, 2014). Transferability was also measured through the assessment using a Likert Scale format ranging from 1 (skill is not performed in any environment) to 3 (skill is performed in 3 or more environments, including unfamiliar environments). (VCU, 2014). Final scores for the assessment are calculated as a percent for each section for both performance and environment (VCU, 2014). For the present study, The Community Based Functional Skills Assessment for Transition Aged Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder will be used to measure work readiness skills for people aged 17 and up. No reliability or validity data were reported for the assessment.

Taylor Vocational Index

The Taylor Vocational Index was used in the present study to measure post-secondary employment outcomes. The index measured the amount of independence an autistic adult has based on their vocational activities. A 1-9 scale was utilized in the index and ranked many different vocational activities (Taylor & Seltzer, 2012). A score of 1 indicates an autistic adult had no current educational or vocational activities and the score increased as the adult participated in more independent vocational activities with a score of 9 indicating either non-supported, community-based employment for longer than 10 hours per week or degree-seeking postsecondary education for longer than 10 hours per

week (Taylor & Seltzer, 2012). Previous vocational indices did not have the nuance to capture the many different vocational activities an autistic adult may perform; some indices would view autistic adults the same if they had supported employment in the community or worked in a sheltered workshop (Taylor & Seltzer, 2012). There was a need to have many separate categories of employment for autistic adults; postsecondary outcomes among the autism community are very diverse (Taylor & Seltzer, 2012). The developers recommended the use of the Vocational Index in tandem with other measures of post-secondary outcomes or to examine predictors of employment outcomes (Taylor & Seltzer, 2012). The current study used self-determination skills as a predictor for employment outcomes related to independence, pay, and job satisfaction.

Covariates

Employment outcomes for autistic people were affected by many different factors. Ethnicity and gender expression were two demographic variables that had a significant impact on employment for autistic people. Particularly, white autistic people fared significantly better in finding and keeping employment than non-white autistic people (Roux et al., 2013). To address ethnicity and gender expression, the survey used to measure employment outcomes included questions on these variables. Both ethnicity and gender expression used single question items to ask what ethnicity and gender subjects identified.

Depression and anxiety were also initially included as covariates in the present study. Even for people without autism, mood disorders like depression greatly impact employment. People with depression had lower job retention rates, higher rates of absenteeism, higher rates of unemployment and underemployment, and lower earnings

than people without a mood disorder (Lerner & Henke, 2008). Social anxiety similarly affected employment; people with anxiety had limiting beliefs about their skills and less experience in finding a job and interacting with colleagues and bosses in the workplace (Himle et al., 2014). The PHQ-9 and GAD-7 were used to measure the subject's depression and anxiety for the current study.

The ethnicity covariate was measured as a numeric variable ranging from 1-6 with 1 being white, 2 being Hispanic, 3 being African American, 4 being Asian, 5 being Middle Eastern, and 6 being mixed race/other. Even though ethnicity was not found as a significant factor affecting employment for autistic people, the odds for autistic people to be employed who were either Hispanic or African American were much lower than autistic people who were white (Roux et al., 2013).

Gender expression was another covariate addressed in the present study. Typically, only cis-male/cis-female gender expression had been covered in studies related to autism and employment. The results for employment and autism based on gender were inconclusive as some studies had found that females were more likely to be employed (Chiang et al., 2012), and other studies found no significant differences between male/female employment (Taylor et al., 2019). Studying the differences between male and female employment will add to the literature. For gender expression, no literature had yet looked at this relationship for autistic people. There is a need for literature to address gender expression, employment, and autism as autistic people had significantly less gender congruence and significantly higher rates of gender transition than their neurotypical peers (Cooper et al., 2018). Employment could be impacted by gender expression as many reported harassment, differential treatment, and firing due to being

transgender (Budge et al., 2010). Even though no literature had reported on discriminatory treatment nor employment statistics for both autism and gender expression, the researcher suspected that there was a significant relationship between employment outcomes, autism, and gender expression based on past literature on these topics. Gender expression will be coded 1-6 with 1 being male, 2 being female, 3 being trans female, 4 being trans male, 5 being non-binary, and 6 being other.

Executive functioning skills were initially a covariate for the present study. Even though many autistic people also have differences in executive functioning skills, executive functioning skills may impact employment outcomes without it being related to autism itself. The Social Flexibility scale was used to measure executive functioning for the present study. The BDEFS was also considered for use but its length (6 subsections containing a total of 89 questions) would limit the responses the researcher would get (Holst & Thorell, 2017). A total of 10 items from the two subscales were be included in the executive functioning covariate (Strang et al., 2017). Flexibility had been established in past literature as a central component of executive functioning; it impacted socialization and adaptive behavior (Bertollo et al., 2020). Flexibility impacted employment; the ability to adapt to ever-changing work demands and working with many different people could often determine how successful employment was.

Work readiness was included as a covariate for the present study. Part of the Community Based Functional Skills Assessment for Transition Aged Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder will be used to measure work readiness skills in subjects. Work habits, work exploration, and work social skills will be measured and included in the present study. A total of 11 Likert Scale items will be included in the assessment.

Missing Data

Considering the nature of the data the researcher will collect, there was a possibility for missing data. Questions such as income and gender expression could make some subjects feel uneasy and omit this information from the survey. The non-random nature of withholding income and gender expression information could make listwise deletions undesirable; income and gender expression parameters could be overly biased (Roth, 1994). Listwise deletion also reduces the power of the study by eliminating an unexpectedly large number of subjects from the study (Roth, 1994). For the present study, pairwise deletion was used to address missing data. Pairwise deletion required the researcher to keep other data collected from subjects and excluded missing data from the missing item itself (Roth, 1994). Through pairwise deletion, less data was lost and other measures of employment outcomes could still be calculated.

Qualitative Design

Critical disability theory guided the qualitative aspect of the mixed-method study. Research often does not fully grasp the voice of research subjects with disabilities. Despite all the research on the results of current policies and practices for students and autistic adults, autistic people are still struggling to find and keep satisfactory work (Feinstein, 2019). Autistic people frequently did not make livable wages nor got necessary healthcare benefits from their jobs (Feinstein, 2019). Current research had not adequately addressed the personal insights of autistic people; research focused on just being employed (Wehman et al., 2014). Employment research did not question underlying societal assumptions about work or people in general (Wehman et al., 2014). Many autistic people do not fit into these assumptions, making them outsiders to the

world of work and society in general (Wehman et al., 2014). The present interview asked questions of autistic adults that critiqued critical gaps in supports and services and attitudes from employers that harmed adults on the spectrum. Autistic adults were asked how their self-determination skills had been stymied and how, when encouraged, they helped them find and keep high-quality employment.

Interview

Based on the needs and desires of autistic people, an intensive interview was being done in conjunction with a survey of self-determination and employment outcomes. Much of the literature evaluating employment outcomes for people with disabilities only focused on economic outcomes with wages and hours worked is the most common measure of outcomes. An intensive interview was chosen for the present study because survey data did not present a complete picture of employment. Through the intensive interview, the researcher addressed other measures of employment outcomes such as job satisfaction through the lens of Critical Disability Theory. The intensive interview was ideal for the present study because it allowed for meaningful input from subjects and allowed them to explore their personal experiences of being autistic and employed. Even though livable wages were a valid measure of the quality of employment, it did not provide a full picture of employment. For autistic people, additional supports and services helped in making the job more enjoyable (Feinstein, 2019). Workplace harassment, lack of support, unpredictable schedules, lack of flexibility, no benefits, and overbearing social demands made even the most well-paying jobs tortuous (Feinstein, 2019). The researcher asked subjects evaluative questions about their workplace in relation to self-determination. Subjects should feel empowered to meaningfully critique their workplace

and analyze how it can improve. The intensive interview emphasized to the subjects that their perspectives on employment were valuable and their ideas helped reconstruct the overall conversation on employment outcomes for autistic people.

The interview took a constructivist approach, allowing subjects to build upon the researcher's current knowledge base and work towards building theory regarding self-determination and employment. The subjects proposed different ideas of their employment struggles and successes that were not currently mentioned in the literature. As a value-free expert, the researcher analyzed how specific privileges (such as wealth, general verbal skills, and familial situation and support) may play into what is theorized. Interviewed subjects came from very different backgrounds than the researcher and associated employment issues with factors unrelated to autism or attributed employment to autism in unexpected ways. The research was careful to not overly guide the conversation and have their views and values dominate the interviewing protocol. As the subjects are on the spectrum, the interview had many unique challenges that many other studies do not face. The reading of non-verbal cues during the interview was particularly challenging because autistic people do not use these cues or interpret these behaviors (American Psychological Association, 2013). Lack of eye contact and slouched body position for the subjects may not show lying or disinterest like it would for neurotypical subjects. The subjects also needed additional time or felt nervous about a one-on-one interview, uniquely impacting the interview protocol.

Through evaluation of work, the interviewer valued the subject's self-determination and saw how the world of work should be improved for autistic people.

Interviews were transcribed through a recording program and coding was done by the researcher to find common themes among interviews.

Integration of Data

Both the predictive analysis and interview parts of the present study complemented each other. One purpose of a mixed-methods study is to address the limitations of a purely quantitative or qualitative study (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). The predictive analysis by itself ignored the rich data and experiences of the adults struggling to gain satisfying employment. The interview by itself ignored the potential applicability of self-determination's impacts on employment. Enhancement of the predictive analysis with interviews provided coherent messages for the present study. Analysis of self-determination factors showed which of these factors was most responsible for successful employment outcomes. Interviews provided additional insight into self-determination factors and the experiences that helped or hindered gaining meaningful, satisfying employment. The interviews were particularly important in getting the oft-ignored voices of the autism community; interviewees provided insight into why they felt they had gained successful employment and helped build additional theories as to how self-determination and employment worked for autistic adults.

Legitimation of Mixed Methods

Mixed methods research is a relatively new research paradigm; while both quantitative methods and qualitative methods have been legitimized, the use of mixed methods research has not had the luxury of time to undergo the same evaluation of procedures. Mixed methods research requires a unique approach in legitimation and representation because of the process of bringing in multiple research methods that can

exacerbate issues with both (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). Mixed methods research has problems with representation, legitimation, and integration (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). Perhaps the biggest issue with mixed methods research is how to draw quality inferences from a mixed-methods study. The legitimation of inferences from the current study was based on design quality and interpretive rigor (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). To improve upon the legitimation of the current study, considerations were given to the generalizability of the data gathered, transferability to other autistic individuals, transferability to other settings, and transferability to other contexts (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). Consistency of procedures, consistency with established knowledge about autism, employment, and self-determination, consistency of interpretations across autistic people, and interpretations that eliminate the possibility of different explanations of the data improved the legitimation of the present study (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003).

With the current study, data transferability was given special consideration. Autism is an idiosyncratic condition that affects each person differently, some people will have a much easier time adjusting to post-secondary life than other people. To improve upon transferability, random sampling of subjects for the interview stage from the survey stage was conducted to gather unique voices within the autism community. With a collection of different experiences, generalizable data was gathered to allow for the development of themes that were inclusive of all autism and employment experiences as well as autism experiences in different settings.

Autistic people each have different experiences from one another. To further improve the legitimation of the current study, member review was particularly important to check the interview data (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). With member checking, the

interview data was reviewed by the subjects themselves to ensure that they have communicated what they intended. Autism is a condition that affects communication for many individuals (American Psychological Association, 2013). With member checking, the subjects ensured clear communication for the current study and helped validate the data's trustworthiness and applicability.

The current study also required conversion legitimation because both numeric and interview data were collected. To ensure conversion legitimation, quantizing the interview data from the present study helped alleviate problems with over or underweighting aspects of the study (Sandelowski, 2001). The current study counted the number of times specific themes appeared in the interviews to make measuring data from the interviews more succinct. Data conversation corroborated data more readily between the methods used and produced integrated and coherent analysis.

Data Analysis

Uniting Philosophy

The present study was underpinned by a transformative philosophy. A transformative philosophy is focused on social justice and human rights (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). The social justice and human rights mission was ideal for the present study; autistic people had always been unemployed or underemployed much more frequently and subminimum wage jobs still exist for autistic people today. Poor employment outcomes affect autistic people and their ability to participate in the general community. Without adequate wages, people will not have the money to support themselves or live comfortably. Placement in sheltered workshops isolates people away from their community. Policy negatively impacting government services and schooling

further impacts autistic people and their preparation for and participation in the postsecondary world of work. Through interviews of autistic adults, the marginalization of the autism community was addressed. The voices of autistic people were often not included in policy and research and through the current study; their voices were heard. Feedback from autistic adults regarding the interpretation and presentation of data helped the overall efficacy of the study (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018).

Basic Interpretive

The qualitative design of the present study was a basic interpretive design. The researcher was interested in gathering the voices of autistic adults and asked them about their employment and how they navigate the world of work. Knowledge about employment was and still is constructed by autistic adults as they experience the world of work (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The autistic interviewees shared the meaning of their experiences with the researcher; they described in detail the successes and struggles they had with employment and how they interpreted the events in their work lives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The primary interest of the present study was to construct meaning from the experiences of autistic adults in employment. The researcher did not ascribe to any special type of qualitative research. An ethnographic design was not used as there was no assumption of a common phenomenon being experienced by the interviewees. The research did not use a grounded theory design as there was no current, widespread theory that describes how employment for autistic adults works. A phenomenological design was not used as the researcher did not assume that autistic adults shared a common employment experience. The researcher did not use any special framework or design to

make sense of the knowledge gathered from interviews; they used a semi-structured interview to make sense of the employment experiences of autistic adults.

Analysis of Quantitative Data

The quantitative data came from the SDI (AR), income question, and Taylor Vocational Index and was entered into SPSS for organization and predictive analysis. With predictive analysis, assumptions of the data from SDI (AR) must be met.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Variables

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
GNDE	200	1	5	2.42	1.430
ETH	200	1	6	1.75	1.124
INC	200	1	4	1.97	.769
ANX	200	0	3	1.90	.579
TVC	200	1	9	6.57	2.236
FLX	200	3	28	18.16	3.346
DEP	200	0	4	2.28	.822
VEV	200	36.67	100.00	67.2450	10.46757
VAV	200	20.00	100.00	63.9484	14.78960
SDB	200	12	100	68.26	22.302
SDA	200	10	100	68.77	22.157
SDD	200	9	98	68.14	21.430
Valid N (listwise)	200				

Homoscedasticity

The data from SDI (AR) had constant variance. If the data was heteroscedastic, assuming that a least-squares fit line existed would be compromised and such a line may not be best for capturing the relationship between the SDI (AR) variables (Fox, 2016). SPSS tested for this assumption and the diagram between standard errors and predicted values.

Figure 3

Income Homoscedasticity Test

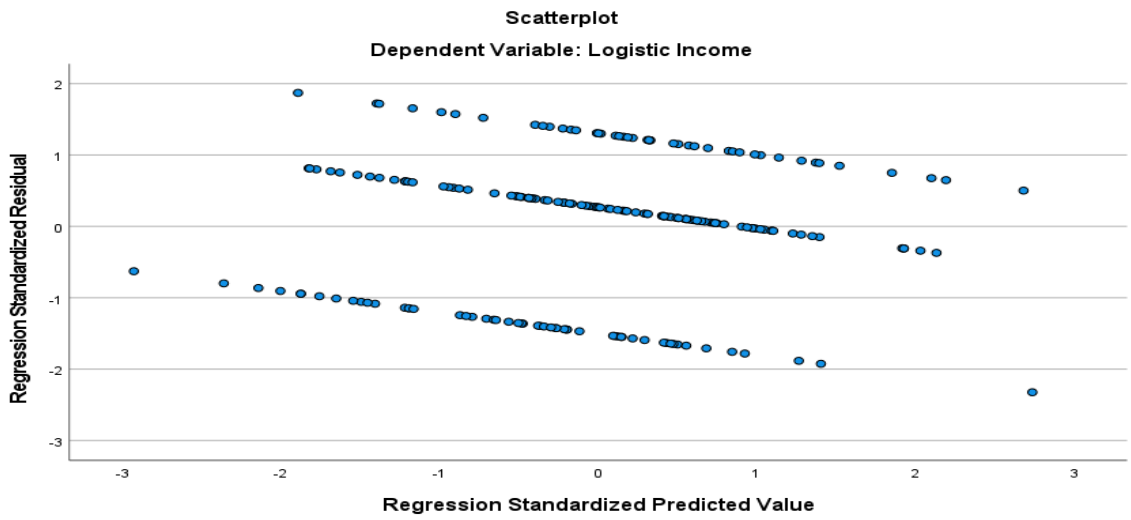
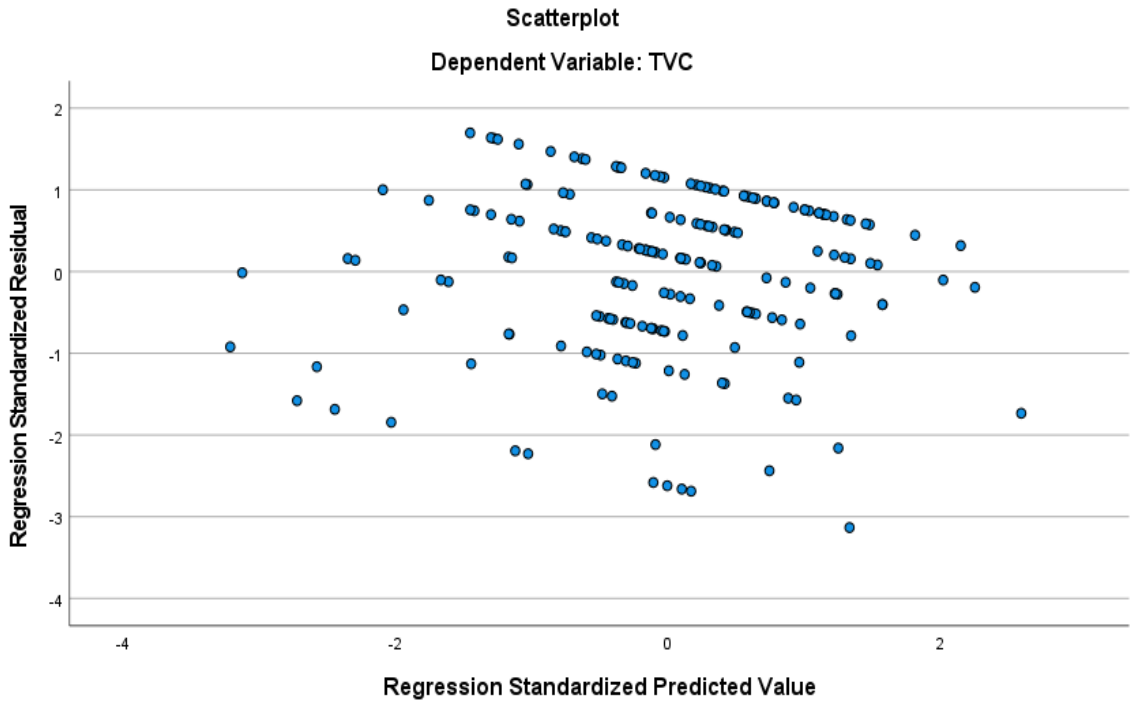


Figure 4

Taylor Homoscedasticity Test

-



Linearity

The data from the SDI (AR) must have a linear relationship. Data with a nonlinear relationship will need to be analyzed with a nonlinear model and will drastically impact the predictive analysis (Fox, 2016). The line of best fit for the SDI (AR) data will produce an average error value of 0 (Fox, 2016).

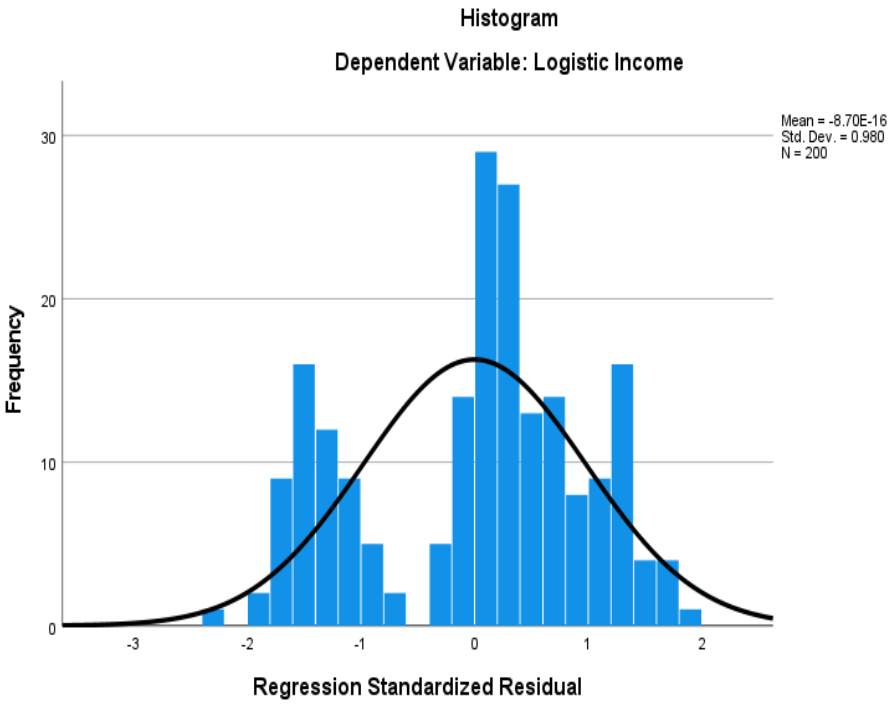
Normal Distribution

The errors from the line of best fit with the actual data must follow a normal distribution (Fox, 2016). The present study's power analysis shows that 205 subjects are

required. Due to the relatively small sample size in the study, the researcher used SPSS to test the residuals from the line of best fit to observe if the errors are normal (Statistics Solutions, 2019). A Predicted-Probability plot (P-P) was produced via SPSS and the errors will follow the line produced by SPSS for the plot (Statistics Solutions, 2019).

Figure 5

Income Normalcy Test



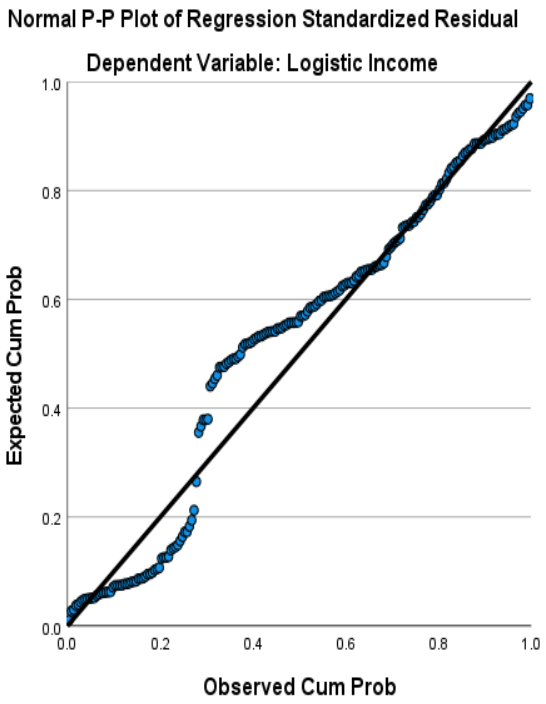
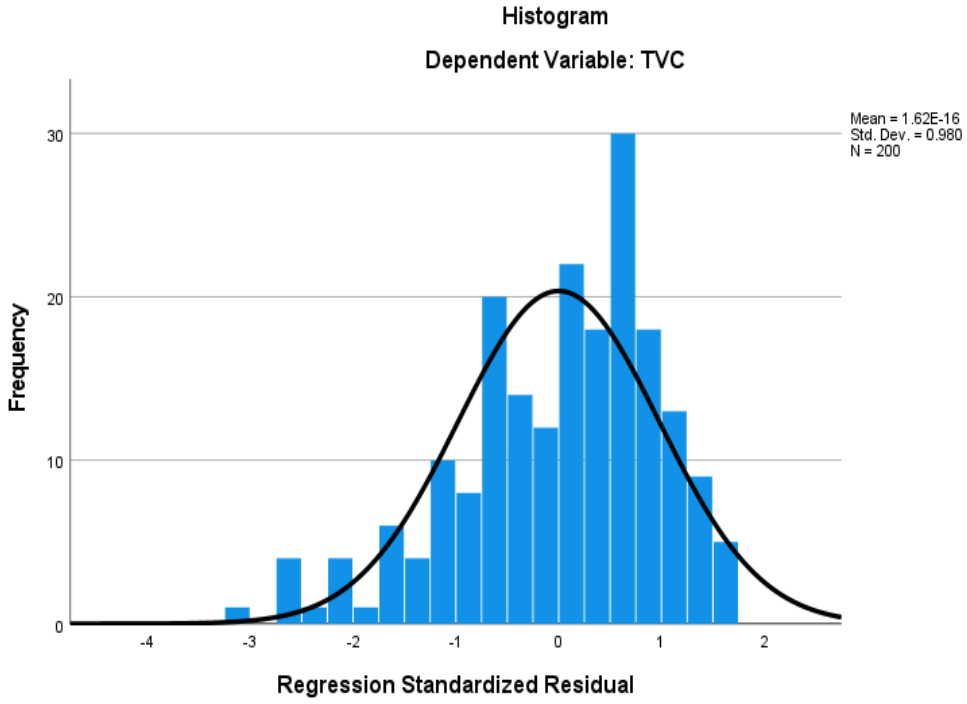
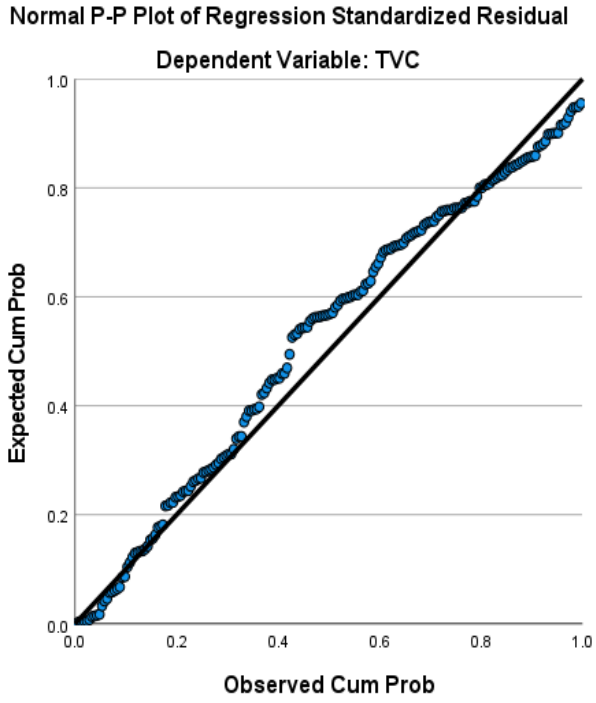

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual
Dependent Variable: Logistic Income
Expected Cum Prob
Observed Cum Prob
0.0
0.2
0.4
0.6
0.8
1.0

Figure 6

Taylor Vocational Index Normalcy Test





Collinearity

Variables in the predictive analysis must not be too correlated to each other or the regression model will not be able to accurately associate variance to the correct variable in the model (Statistics Solutions, 2019). The research questions in the present study required the researcher to use a multiple linear regression that tested how multiple self-determination skills impacted employment outcomes. As a result, testing how the self-determination factors were correlated to each other was necessary. If self-determination factors were too highly correlated to each other, removing self-determination factors would be necessary. Through SPSS, variance inflation factors (VIF) were produced to indicate if collinearity exists (Statistics Solutions, 2019). VIFs of 10 or more indicated high collinearity and the need for the removal of self-determination variables from the current study.

Figure 7

Collinearity Test for Income

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.355	.212		1.671	.096	-.064	.774					
	GNDE	-.021	.020	-.075	-1.056	.292	-.060	.018	-.128	-.076	-.073	.951	1.051
	ETH	-.005	.025	-.015	-.214	.831	-.054	.044	-.007	-.015	-.015	.981	1.019
	ANX	-.122	.058	-.176	-2.107	.036	-.235	-.008	-.150	-.150	-.145	.682	1.466
	FLX	.021	.009	.173	2.400	.017	.004	.038	.218	.170	.165	.914	1.094
	DEP	.065	.040	.132	1.616	.108	-.014	.143	.033	.115	.111	.709	1.410
2	(Constant)	.290	.319		.910	.364	-.339	.920					
	GNDE	-.007	.023	-.025	-.300	.764	-.052	.039	-.128	-.022	-.021	.706	1.417
	ETH	-.008	.026	-.022	-.306	.760	-.058	.042	-.007	-.022	-.021	.935	1.069

ANX	-.124	.060	-.179	-2.073	.040	-.241	-.006	-.150	-.148	-.143	.644	1.553
FLX	.019	.009	.161	2.186	.030	.002	.037	.218	.156	.151	.885	1.130
DEP	.071	.041	.145	1.708	.089	-.011	.152	.033	.123	.118	.665	1.504
VAV	-6.729E-5	.002	-.002	-.029	.977	-.005	.005	-.007	-.002	-.002	.652	1.534
VEV	-.001	.003	-.025	-.292	.770	-.007	.005	.003	-.021	-.020	.660	1.516
SDD	.002	.002	.094	1.110	.269	-.001	.005	.164	.080	.077	.663	1.508

a. Dependent Variable: Logistic Income

Figure 8

Collinearity Tests for Taylor Vocation Index

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	4.788	1.178		4.064	.000	2.464	7.112					
	GNDE	.034	.110	.022	.307	.759	-.183	.250	-.006	.022	.021	.951	1.051
	ETH	.319	.138	.161	2.322	.021	.048	.591	.181	.164	.159	.981	1.019

	ANX	-.659	.320	-.171	-2.058	.041	-1.290	-.027	-.031	-.146	-.141	.682	1.466
	FLX	.041	.048	.061	.851	.396	-.054	.135	.090	.061	.058	.914	1.094
	DEP	.723	.221	.266	3.268	.001	.287	1.160	.189	.228	.224	.709	1.410
2	(Constant)	5.761	1.336		4.312	.000	3.126	8.396					
	GNDE	-.064	.127	-.041	-.507	.613	-.315	.186	-.006	-.036	-.035	.708	1.413
	ETH	.348	.138	.175	2.518	.013	.075	.621	.181	.178	.172	.963	1.039
	ANX	-.678	.319	-.176	-2.124	.035	-1.308	-.048	-.031	-.151	-.145	.681	1.469
	FLX	.053	.048	.079	1.091	.277	-.043	.148	.090	.078	.074	.890	1.124
	DEP	.693	.221	.255	3.128	.002	.256	1.130	.189	.220	.213	.704	1.421
	SDD	-.013	.009	-.126	-1.527	.128	-.030	.004	-.065	-.109	-.104	.681	1.468

a. Dependent Variable: TVC

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	4.788	1.178		4.064	.000	2.464	7.112					
	GNDE	.034	.110	.022	.307	.759	-.183	.250	-.006	.022	.021	.951	1.051
	ETH	.319	.138	.161	2.322	.021	.048	.591	.181	.164	.159	.981	1.019
	ANX	-.659	.320	-.171	-2.058	.041	-1.290	-.027	-.031	-.146	-.141	.682	1.466
	FLX	.041	.048	.061	.851	.396	-.054	.135	.090	.061	.058	.914	1.094
	DEP	.723	.221	.266	3.268	.001	.287	1.160	.189	.228	.224	.709	1.410
2	(Constant)	2.389	1.540		1.551	.122	-.649	5.428					
	GNDE	.009	.109	.006	.084	.933	-.206	.224	-.006	.006	.006	.938	1.066
	ETH	.277	.137	.139	2.022	.045	.007	.547	.181	.144	.136	.959	1.042
	ANX	-.478	.323	-.124	-1.478	.141	-1.116	.160	-.031	-.106	-.100	.648	1.544
	FLX	.042	.047	.063	.885	.377	-.051	.135	.090	.064	.060	.910	1.099
	DEP	.759	.224	.279	3.385	.001	.317	1.201	.189	.237	.228	.670	1.493
	VAV	.029	.013	.192	2.306	.022	.004	.054	.191	.164	.156	.658	1.519

VEV	.004	.018	.016	.199	.843	-.031	.038	.179	.014	.013	.662	1.511

a. Dependent Variable: TVC

Figure 9

Original Collinearity Test

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.361	.309		1.170	.244		
	ANX	-.150	.061	-.210	-2.450	.015	.647	1.545
	FLX	.019	.009	.151	2.053	.041	.880	1.136
	SDD	.001	.004	.046	.200	.841	.092	10.889
	SDA	-.005	.004	-.257	-1.101	.272	.087	11.451
	SDB	.006	.005	.312	1.156	.249	.065	15.384
	VAV	.000	.002	-.013	-.146	.884	.645	1.550
	VEV	-.001	.003	-.036	-.422	.674	.648	1.544
	DEP	.076	.042	.151	1.799	.074	.673	1.486

a. Dependent Variable: LogINC

Outliers

In predictive analysis, outliers in data can drastically affect the line of best fit for data. Mahalanobis Distances were calculated for the data as it is a measurement of how far a specific data point is from the mean of all data points. Extreme data points were fully excluded from the data set.

Regression

Income data, Taylor Vocational Index data, and SDI (AR) data were entered into SPSS and a multiple regression analysis was performed to analyze the relationships between all self-determination factors and employment outcomes. The self-determination

factors included in this analysis were volitional action, agentic action, and action-control beliefs. The variables of wages and vocational independence were also included. Analysis of the relationship between these variables was tested for significance at the $p<.01$ level to account for the smaller number of subjects in the present study. Effect sizes were measured using r^2. The effect size in regression analysis measures how much variance in employment outcomes can be explained by self-determination skills.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

For the present study, open coding was the first step in analyzing the interview transcripts. Interviews were transcribed through an application via text-to-speech. The first step of the coding process was open coding where the researcher found segments of the interview data that were relevant to answering the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Flexibility in coding at this stage was necessary as the researcher could not preconceive what the subjects will say or what common themes would emerge. Constructing categories and themes that capture recurring patterns found in the interviews was particularly important; well-constructed categories and themes capture particularly important details and overarching ideas (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Interview Purpose

The interview in the present study expanded upon the predictive analysis in the study and included the voices of autistic adults. Autistic adults are often ignored in most post-secondary outcome research and only quantifiable measures of employment are included in the research. The researcher for this study discovered what autistic adults

thought about their post-secondary outcomes, what had helped or hurt with gaining meaningful employment, and what constituted a satisfying employment experience. Research questions regarding individual self-determination skills and helpful interventions highlighted how having a voice in the transition process was helpful and what interventions were appreciated by autistic people.

Epistemological Framework for Interview

The present study was based on Critical Disability Theory. Critical Disability Theory views the current structure of society as inherently unwelcoming to people with disabilities. Of particular concern to this theory is the amount of cost-cutting and austerity measures that have an unproportionally larger impact on people with disabilities (Goodley, 2013). The rampant poverty and exclusion from mainstream society are caused by systemic barriers that physically, mentally, and economically shun people with disabilities (Goodley, 2013). In particular for autistic people, the literature further supported the idea that autistic people faced extra challenges gaining meaningful inclusion into society. Autistic people followed especially difficult paths towards gaining and keeping employment. Due to employment difficulties, the current study had themes of general poverty and social exclusion emerge.

Coding

Coding qualitative data from interviews has three purposes: noticing relevant phenomenon, finding examples of these phenomena, and analyzing the phenomenon to describe similarities, differences, and patterns in the data (Seidel & Kelle, 1995). When coding data, it is characteristically different from quantitative analysis as data is reordered and identified to be expanded, transformed, and reconceptualized (Coffey &

Atkinson, 1996). The way the researcher codes the data is how the researcher will interact with the interview data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). It is important to consider the philosophical underpinnings of the researcher when coding. Critical Disability Theory and a social justice approach impacted the coding of data from the interviews. Categories related to power imbalances and difficulties fitting into mainstream society, and help needed to fit in emerged. With effective coding, the researcher can analyze and discuss the consequences of the phenomenon related to autism and employment (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Consequences related to workplace discrimination, lack of government services, lack of welfare support, and power imbalances were topics that the researcher's analysis led to.

Inductive Reasoning

Based on the current study's purpose and philosophical underpinnings, details concerning advocacy, interventions, skill-building, discrimination, job-coaching, pay, benefits, work hours, goal-setting, executive functioning, self-efficacy, following through on plans, government services, welfare, disability income, education, training, participation in the community, independence, and happiness may all come from the interview. With a diversity of topics, the researcher coded the interviews to find what overarching ideas from these topics emerged and how self-determination and Critical Disability Theory underpinned the coded data. The coded data had a clear message about how autistic people felt about their employment and what was truly helpful to getting and keeping their jobs. More comprehensive categories were made to have more cohesive results; it was particularly important that these categories were responsive to the purpose of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Axial coding ensured that the topics covered in

the interviews coalesced with the study's questions and philosophical underpinnings. For qualitative validity, the researcher member-checked the data from interviews. With member-checking, the research gave the summary of findings to key subjects in the study to see if the results truly reflected their experiences (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). The researcher asked others members of the autism community to validate these results to confirm if the employment experiences were truly reflective of what an autistic adult typically encounters.

Statement of Personal Goals

For qualitative research, the researcher needs to know their personal goals. Without acknowledging personal viewpoints in research could lead to unaddressed negative influences and personal biases that harm the validity of the research (Maxwell, 2013). Awareness of researcher goals will help the researcher know how their goals and personal views are shaping the current study (Maxwell, 2013). The researcher for the current study is an autistic adult that was diagnosed as a toddler. As an autistic person, the researcher was motivated by personal goals to endeavor in autism, self-determination, and employment. As a student with an IEP in high school, the researcher noticed that he was ill-prepared for post-secondary life and did not truly know what to do as a career. Through haphazard self-discovery, the researcher mistakenly thought teaching was a desired career choice despite poor management and executive functioning skills. Despite the researcher's need for help, certain colleagues would focus on the wrong skills and eventually led to the dismissal and needing to work part-time at a steep pay-cut. The researcher figured that he was not alone in this misguidance and wrongful choice in career; autistic people often do not get adequate transition services in high school nor

receive career guidance. Wages, benefits, and hours worked for autistic people are also sparse as many resorted to sub-minimum or minimum wage work and work part-time. Due to this experience, the researcher addressed how systemic issues negatively impact autistic people in getting meaningful, satisfying employment.

With the researcher's experience, the current study adopted a transformative lens for autism and employment. The researcher's personal experiences allowed for unique reflection and learning experiences concerning the gap between autism and employment now and what needs to occur for the future of autism and employment. Being part of the community, the researcher personally understands how autistic people have not been adequately guided into well-fitting careers nor had much of the transition to post-secondary life explained. Despite the researcher's educational background and previous work experience, they are still underemployed. Partnering the research with the community at large advanced the research methods into autism and employment (Mertens, 2009). Including the larger autism community into the current study added personal accounts to the shortcomings of transition, employment, and research for autistic people (Mertens, 2009). The researcher used a needs sensing paradigm. The needs sensing paradigm placed a high priority on, "the community member's ability to identify their own needs." (Mertens, p. 148, 2009). The researcher used interview questions to probe autistic individuals about what made their jobs satisfying or unsatisfying, what help they needed at the job, and what supports or interventions could have helped them at work. Autism is a highly idiosyncratic condition; even though the researcher has extensive experience living with autism, his knowledge could not speak to the experiences of the larger autism population. Interviewing other autistic people expanded

the narrative power of the current study. The researcher's use of other voices in the study developed a more thorough explanation of the shortcomings and needs of the autism population in transitioning to adulthood.

Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Data

The key purpose of mixed methods studies is to integrate quantitative data and qualitative data into a coherent, complete message about the phenomenon studied (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). For the present study, predictive analysis and interviews were integrated to capture a more complete picture of self-determination and employment outcomes for autistic people. Without the interviews, the current study would not capture the voices of an oft-ignored group of people in research and questions regarding employment satisfaction and insights into the efficacy of interventions and government programs for employment. Without the predictive analysis, self-determination skills would not be fully quantified or addressed in making a significant impact on employment.

For a convergent mixed methods design, it was recommended that the researcher integrate the two data sources by comparing and contrasting the data (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). Searching for common concepts or disconfirming information and creating joint displays helped to integrate the data from the quantitative and qualitative portions of the data (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). Before completing a joint display table, the qualitative data in the mixed methods study was transformed into numeric information that captured the number of times specific themes or codes emerged (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). For the present study, the interview data was transformed into a percentage. Interviews with themes of self-determination, advocacy, intervention, satisfaction with

employment, and discrimination were added to the percentage of people who discuss these themes.

Discussion

After data analysis, the researcher interpreted the results by discussing convergent and divergent results in the predictive analysis and interview (Lee & Greene, 2007). It was particularly important to assess how both the quantitative and qualitative parts of the mixed methods study described autism, self-determination, and employment in similar and different ways (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). Potential sources for discrepancies included differences in survey and interview materials. Wages and vocational independence did not measure happiness with employment. Even if wages and hours were satisfactory, it did not guarantee employees with autism were truly happy with their jobs. The SDI (AR) did not discuss interventions autistic people had in high school whereas the interview addressed this. The research discussion gave priority to one of the data sources and used it more for a basis of interpretation (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). Due to potential limitations and the critical need for research into autism and employment, the researcher might advocate for a new research focus (Bryman, 1988).

Validity Threats

With the convergent mixed-methods study, there were some threats to the validity of the study. The surveys and interviews used for the current study failed to address the same concepts (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). For the study, the researcher collaborated with the already produced surveys and used them to guide the interview question writing. In the present study, the researcher used different sample sizes for the surveys and interviews. The researcher acknowledged that the surveys and interviews served two

different purposes in the study (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). The researcher used the survey data to predict how self-determination skills predicted wages, hours, and benefits. Interviews captured the idiosyncratic nature of employment experiences for autistic people. There were some disconfirming results from the study and the researcher analyzed these disagreeing results and why they occurred (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018).

CHAPTER 4

Results

Chapter Breakdown

The following chapter will discuss results from both the quantitative and qualitative methods and then integrate both analyses using a joint display table to compare and contrast results between the two methodologies. The quantitative results section will cover the characteristics of the sample that took the survey and then the results from the regression analysis. The qualitative analysis will describe the subjects that were interviewed by the researcher, the coding that was used to analyze the interviews, and emergent themes found in the interviews. The integrated analysis will start with a joint display table to compare and contrast results found in both methods, present a flowchart of results that explains how self-determination affects employment, discuss areas of convergence and divergence between the methodology, and conclude with areas of silence.

Quantitative Results

Sample

A total of 361 respondents sent surveys to the researcher for analysis. Of these 361 respondents, 161 did not completely follow the directions of the survey resulting in incomplete data and removal of the surveys from the present study. After removal, 200 completed surveys remained in the current study. Many of the incomplete responses did not fill in the Self-Determination Inventory which was required to collect predictor variable data. Without any predictor variable data, the surveys that did not complete the SDI were ineligible for inclusion. For the remaining, eligible surveys, there were 71

males (35.5%), 61 females (30.5%), 2 non-binary individuals (1%), 45 trans female people (22.5%), and 21 trans male people (10.5%). For the present study, the research was conscious of previous research on autism and gender expression, where autistic individuals are significantly more likely to report gender dysphoria than neurotypical individuals (Strang et al., 2014). Despite the significant relationship between autism and gender dysphoria, having a total of 34% of respondents identifying as non-cis gendered is large. In previous studies, 5.4% of autistic individuals identified as having gender dysphoria (Strang et al., 2014). The gender expression of many of the subjects in the present study also pairs with the data on both anxiety and depression. For the present study participants, 4 reported no/low anxiety (2%), 33 reported mild anxiety (16.5%), 143 reported moderate anxiety (71.5%), and 20 described severe anxiety (10%). The subjects in the current study also reported on their depression symptomology where 9 reported no/low depression (4.5%), 14 showed mild depression (7%), 95 noted having moderate depression (47.5%), 76 reported having moderately severe depression (38%), and 6 described having severe depression (3%). Many participants in the current study, much like many autistic individuals, have elevated anxiety and depression (Park et al., 2019). The survey data collected for the present study corroborates research into autism and comorbid anxiety and depression. Elevated anxiety and depression also exist within the transgender community (Strang et al., 2014). Research into interactions between autism, gender dysphoria, and mood disorders is not conclusive (Strang et al., 2014) but the data received for the current study indicates that such an interaction may exist. For income, 56 indicated that they make less than $25,000 per year (28%), 100 reported making $25,001-$50,000 per year (50%), 38 made $50,001-$74,999 (19%), and 6 earned more than

$75,000 per year (3%). Over three-fourths of all participants in the current study make less than the mean income of $56,310 (bls.gov, 2021). The lesser income earned by autistic individuals in this study is consistent with what other researchers have found when comparing autistic and neurotypical adults. Many autistic people work part-time and earned an average of $9.11 per hour while full-time employees on the spectrum earned an average of $8.08 per hour (Roux et al., 2015). There is also a distinct possibility that many of the autistic adults who stated that they make less than $25,000 per year may be unemployed as autistic people have significant difficulties in finding and keeping employment, even when compared to people with other disabilities (Roux et al., 2015). Half of the respondents noted that they make between $25,001-$50,000 per year which may be above the autistic population's annual income due to rampant underemployment and unemployment in this community. There are very few autistic adults in the present study that are making above $75,000 and because of this small group membership, the $50,000-$74,999 and more than $75,000 groups were combined. The racial demographics of the survey respondents included 129 Caucasian people (64.5%), 17 Hispanic individuals (8.5%), 31 African American people (15.5%), 22 Asian/Asian American individuals (11%), and 1 other/mixed-race person (0.5%). Respondents did not overly vary from the population's racial demographics.

A majority of autistic adults that completed surveys were in the clinical range for both anxiety and depression based on the GAD-7 and PHQ-9. The clinical cutoff for the GAD-7 and PHQ-9 indicates the need for further evaluative for anxiety and depression respectively. For the GAD-7, a total of 163 (81.5%) of autistic adults scored within the test's clinical range and for the PHQ-9, 177 (88.5%) of all subjects scored within the

clinical range for depression. With potentially high levels of anxiety and depression within the autism community, it was important for the present study to analyze anxiety and depression as covariates to income and vocational independence.

Table 2

Covariate and Variable Descriptive Statistics Table

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Anxiety	200	0	3	1.90	.579	.336
Depression	200	0	4	2.28	.822	.675
Taylor Vocational Index	200	1	9	6.57	2.236	5.000
Self-Determination Decision	200	9	98	68.14	21.430	459.253
Self-Determination Action	200	10	100	68.77	22.157	490.942
Self-Determination Beliefs	200	12	100	68.26	22.302	497.382
Vocational Activities	200	20.00	100	63.9484	14.78960	218.732
Vocational Environments	200	36.67	100	67.2450	10.46757	109.570
Social Flexibility	200	3	28	18.16	3.346	11.194
Valid N (listwise)	200					

Table 3

Frequency of Incomes

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Scores	1 (Under $25000)	56	28.0	28.0
	2 ($25000-$49999)	100	50.0	78.0
	3 ($50000-$74999)	38	19.0	97.0
	4 (Greater than $75000)	6	3.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	

Table 4

Frequency of Gender Expression

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	1 (Male)	71	35.5	35.5
	2 (Female)	61	30.5	66.0
	3 (Trans female)	2	1.0	67.0
	4 (Trans male)	45	22.5	89.5
	5 (Non-Binary)	21	10.5	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	

Table 5

Frequency of Ethnicities

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Ethnicity	1 (White)	129	64.5	64.5
	2 (Hispanic)	17	8.5	73.0
	3 (African American)	31	15.5	88.5
	4 (Asian)	22	11.0	99.5
	6 (Mixed Race/Other)	1	.5	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	

Results of Quantitative Analysis

The primary question the researcher intended to answer using regression analysis was what self-determination capacity variables predict gainful, high-quality employment for autistic people? To answer the research question, the researcher used the SDI: AR to distinguish between three separate self-determination traits: actions, decision-making, and beliefs. However, the research found that there was collinearity between all three of these variables, indicating that the skills were indistinguishable amongst themselves statistically. The collinearity caused the regression analysis to be unperformed and the researcher eliminated self-determination beliefs and self-determination actions because they had the highest two VIF scores. After eliminating two of the three self-determination skills, self-determination decision-making was used to represent self-determination and there were no significant relationships found between self-determination and income nor self-determination and vocational independence. The researcher found, based on the regression analysis, that no self-determination skills predict employment outcomes.

Multiple regression analysis is used to measure how self-determination skills and opportunities affected income and vocational activity in the community. Gender expression and ethnicity were covariates for the multiple regression analysis. Tests were conducted to see if the data met the assumption of collinearity and multicollinearity was a concern for the variables self-determination decision- making (Tolerance= .09, VIF= 11.04), self-determination action (Tolerance= .09, VIF= 11.68), and self-determination beliefs (Tolerance= .07, VIF= 15.43). To fix this problem, all self-determination skills were separated as variables for the study and tested individually. After the separation of the variables, multicollinearity was no longer a concern. (self-determination decision-

making, Tolerance= .71, VIF= 1.4; self-determination actions, Tolerance= .71, VIF= 1.4; self-determination beliefs, Tolerance= .74, VIF=1.4; Gender Expression, Tolerance= .99, VIF= 1.0; Ethnicity, Tolerance= .98, VIF= 1.0; Vocational Activity Level, Tolerance= .72, VIF= 1.4; Vocational Environments Performed, Tolerance= .70, VIF= 1.4). For the first set of regression analyses, income was logarithmically transformed because only three income categories were present in the present study. The logarithmic income was set as the outcome variable with each self-determination skill, vocational activity levels, and vocational environments performed as predictors. Gender expression and ethnicity were set as covariates. Multiple regression analysis was used to test if self-determination skills and opportunities significantly predicted income levels after controlling for gender expression and ethnicity. The regression found that after controlling for the covariates, there was no significant change in explanation of the variance for any of the self-determination skills.

Table 6

Model Change Summary for Covariates and Self-Determination Decisions on Income

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df 1	df 2	Sig. F Change
1	.129[a]	.017	-.004	.40134	.017	.823	4	195	.512
2	.174[b]	.030	.005	.39955	.014	2.746	1	194	.099

a. Predictors: (Constant), VEV, GNDE, ETH, VAV

b. Predictors: (Constant), VEV, GNDE, ETH, VAV, SDD

c. Dependent Variable: Logistic Income

Table 7

Correlation Table for Income and Self-Determination Decision Making

		Logistic Income	GNDE	ETH	VAV	VEV	SDD
Pearson Correlation	Logistic Income	1.000	-.128	-.007	-.007	.003	.164
	GNDE	-.128	1.000	.044	.063	.087	-.520
	ETH	-.007	.044	1.000	.078	.154	.090
	VAV	-.007	.063	.078	1.000	.533	-.111
	VEV	.003	.087	.154	.533	1.000	-.118
	SDD	.164	-.520	.090	-.111	-.118	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Logistic Income	.	.036	.463	.459	.485	.010
	GNDE	.036	.	.269	.188	.111	.000
	ETH	.463	.269	.	.136	.015	.103
	VAV	.459	.188	.136	.	.000	.059
	VEV	.485	.111	.015	.000	.	.049
	SDD	.010	.000	.103	.059	.049	.
N	Logistic Income	200	200	200	200	200	200
	GNDE	200	200	200	200	200	200
	ETH	200	200	200	200	200	200
	VAV	200	200	200	200	200	200
	VEV	200	200	200	200	200	200
	SDD	200	200	200	200	200	200

Table 8

Model Change Summary for Covariates and Self-Determination Actions on Income

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df 1	df 2	Sig. F Change
1	.129[a]	.017	-.004	.40134	.017	.823	4	195	.512
2	.161[b]	.026	.001	.40047	.009	1.843	1	194	.176

a. Predictors: (Constant), VEV, GNDE, ETH, VAV

b. Predictors: (Constant), VEV, GNDE, ETH, VAV, SDA

c. Dependent Variable: Logistic Income

Table 9

Correlation Table for Income and Self-Determination Action

		Logistic Income	GNDE	ETH	VAV	VEV	SDA
Pearson Correlation	Logistic Income	1.000	-.128	-.007	-.007	.003	.147
	GNDE	-.128	1.000	.044	.063	.087	-.518
	ETH	-.007	.044	1.000	.078	.154	.108
	VAV	-.007	.063	.078	1.000	.533	-.099
	VEV	.003	.087	.154	.533	1.000	-.064
	SDA	.147	-.518	.108	-.099	-.064	1.000

Sig. (1-tailed)	Logistic Income	.	.036	.463	.459	.485	.019
	GNDE	.036	.	.269	.188	.111	.000
	ETH	.463	.269	.	.136	.015	.064
	VAV	.459	.188	.136	.	.000	.083
	VEV	.485	.111	.015	.000	.	.185
	SDA	.019	.000	.064	.083	.185	.
N	Logistic Income	200	200	200	200	200	200
	GNDE	200	200	200	200	200	200
	ETH	200	200	200	200	200	200
	VAV	200	200	200	200	200	200
	VEV	200	200	200	200	200	200
	SDA	200	200	200	200	200	200

Table 10

Model Change Summary for Covariates and Self-Determination Beliefs on Income

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df 1	df 2	Sig. F Change
1	.129[a]	.017	-.004	.40134	.017	.823	4	195	.512
2	.183[b]	.033	.009	.39891	.017	3.379	1	194	.068

a. Predictors: (Constant), VEV, GNDE, ETH, VAV

b. Predictors: (Constant), VEV, GNDE, ETH, VAV, SDB

c. Dependent Variable: Logistic Income

Table 11

Correlation Table for Income and Self-Determination Beliefs

		Logistic Income	GNDE	ETH	VAV	VEV	SDB
Pearson Correlation	Logistic Income	1.000	-.128	-.007	-.007	.003	.175
	GNDE	-.128	1.000	.044	.063	.087	-.498
	ETH	-.007	.044	1.000	.078	.154	.098
	VAV	-.007	.063	.078	1.000	.533	-.053
	VEV	.003	.087	.154	.533	1.000	-.034
	SDB	.175	-.498	.098	-.053	-.034	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Logistic Income	.	.036	.463	.459	.485	.007
	GNDE	.036	.	.269	.188	.111	.000
	ETH	.463	.269	.	.136	.015	.084
	VAV	.459	.188	.136	.	.000	.229
	VEV	.485	.111	.015	.000	.	.316
	SDB	.007	.000	.084	.229	.316	.
N	Logistic Income	200	200	200	200	200	200
	GNDE	200	200	200	200	200	200
	ETH	200	200	200	200	200	200
	VAV	200	200	200	200	200	200
	VEV	200	200	200	200	200	200
	SDB	200	200	200	200	200	200

For the second regression, vocational independence as measured by the Taylor Vocational Index was used as the outcome variable with each self-determination skill. Vocational activity levels, vocational environments performed, gender expression, and

ethnicity were covariates. The regression found that the covariate model for the self-determination skills significantly predicted vocational independence at p=.01. The regression found that after controlling for the covariates, there was no significant change in the variance between the at the p=.01 level. For all three covariate models at the p=.05, ethnicity was a significant predictor for vocational independence (β= .159, p<.05 for all self-determination skills) At the p=.05 level, ethnicity is a significant predictor in all three self-determination skill models for vocational independence (β= .171, p<.05 for self-determination decisions, β= .170, p<.05 for self-determination actions, and β= .173, p<.05 for self-determination beliefs).

Table 12

Model Change Summary for Vocational Independence and Self-Determination Decisions

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df 1	df 2	Sig. F Change
1	.264[a]	.070	.051	2.179	.070	3.665	4	195	.007
2	.277[b]	.077	.053	2.176	.007	1.419	1	194	.235

a. Predictors: (Constant), VEV, GNDE, ETH, VAV

b. Predictors: (Constant), VEV, GNDE, ETH, VAV, SDD

c. Dependent Variable: TVC

Table 13

Correlation Table for Vocational Independence and Self-Determination Decisions

		TVC	GNDE	ETH	VAV	VEV	SDD
Pearson Correlation	TVC	1.000	-.006	.181	.191	.179	-.065
	GNDE	-.006	1.000	.044	.063	.087	-.520
	ETH	.181	.044	1.000	.078	.154	.090
	VAV	.191	.063	.078	1.000	.533	-.111
	VEV	.179	.087	.154	.533	1.000	-.118
	SDD	-.065	-.520	.090	-.111	-.118	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	TVC	.	.466	.005	.003	.006	.181
	GNDE	.466	.	.269	.188	.111	.000
	ETH	.005	.269	.	.136	.015	.103
	VAV	.003	.188	.136	.	.000	.059
	VEV	.006	.111	.015	.000	.	.049
	SDD	.181	.000	.103	.059	.049	.
N	TVC	200	200	200	200	200	200
	GNDE	200	200	200	200	200	200
	ETH	200	200	200	200	200	200
	VAV	200	200	200	200	200	200
	VEV	200	200	200	200	200	200
	SDD	200	200	200	200	200	200

Table 14

Model Change Summary for Vocational Independence and Self-Determination Actions

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.264[a]	.070	.051	2.179	.070	3.665	4	195	.007
2	.273[b]	.075	.051	2.178	.005	1.004	1	194	.318

a. Predictors: (Constant), VEV, GNDE, ETH, VAV

b. Predictors: (Constant), VEV, GNDE, ETH, VAV, SDA

c. Dependent Variable: TVC

Table 15

Correlation Table for Vocational Independence and Self-Determination Actions

		TVC	GNDE	ETH	VAV	VEV	SDA
Pearson Correlation	TVC	1.000	-.006	.181	.191	.179	-.045
	GNDE	-.006	1.000	.044	.063	.087	-.518
	ETH	.181	.044	1.000	.078	.154	.108
	VAV	.191	.063	.078	1.000	.533	-.099
	VEV	.179	.087	.154	.533	1.000	-.064
	SDA	-.045	-.518	.108	-.099	-.064	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	TVC	.	.466	.005	.003	.006	.264
	GNDE	.466	.	.269	.188	.111	.000
	ETH	.005	.269	.	.136	.015	.064
	VAV	.003	.188	.136	.	.000	.083

	VEV	.006	.111	.015	.000	.	.185
	SDA	.264	.000	.064	.083	.185	.
N	TVC	200	200	200	200	200	200
	GNDE	200	200	200	200	200	200
	ETH	200	200	200	200	200	200
	VAV	200	200	200	200	200	200
	VEV	200	200	200	200	200	200
	SDA	200	200	200	200	200	200

Table 16

Model Change Summary for Vocational Independence and Self-Determination Beliefs

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df 1	df 2	Sig. F Change
1	.264[a]	.070	.051	2.179	.070	3.665	4	195	.007
2	.283[b]	.080	.057	2.172	.010	2.189	1	194	.141

a. Predictors: (Constant), VEV, GNDE, ETH, VAV

b. Predictors: (Constant), VEV, GNDE, ETH, VAV, SDB

c. Dependent Variable: TVC

Table 17

Correlation Table for Vocational Independence and Self-Determination Beliefs

		TVC	GNDE	ETH	VAV	VEV	SDB
Pearson Correlation	TVC	1.000	-.006	.181	.191	.179	-.068
	GNDE	-.006	1.000	.044	.063	.087	-.498
	ETH	.181	.044	1.000	.078	.154	.098
	VAV	.191	.063	.078	1.000	.533	-.053
	VEV	.179	.087	.154	.533	1.000	-.034
	SDB	-.068	-.498	.098	-.053	-.034	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	TVC	.	.466	.005	.003	.006	.171
	GNDE	.466	.	.269	.188	.111	.000
	ETH	.005	.269	.	.136	.015	.084
	VAV	.003	.188	.136	.	.000	.229
	VEV	.006	.111	.015	.000	.	.316
	SDB	.171	.000	.084	.229	.316	.
N	TVC	200	200	200	200	200	200
	GNDE	200	200	200	200	200	200
	ETH	200	200	200	200	200	200
	VAV	200	200	200	200	200	200
	VEV	200	200	200	200	200	200
	SDB	200	200	200	200	200	200

Qualitative Analysis

Sample

A total of 13 interviewees were recruited for the present study. To recruit the participants, the researcher initially asked randomly selected survey respondents that

indicated an interest in the interview for participation. Unfortunately, the lack of responses prompted the researcher to recruit interviewees through Facebook autism groups. Asking via Facebook yielded all 13 participants. Based on the themes identified in the interviews, 2/13 (15.4%) discussed how their autism was a strength, 8/13 discussed burnout (61.5%), 4/13 described discrimination (30.8%), 7/13 talked about accommodations (53.8%), 5/13 brought up advocacy (38.5%), 2/13 talked about falling through the cracks (15.4%), 6/13 discussed government services (46.2%), 3/13 shared their experiences with family supports (23.1%), 4/13 experienced significant job conflicts (30.8%), 3/13 brought up their comorbidities (23.1%), 4/13 discussed their experiences and views on their diagnoses (30.8%), and 6/13 reflected on past, present, and future education (46.2%). The following table lists the key characteristics of the autistic adults that partook in the interviews.

Table 18

Interviewee Characteristics

Participant	Participant Characteristics	Themes Identified in Interview	Key Experiences
AW	Male, late 20's, from England	Autism as Strength, Discrimination, Education, Advocacy, Comorbidities, Accommodations, positive government supports	Workplace discrimination in the form of limiting work hours, going back to school for a doctorate, Government supports for social skills
LH	Non-binary, 20's, from US	Negative and Positive Attitudes towards government	Film making class, police help for mental health crises, misperceptions from employers that autistic people are slow, denial of services due to

		services, masking, falling through the cracks, Job conflicts, comorbidities	functioning, hostile work environments not due to autism
HeG	Late 40's, female, single, private therapist	Autism as strength, education, job conflicts, discrimination, diagnosis (late), accommodations (for self)	Job conflicts and differential treatment due to not understanding office politics, needing help from a professor to get through undergraduate school, owning her private practice, looking for a relationship,
MG	From Europe, 30's, female, moved away from parents, married to husband	Negative family supports, burnout, diagnosis (late), education, advocacy, burnout, masking	Moved away from their parents, parents wanted her to go into an undesired profession, drop out due to pressure, move to a different country to pursue the desired career and live with their husband,
KO	40's female, non-profit owner, US	Job conflicts causing turn-over and burnout (boss personality), Positive government supports, accommodations, advocacy	Created own non-profit in response to not fitting into multiple companies, burn-out due to bad bosses, denial of accommodations due to company culture,
KGr	30's, female, US, college graduate	Positive and negative government supports (job coaching), Negative then positive family supports, accommodations, diagnosis, advocacy (needing help with it)	Multiple job coaches not appropriately serving her needs, warehouse job that considers her sensory needs and job coach who helped her, parents at denial at first until shift in attitudes
BC	40's female, married with kids, US, currently unemployed but had many jobs, husband employed,	Positive (Medicaid) and negative government supports, systems change, burnout	Used to own her own business but could not perform all of its functions (billing and paperwork), with higher turnover and burnout from more traditional work situations, her and children on disability, still lives in near poverty.

TD	30's, male, Canada, married to wife, currently unemployed	Advocacy (lack of sharing), comorbidities, family supports (from wife), burnout, turnover, education (drop-out), Government supports (lacking in rural Canada)	Bullying in school, having great difficulty reading, finding medication for his co-morbidities, getting married, frequent discomfort and turnover at work
KD	Late 20's, male, employed, in a relationship (Girlfriend), US	Negative government services, burnout, accommodations, job conflicts	Asking for help reducing workload but not getting it, being ignored by vocational services as a student and recent grad, burnout and returning to a new job despite not fully recovering, conflicts with colleagues and job due to demands of being a supervisor, and not wanting to do it.
ER	60's woman, retired, divorced, Israeli	Discrimination, job conflicts, education, advocacy, diagnosis, burnout	Suing a boss and winning due to gross mistreatment, hating customer service and learning computers to escape customer service, retiring from work, frequent turn-over, finding out about her autism, and feeling good about it.
LWW	30's, married (husband), female, Canada	Advocacy, education, burnout, turnover, accommodations, systems change,	Getting a graphic design degree to move out of customer service, being fired from multiple jobs, having their husband help her explain autism and social situations
MJP	30's, female, US, single	Discrimination, turnover, burnout, falling through the cracks, systems change	Disclosing autism negatively impacted her at her phlebotomist job and drastically changed her job, went to a customer service job in tech and was frequently fired, ADA not adequately protecting her,
TG	30's, female, US, single, religious, employed	Accommodations, other supports,	Worked in a Walmart previously but left due to poor environmental match, social activities surrounding her religion, and does them frequently, found a job at the YMCA and was very happy with it.

Interview and Coding Process

Interviews were conducted with a total of 13 autistic adults. The interviews were semi-structured and aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What self-determination capacity variables predict gainful, high-quality employment for autistic people?

2. How do the individual capacities of self-determination affect employment outcomes for autistic people?

3. What self-determination skills do autistic people value the most in finding and maintaining high-quality employment?

4. What makes autistic people satisfied with their employment?

Throughout the interviews, open coding was used to find common ideas and themes. In open coding, the researcher found potentially relevant comments to the research questions throughout the interview transcripts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After coding the interviews, categories were constructed from the codes that could answer at least one of the research questions. The researcher noticed that the codes could fit into at least one of 16 categories. The researcher then reviewed the codes and assigned them into corresponding categories with many codes fitting into multiple categories. Codes that belonged to multiple categories were counted in all of their applicable groupings. Categories were formed based on past research that found that these categories significantly impacted employment outcomes. The categories for the interviews were:

1. Accommodations: Interviewees shared what employers did to help them at the

workplace. Accommodations include changing workloads, providing equipment to ameliorate sensory input, and working from home.

2. Advocacy: Interviewees discussed how they spoke up for themselves when there was a problem at the workplace or determined which career path or job would be best for them.

3. Autism as Strength: Interviewees sometimes saw that their autism made them desirable employees and professionals. Interviewees focused on how their symptomology was beneficial for themselves and their workplaces.

4. Burn-out: The adults commonly shared that they were tired with their employment or work which typically caused frustration and depression. This resulted from them trying to compensate for undesirable conditions at their employment.

5. Comorbidities: The autistic adults discussed how they have other diagnoses that impact how they work.

6. Diagnosis: The subjects talked about how and when they were diagnosed with autism. Reactions to this diagnosis were also talked about.

7. Discrimination: Many of the adults talked about the negative, differential treatment they received at the workplace due to their autism.

8. Education: The interviewees would discuss how their education would prepare them or not prepare them for their employment future. Some also conveyed that

education was used as a means to improve or change career paths.

9. Falling through the cracks: Several adults shared that they felt ignored or not adequately serviced. Discussion of not getting appropriate help and how subjects felt left behind and in undesirable positions were common.

10. Family Supports: Both positive and negative impacts of parents and other family were talked about.

11. Government Supports: Positive and negative impacts of government programs and services were discussed.

12. Job Conflicts: Issues that arose in the workplace. This could be due to the adult's autism or other issues and negatively impacted job performance and relationships with co-workers and/or supervisors

13. Masking: This is how autistic adults would hide or control their symptomology. The adults would frequently tolerate stressful or undesirable workplace environments and tasks to stay employed but this would eventually lead to burn-out.

14. Other Supports: How did friends, bosses, colleagues, or private services and supports help or hinder adults.

15. Systems Change: How would autistic adults change how employment works? Issues with macrosystems and work culture are discussed.

16. Turn-over: Many autistic adults talked about how often and why they would lose

jobs.

Emergent Themes

From the 16 codes, the researcher used inductive reasoning as a means to develop common themes amongst the codes. The researcher based the codes on common observations throughout the interviews; multiple occurrences of the same or similar events happened with multiple interviewees and were dedicated into codes. After the coding was completed, the researcher generalized the codes, and several codes were compared against each other. The researcher found that many codes could be combined into common themes: the themes of diagnosis, individualized supports, self-knowledge, and self-awareness, all positive themes emerged from seeking a diagnosis, accommodations, autism as strength, and advocacy. Positive supports from family, government, and other sources were also grouped into positive themes. Negative themes of discrimination, falling through the cracks, and masking/burnout emerged from job turnover, job conflicts, and demands for systems change. Negative descriptions of support systems or not receiving supports were also compiled by the researcher into negative themes of autism and employment.

A total of seven emergent themes became apparent when coding and analysis were done for the interviews. Masking, diagnosis, receiving individualized supports, knowledge about autism, self-awareness, falling through the cracks, and discrimination all positively or negatively affected employment outcomes for the interviewees. Overall, the emergent themes are directly tied to self-determination skills that affect employment outcomes. Autistic adults who mentioned masking would often not be fully aware that

they have autism and would not consider seeking support. Adults who received an autism diagnosis, often after much internal turmoil or mistreatment as a result of masking or neurodivergent behavior, found the diagnosis a relief and built their self-awareness and knowledge of their condition which resulted in the interviewees seeking helpful and individualized supports. Even with seeking help, however, some interviewees expressed disappointment when they sorely needed help from the system and explicitly discussed how being ignored made it harder to get or maintain employment.

Table of Themes

A total of seven themes emerged from the interviews. Some themes highlight positive impacts on autistic adults' lives while others negatively affected affect the individuals.

Table 19

Theme Impact Table

Theme Impact	Theme
Positive	Diagnosis, individualized supports, knowledge of autism, self-awareness
Negative	Masking/burnout, falling through the cracks, discrimination

Masking Leads to Burnout/Turnover

Many of the autistic adults interviewed talked about their masking experiences. The adults would mask their autism symptomology as a means to fit into the job environment or to deal with the sensory demands of their work. Some would even mask during the interview process to get the job. BC on how her masking caused her frequent turnover,

> I would work and I would put everything into it and then it would be too much, I would start going into, well now I know they were meltdowns and shutdowns because of having to deal with masking in that, I would go to work and I would come home and I would be a wreck. I would end up switching jobs because the job would be too much for me, but really it was my autism and how I was dealing with things that was the problem.

MJP on her masking at the workplace,

> I passed really well, but again, the masking and the effort it takes to mask and hide my symptoms, that definitely contributes a lot to the toll and burnout. Again, I'll perform really exceptionally well at a job and then at the six-month mark, it's like my brain is like, "I'm done with this, I can't work at this level anymore.

Many of the interviewees felt that they had to ‘perform’ to fit into their workplaces. Some autistic people were able to ‘perform’ for a few months to hide their symptomology but this was not a long-term solution. As some of the autistic adults pointed out, their masking would last for only a few months then job performance and/or life quality would drastically decrease, leading to burn-out and turnover. Masking resources were used particularly fast for autistic adults in jobs that did not match their skills. ER on working

customer service, “I couldn't take the people anymore, nagging me and asking me all kinds of stupid questions. And my thinking was, "The next one who walks in, I will shoot him, because I can't take it anymore." KGr on pursuing a career in education, “I was in education during my students teaching, doing that full time and my anxiety just got so bad. And we didn't really realize that most of my anxiety was coming from sensory issues.” Masking was commonly used for customer-facing jobs, especially since many autistic people use masking to compensate for social issues and sensory stimuli that goes with working with other people. Anxiety, stress, depression, and quitting were all responses to no longer being able to wear the mask.

Diagnosis Leads to Relief

Many of the autistic adults interviewed were diagnosed later in life, frequently as adults. Some have known about their autism symptomology for much longer, sometimes knowing ever since they were children. ER on her recent autism diagnosis, “But, now I feel a lot better after being diagnosed, because I know there's a reason. I feel less guilt feelings, because I was always guilt with feelings. Because I didn't know.” BC on how the diagnosis would have helped her in her life, “If the proper diagnosis had been made back then so that I could have known this stuff, then it could have changed everything with my work experiences because I would have understood it better.” KGr on her diagnosis, “It was a relief for me to finally have someone to say it.” MG on her reaction to her diagnosis, “I remember coming out of the clinic I was diagnosed at and I was smiling. Alex said, "What, you got it?" And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "You're happy about it?" I said, "Absolutely." With many of the adults interviewed, they recognized that they stood out from their peers and colleagues. The adults then used this information to

help themselves; they either learned new coping strategies, took measurable action towards new personal and/or professional goals, or have gained a new perspective on themselves as people. As HeG describes, "Oh my God, thank you for there finally being an explanation," and that I'm not a bad person for breaking social rules and pissing people off on purpose." MG on asking for accommodations after learning about her autism, "like obviously before I knew what was actually wrong with me and the fact that it's actually a recognized disability, yeah, I never thought to ask for it really, so I never really did." Formal diagnosis builds essential self-determination skills; adults learning that they have autism and what it means helps them to think of and ask for workplace accommodations that will prevent burnout and help them to better job performance. Autism explains why the interviewees need supports and accommodations.

Importance of Individualized Supports

Many autistic adults talked about both positive and negative experiences they had with various support systems. Autistic people who had more positive experiences often talked about how they received services that were tailored to their individual needs. KO on how the helped she received to start her own non-profit,

> I have folks that I met at Autism Alliance of Michigan, Ann Arbor Center for Independent Living, there's this whole network of centers for independent living that are also in some places called Disability Network, I think. And each county in Michigan has one. So having those folks that were very supportive, even people from the University of Michigan that are working in diversity, equity, and inclusion programs.

KGr on how she got her job coach to help her with advocating for specific job accommodations, “I had my job coach, so I would tell her, and then she would, I guess, help me with it or helped me approach a supervisor about it.” KD on the therapy he received,

> Therapy and having my shrink that I've known since I was six or seventh grade has really helped me become the person I am, and have the coping skills in that, and being able to understand those coping skills, and just use them has helped me explore myself more internally.

The autistic people who highlighted positive aspects of the support they received noted the individualized nature of the supports. The supports helped the autistic adults achieve their own defined goals, as was the case with KO in setting up her own non-profit. Beneficial supports also addressed self-defined areas of concern for autistic people; KGr found that her best job coach helped advocate for specific work tasks to mitigate sensory overload and gave extra direction whenever she would need to learn a new task. KD found that working on much-needed coping skills helped him overcome his struggles with stress.

Autistic adults that had more negative experiences with various support systems felt that they were not considered as individual people and were either given insufficient support or denied support because they were considered too ‘high functioning’. In the case of LH trying to qualify for services, “the Resource Center, that took me a long time to get in, because I am really high functioning, and I tend to fall in between the cracks a lot.” KD on how government services ignored him in high school,

> And I called for them, they never got back to me. I don't want to say I got put by the wayside, but because I was working for a town at the time, doing landscaping. I told them, honest, that I was doing side work too, so I think they saw me as more of a ... not eligible, but more of a ... I can't think of the right word. Self-going ... can't think of it. Self-reliant person that I got put to the wayside and not need this help.

KGr on a job coach finding her work as a dog poop scooper despite her bachelor's degree,

> One of the issues with, at least one of the other job coaches I had before, was they were trying to get me jobs that are kind of below my level. Jobs that I would be way over qualified for.

For many autistic adults in general, there are preconceived notions of what the strengths and weaknesses of an autistic person should look like. Many of the interviewees in the study did not meet the schema to qualify for helpful services. LH was able to hold conversations and use body language, making the service provider question her many needs. The service provider rejected LH to the point where they considered 'faking' their autism as a means to get services. KD corroborates this experience as government services in his region would not give him support because of his academic performance. For many autistic adults who face these frequent yet unsubstantiated rejections, self-determination skills are diminished.

Knowledge of Autism Helps Employment Outcomes

Knowledge about autism was a particularly powerful tool for autistic adults to find and keep their jobs. KO on using autism as a means to screen employers, "I think

you have to talk to the people you're going to interview with ahead of time and be like, "I have autism and here's what that means, and here's what would be helpful for me in the interview if you're willing to accommodate." And really, if they're not, that should be a red flag I think." HeG commented, "I always realized I always did better where there was a fair degree of autonomy in the job, which now looking back, accommodated the autism." Both of these autistic adults own and operate their places of work. They can use their knowledge to help themselves, develop their schedules, and have been in business for years. With their knowledge, they knew that running their places of work were the best places to ensure vocational success because only they know how they work. MG on trying different professions despite not fully knowing what she wanted to do as a career

> With the teaching, first of all, I think it's important to say that I didn't really want to be a teacher or a lawyer. That was all part of my parents wanting that for me and me not knowing what the hell I want in my life, so I think that was the first bit. And with the teaching, I remember I was in a practical, and I was supposed to teach a class, and I was so nervous. I became physically sick, and I was so nervous I couldn't talk anymore.

KGr on not knowing the full scope of teaching and pursuing it, "I was in education during my students teaching, doing that full time and my anxiety just got so bad. And we didn't really realize that most of my anxiety was coming from sensory issues" Both MG and KGr had not spent much time in their childhood or adulthood in developing self-determination skills; MG's parents frequently pushed her into undesirable career directions and KGr's parents took considerable time in acknowledging her autism diagnosis. Both MG and KGr perceived their parents did not give much support in

helping their children with learning about autism or how to find accommodations, careers, and supports to help with the autism and they felt left behind in their careers; MG moved to a foreign country to pursue her education and KGr has an unstable work history going from job to job.

Individual Self-Awareness Leads to Better Employment Outcomes

A common theme in many of the interviews was how self-awareness helped autistic adults or how a lack of self-awareness would hurt their employment outcomes. HeG on sharing autism with colleagues and what it means to her,

> It would be nice if you, basically it's branding yourself really, in a way. It's like, "Hey, I have autism so I see things in a way different from other people." Then when you do, they go, "Right, because she has autism," not because she's a weirdo.

MG acknowledged her autism despite unsupportive parents, “I finally admitted to myself there was something wrong, so I did see a therapist.” ER on how her diagnosis improved her self-awareness and emotional state

> First of all, if you suspect it, go and get diagnosed. It helped me trust my feelings, I'm so much better now. I can evaluate myself better. I can say, "Okay, I behaved like that because of that." And not starting blaming myself for all those strange behaviors. Or, if I don't understand something, if people make a joke and I don't understand it, I used to hide it. I was laughing just out of being polite, but now I don't care. I ask, "What did you mean?"

Self-awareness of autism helped many adults seek out supports, services, and more desirable jobs and people. Self-awareness made many autistic adults happier as it

provided a way to explain various difficulties in their lives without it being overly negative. Instead of personally blaming themselves and not understanding their struggles, autistic adults ameliorate their self-blame and negative feelings about themselves. Instead of wallowing, the self-aware autistic adult seeks out therapy like MG and improves their self-acceptance much like HeG and ER.

Adults lacking self-awareness face more difficulties than those who have learned about their autism and what it means to them personally. TD on his not acknowledging his autism,

> I wasn't on medication until about a year ago and couldn't accept what I had all my life. I never really actually realized what was wrong with me. I kind of ignored it, denied my health conditions and my problems.

LWW on her lack of understanding of her autism and schooling,

> I don't even know how to figure it out. I was doing school for graphic design and my school asked me, "What accommodations would you need, if any?" I was like, "How the hell would I know? I don't know.

TD has gone through many jobs over his adult life and has not yet found a career where he is satisfied. LWW similarly has had many jobs throughout her adulthood and has only recently begun looking for work in a career field that would accommodate her needs. Interestingly, both of these autistic adults have spouses that help build their self-awareness. Both TD's wife and LWW's husband often inform them how their autism works and how their autism affects their thinking and responses to various social situations. Spousal help in explaining autism has helped both of these adults understand their autism better and learn how to avoid past pitfalls.

Falling Through the Cracks Hurts Self-Determination and Employment

A feeling of falling through the cracks was common for many autistic adults. LH on not qualifying for needed services, “But if I act like myself, "Too high functioning. You don't qualify. You don't need it. You don’t qualify, high functioning." I'm like, crap!” KD on not qualifying for employment services, “I was able to get an appointment, I was able to be seen and heard, but once they were able to gauge where I was ... That's my perspective, how I feel, but it might be different. But how they could gauge where I fell on, I don't want to say their spectrum, but on where I was, that I got ... I don't want to say dropped, but fallen between the cracks, because I wasn't that much of a priority.” HeG on how a lack of formal diagnosis affects autistic adults, “we spend a lot of years being undiagnosed, which means we've spent a lot of years with a lot of social traumas and hurt. By the time we get to this age we're trigger-reactive and feel abused.” LWW on the dearth of job-seeking supports, “So a lot of the ones that are close to what I would be looking for only service people in tech world, so unless you're a computer engineer or software engineer, like you don't use that before you, so it'd be great if there is a company that would help people find a job at a company that hires autistic people and hires them properly, not just for tech roles.” Many autistic adults fall between the cracks because they are seen as ‘too high functioning’. The myopic view of being too high functioning causes agencies to deny much-needed services to autistic adults, leaving them unemployed. The disappointment of not getting necessary services hurts autistic job seekers, as LH puts it, “It felt like I wasn't meant to have help, and I was just going to have to silently struggle for the rest of my life, because I looked like I was fine. That's not cool.” The feeling of helplessness stifles employment outcomes for autistic adults and

does not encourage the use of self-determination skills. The adults who were denied services are less likely to go back to those services providers, even if they still need help. The logic here is why bother seeking services if they will just deny me. For autistic individuals that faced significant hurdles getting a formal diagnosis, the lack of understanding of their feelings and from society at large stifles self-determination development and employment. The years of social trauma and stigmatization wear down many autistic people; they feel that others will not understand them and they do not have a way to explain their struggles. Without social supports, many autistic people have difficulty getting connections to get higher-quality jobs. Without ways to explain their struggles, autistic adults cannot effectively advocate for themselves because they have difficulty articulating what they need in the workplace and their lives. For job development programs, there has been a recent push to hire autistic people for jobs but that push largely comes from tech companies as LWW stated. While the recent programs seeking autistic employees are welcome, it only helps a small subsection of autistic individuals. Much like the neurotypical population, autistic people also have a wide variety of skills, talents, and interests. While some autistic individuals are drawn to computers and technology, many other autistic people have different career interests and would need similar programs but for all different careers. Again, the lack of job-seeking supports stifles self-determination development; why bother seeking help finding jobs when the only places offering help are in a field you have no interest?

Discrimination

Discriminatory treatment was a common occurrence for the autistic adults I interviewed. AW from England, “I've had discrimination for my autism and my bipolar.

People would talk about me; they'd laugh about me. They would bring stuff up and you'd just sort of, you'd know they was talking about you, but not directly. Management wasn't very understanding. I was a support worker, so they wasn't letting me go to my support sessions." TD on autism in Canada, "It seems in Canada, if you know... It's so stigmatized and it shouldn't be that way, it should be like, I feel like there's more... I lived in the States for a while. I feel like there's more advocacy for people who have conditions. And then here, it just seems like very stigmatized and secluded." MJP on asking for necessary accommodations, "I've stopped actually asking for disability accommodations because, I've been fired outright for asking them." Discrimination takes many forms for autistic adults. Both workplace and social mistreatment are common occurrences. Even though people I interviewed come from countries with legal protections, colleagues and managers often make working untenable for many autistic adults. KO on her workplace harassment and discriminatory treatment, "it's bullying. It is. And abuse. That's what it is. So yeah, that kind of thing can be very traumatizing. I came out of that experience myself saying like, "I'm never going to work for anybody ever again. I'd rather live in a cardboard box." Discriminatory treatment is bad for many autistic adults to the point that it has a significant, negative impact on employment outcomes. Why bother looking for work if it just yields frustration?

Integrated Analysis

Process for Analysis

The regression analysis and interviews were used together to gather as much rich data as possible. The regression analysis used an already established measurement of self-determination to find meaningful relationships between self-determination, income,

and vocational independence. Despite self-determination being the key predictor variable for the present study, literature had established many potential covariates that could affect employment outcomes for autistic adults such as anxiety, depression, gender expression, ethnicity, and social flexibility. The additional variables were added as covariates to the quantitative analysis. The regression analysis helped answer some of the research questions and provided results that either converged or diverged with the interviews. The interviews yielded some different answers to the research questions and addressed some questions that were not sufficiently answered by the quantitative research alone. The joint display table shows the areas of convergence, divergence, and mixed areas of agreement and will be discussed in the next section. To make the joint display table, the researcher found significant relationships in the regression analysis and then compared and contrasted the significant relationships with quotes from interviews that either supported or refute the significant relationship. The researcher also included not significant relationships if interviewees shared that they felt the relationship was significant. With the joint display table, the researcher found areas of convergence, divergence, and silence. If the research found that both the regression analysis and interviews agreed on the significance of a relationship, convergence was found. An area of divergence was included if the researcher found explicit disagreement expressed in both the regression analysis and interviews. Areas of silence were included by the researcher if at least one methodology did not address a relationship that the other research methodology addressed.

Table 20

Joint Display Table

Quantitative relationships between two variables	Significance	Interview quotes convergent with relationship	Interview quotes divergent with relationship
Vocational Independence & Self-Determination	Not significant (β= -.126, *p*<.05)	"telling people you're disabled and need additional help is putting a target on your back." (MJP)	"So I am able to structure my own day. And I actually do a spreadsheet for the week every Sunday and I map out what the week is going to look like to remind myself that it's not probably going to go exactly like this and that's okay. But I have... I can set my own limits. I can say, "Okay, this looks like a really busy week. Maybe I only want to have two meetings a day," or something. And other weeks, I might set the limit at three. I can have a little bit more control over the time. Like if I know I'm going to need an hour to recover from this one meeting or maybe one's going to be much more stressful and I think I'm going to need two hours to decompress, I can get to make those decisions for myself in a way where I'm not going to end up just completely melting down or burning out or both." (KO)

Vocational Independence & Depression	Depression (β= .271, p<.01) Significant	"Having to give up my job, something that had been a special interest that I really liked. It got to a point of being so detrimental to me that I just gave up everything. I ended up spending almost 5 years practically bedridden. It was bad. I ended up developing panic disorder, agoraphobia, all because it got to be too much for me to have to deal with the workforce." (BC) "I was depressed. I was very, very depressed. I went through therapy after therapy, after therapy, and I was depressed. And it was not only work, it was also my divorce." (ER)	
Vocational Independence & Anxiety	Anxiety (β= -.131, p>.05) not significant		"I've been in kitchens on and off for 10 years, and I've had problems holding a job more than six months due to anxiety and stress as like feeling uncomfortable around other people and meeting new people and orders coming in and getting overwhelmed by it." (TD) "So I switched to teaching, which I equally hated, and then I had just kind of a complete breakdown, because I had such severe performance anxiety, so it was to the point where I got physically sick every time I had to go to the university. (MG)

Vocational Independence & Vocational Activities	Vocational Activities (β= .192, p<.05) significant	"Autism Alliance of Michigan, Ann Arbor Center for Independent Living, there's this whole network of centers for independent living that are also in some places called Disability Network, I think. And each county in Michigan has one. So having those folks that were very supportive, even people from the University of Michigan that are working in diversity, equity, and inclusion programs… Yep. So there is an element of some networking in a really genuine way. Really, really helpful. I couldn't have done it on my own. I had to have those folks there for support." (KO) "So in-work support, they'd come into my workplace when I have meetings, they'd explain things in a way that I could understand it. They'd go through the positives and the negatives, what happened. They'd work with my manager to sort of get an understanding of how I could do my job better." (AW)	"One of the issues with, at least one of the other job coaches I had before, was they were trying to get me jobs that are kind of below my level. Jobs that I would be way over qualified for." (KGr) "Yeah, correct. No, let me put it this way. I was able to get an appointment, I was able to be seen and heard, but once they were able to gauge where I was ... That's my perspective, how I feel, but it might be different. But how they could gauge where I fell on, I don't want to say their spectrum, but on where I was, that I got ... I don't want to say dropped, but fallen between the cracks, because I wasn't that much of a priority." (KD)
Income & Anxiety	Anxiety (β= -.179, p<.05) Significant	"I would work and I would put everything into it and then it would be too much, I would start going into, well now I know they were meltdowns and shutdowns because of having to deal with masking in that, I would go to work and I	

		would come home and I would be a wreck. I would end up switching jobs because the job would be too much for me, but really it was my autism and how I was dealing with things that was the problem." (BC) "I've had problems holding a job more than six months due to anxiety and stress as like feeling uncomfortable around other people and meeting new people and orders coming in and getting overwhelmed by it. And I've tried landscaping in the past and that didn't work over very well for me. I tried construction and had very paranoia problems from being around close people, doing that stuff." (TD)	
Income & Depression	Depression (β= .145, p>.05) not significant		"I was depressed. I was very, very depressed. I went through therapy after therapy, after therapy, and I was depressed. And it was not only work, it was also my divorce. And, having to raise two children on my own. With my work history, it was not going very well for me. And, I was depressed all the time and nobody knew what, why." (ER)
Income & Social Flexibility	Social Flexibility (β= .161, p<.05). significant	"Yeah, and that's how I feel a lot on that sort of thing, because it's like I'm not	"Well I did not, as a personal trainer I did really well by being excellent at what I did and

		trying to personally attack, but then when they come back at you, it's like ... I'm just, "You know what? Whatever." That why I, not lock up, left people, quit jobs, because it's like I can't deal with that kind of anxiety and that, if you can't take as that and have to headbutt it. Because if I'm going to be going up onto that kind of pedestal to put my views out, and I'm having to be not authoritative, but authoritative and kind of matched, I'm just going to go all out and go for it, and then can say, "You know what? Screw it. I'm done." (KD)	by being systematic and strategic about my marketing, but not by being likable and integrating myself into networks of likability." (HeG)
Income & Self-Determination	Self-Determination ($\beta = .094$, $p > .05$) not significant		"So I just happened to see the post and I said, "Oh, well, apply for it again. And I didn't really think they would call me. And then they did. And I didn't have a job coach at the time. So, I said, "Well, might as well go and try." And then I got an email, I think the next day, they told me I had the job." (KGr) "But honestly, I don't think I probably would've gotten to that point at my work without the help of my husband being able to advocate for me because I just have a hard time doing that." (LWW)

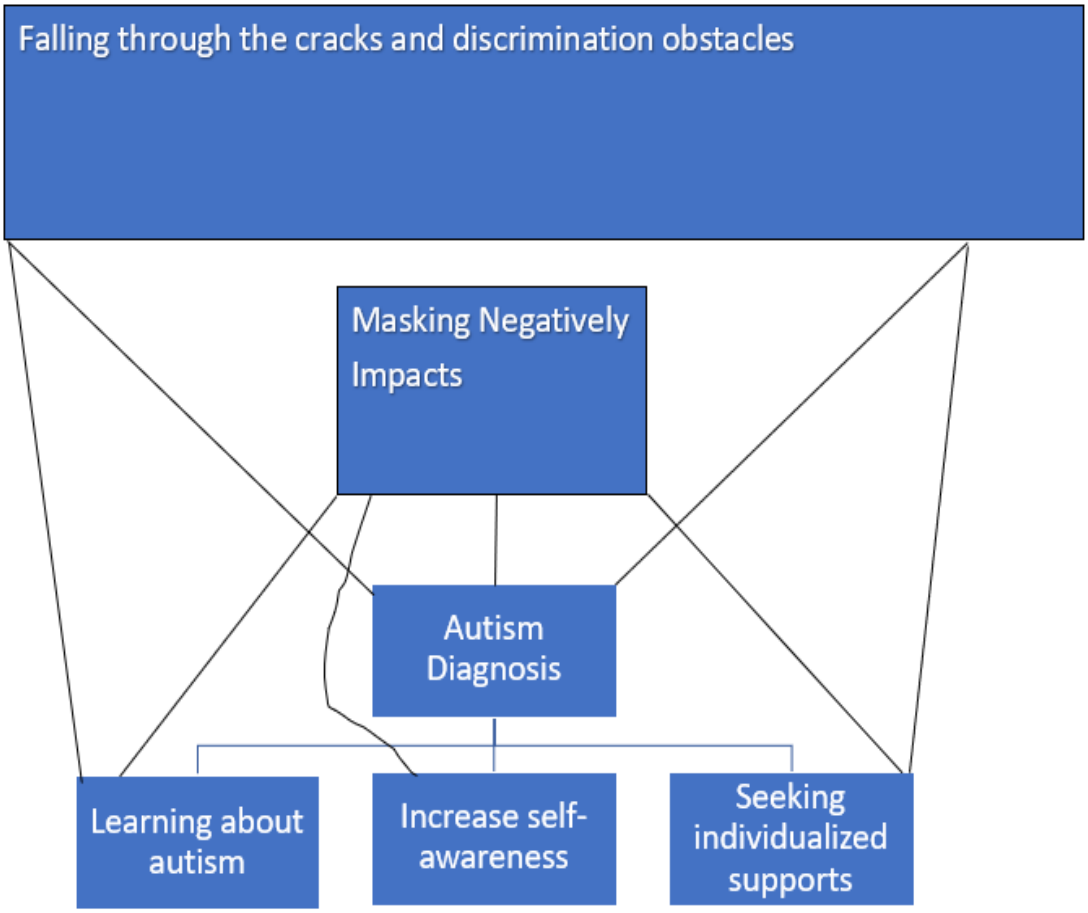
Income & Vocational Activities	Vocational Activities (β= -.002, *p*>.05) not significant	"For a while, I had a job coach and stuff that was helping me with jobs and stuff, but then unfortunately, our vocational rehabilitation department up here and stuff in my state lost funding for that or whatever. I ended up losing my job and stuff, which was pretty unfortunate because I liked him and I felt like he was a big help and stuff, but at the same time, I learned a lot from him and stuff so that way I could take those skills and keep going with them..." (TG) "I guess she didn't really teach me how to approach them, but she more would ask them if I had questions and... I don't know, after she was gone, they just kind of know all that. She let them know that I... If there's a new task that I need to learn, that they give a lot of detail about it. Because I don't like when someone says, "Go do something..." I need a lot of details. I need them to tell me step by step, so that I know that I'm doing it right." (KGr)

Areas of silence not found explicitly in the quantitative results will also be addressed in the following section. Based on the joint display table and results, the

following flowchart best describes what themes were found by the researcher and how they connect to each other.

Figure 10

Themes Flowchart



Areas of Convergence

Areas of agreement were found by the researcher between both the regression analysis and interviews. The researcher included the relationship as an area of convergence if both the regression analysis and interviews had explicit mention of the relationship. The regression analysis and interviews yielded some similar results, mainly how depression and anxiety played roles in employment outcomes for autistic

individuals. Even though anxiety and depression were covariates in the quantitative analysis, the subjects that were interviewed emphasized how anxiety and depression played significant roles in their employment. Anxiety and depression had significant relationships with measures of employment outcomes; anxiety had a significant relationship with income and depression had a significant relationship with vocational independence. The autistic adults corroborated the relationships found in the regression analysis. According to BC,

> I would work and I would put everything into it and then it would be too much, I would start going into, well now I know they were meltdowns and shutdowns because of having to deal with masking in that, I would go to work and I would come home and I would be a wreck. I would end up switching jobs because the job would be too much for me, but really it was my autism and how I was dealing with things that was the problem.

And ER stated, “I was depressed. I was very, very depressed. I went through therapy after therapy, after therapy, and I was depressed. And it was not only work, it was also my divorce.”

Many of the autistic adults talked about how their anxiety and depression affected their employment. The adults would overly mask which in turn caused burnout or they would be in an unaccommodating workplace that created anxiety and depression.

Areas of Divergence Between Quantitative and Qualitative Results

The researcher found areas of divergence where there is an explicit disagreement between the results from the regression analysis and interviews. Only relationships described in both the regression analysis and interviews were counted as an area of divergence. An area of divergence in the current study was self-determination. In the regression analysis, self-determination was not a significant predictor for either income or vocational independence. However, when the autistic adults were interviewed regarding self-determination, many shared that it had a positive effect on their employment. When autistic adults were interviewed, many of the adults talked about how self-determination positively affected their employment. HeG on how being her own boss helped her, "I always realized I always did better where there was a fair degree of autonomy in the job, which now looking back, accommodated the autism." LWW on how having support in advocacy has improved her employment, "But honestly, I don't think I probably would've gotten to that point at my work without the help of my husband being able to advocate for me because I just have a hard time doing that." Self-determination skills such as prioritizing activities, seeking accommodations, and learning about one's self all helped autistic adults keep and succeed in their jobs.

Mixed Results

The research discovered that there was both agreement and disagreement on the significance of a relationship described in the regression analysis and interviews. A relationship may have been significant or non-significant in the regression analysis but interviewees gave information that both agreed and disagreed with the importance of the relationship. Mixed results include any significant or non-significant relationship noted in the regression analysis that has quotes that both agree and disagree with the quantitative

result. The mixed results from the current study included the importance of vocational activities. Vocational activities only had a significant relationship with vocational independence but not with income in the regression analysis. However, several of the adults that were interviewed highlighted how important finding and working with specific supports were vital to their gainful employment. KO discussed how her work with a state organization helped her start her own business,

> Autism Alliance of Michigan, Ann Arbor Center for Independent Living, there's this whole network of centers for independent living that are also in some places called Disability Network, I think. And each county in Michigan has one. So having those folks that were very supportive, even people from the University of Michigan that are working in diversity, equity, and inclusion programs…Yep. So there is an element of some networking in a really genuine way. Really, really helpful. I couldn't have done it on my own. I had to have those folks there for support.

AW described how his job support person helped with his employment,

> So in-work support, they'd come into my workplace when I have meetings, they'd explain things in a way that I could understand it. They'd go through the positives and the negatives, what happened. They'd work with my manager to sort of get an understanding of how I could do my job better.

Vocational activities such as job coaching and seeking out other government supports were generally seen as helpful by some autistic adults. Genuinely helpful government supports helped one adult propose and start her own business and job coaching helped another adult understand his tasks at work more clearly.

However, other autistic adults expressed disappointment in their supports or the process of seeking programs. KGr on the lack of individualization from job coaching, “One of the issues with, at least one of the other job coaches I had before, was they were trying to get me jobs that are kind of below my level. Jobs that I would be way over qualified for.” KD on his seeking support for post-secondary employment,

> Yeah, correct. No, let me put it this way. I was able to get an appointment, I was able to be seen and heard, but once they were able to gauge where I was ... That's my perspective, how I feel, but it might be different. But how they could gauge where I fell on, I don't want to say their spectrum, but on where I was, that I got ... I don't want to say dropped, but fallen between the cracks, because I wasn't that much of a priority.

Despite how some autistic adults felt positively about their supports, others felt ignored or disregarded. The autistic people who felt ignored despite their best efforts to seek out help with employment often questioned how important the services would be to them. LH on her frequent rejections from an employment help center for autistic adults,

> Yeah, and that was really damaging, because I had applied for it multiple, multiple times, and I was like, I really hope that, I really want to have this. I really want to get these services. I really think this could really help me, and then, to keep getting denied. Like you just, I got really discouraged. I was feeling, this sucks.

Many autistic adults could not receive services despite their many attempts at accessing them. Some of the adults mentioned that many service providers doubted their need for assistance, often citing that the potential clients were too ‘high functioning’ to benefit.

The perceived benefit from potential services from rejected clients was there until rejection but the frequent denials or difficulty of access negatively impacted employment outcomes. The rejection for services was an additional barrier to employment that the autistic adults did not anticipate but impacted their employment and dissuaded them from reaching out for future support.

Areas of Silence

The researcher included an area of silence if either the regression analysis or interviews did not include a significant relationship that the other method found significance. A significant finding described in the regression analysis that was not at all mentioned in the interview or a finding found in the interview but not the regression analysis was included as an area of silence. The quantitative analysis does not sufficiently answer all the research questions in the present study. The interviews provide rich data to better answer some of the research questions. Both questions on what makes employment satisfying and what self-determination skills autistic individuals found valuable were answered by the interviews but could not be addressed by the regression analysis. Employment satisfaction, the importance of obtaining an autism diagnosis, accommodations, individual input into the employment process, educational attainment to improve job outcomes, individual capacities of self-determination, and what self-determination skills were most valued by autistic adults were all areas of silence. All of the areas of silence were explicitly addressed by the interviewees but were not detected by the regression analysis.

Employment Satisfaction

Despite the detailed results provided by the regression analysis, the interviews addressed many issues that the quantitative analysis was simply unable to catch and elaborate. Employment satisfaction was not specifically addressed by either quantitative measure of employment outcomes (income and vocational independence). Interviews were required to highlight more personal traits of successful employment. Income and vocational independence, while important, did not address happiness and fulfillment from employment. The interviews also provided additional information as to why autistic adults found joy in their employment that allowed them to use and practice their self-determination skills. As KO noted,

> So I am able to structure my own day. And I actually do a spreadsheet for the week every Sunday and I map out what the week is going to look like to remind myself that it's not probably going to go exactly like this and that's okay. But I have... I can set my own limits. I can say, "Okay, this looks like a really busy week. Maybe I only want to have two meetings a day," or something. And other weeks, I might set the limit at three. I can have a little bit more control over the time. Like if I know I'm going to need an hour to recover from this one meeting or maybe one's going to be much more stressful and I think I'm going to need two hours to decompress, I can get to make those decisions for myself in a way where I'm not going to end up just completely melting down or burning out or both.

The regression analysis did not address how self-determination could be linked to employment satisfaction. The idea of autonomy for autistic adults was attractive; they found that determining their schedules, workloads, and environments were key factors in

making their employment more enjoyable. The self-determination surveys used for the regression analysis did not address directly the use of planning or decision making in the context of work and only addressed it as a general skill.

The quantitative surveys also did not link employment satisfaction with anxiety and depression; the GAD-7 and PHQ-9 were used only to measure general clinical levels of anxiety and depression felt by subjects. Through the interviews, autistic individuals spoke about how anxiety and depression played key roles in affecting employment satisfaction. According to TD,

> I've had problems holding a job for more than six months due to anxiety and stress as like feeling uncomfortable around other people and meeting new people and orders coming in and getting overwhelmed by it. And I've tried landscaping in the past and that didn't work over very well for me. I tried construction and had very paranoia problems from being around close people, doing that stuff.

MG's recollection of her career exploration experience,

> So I switched to teaching, which I equally hated, and then I had just kind of a complete breakdown, because I had such severe performance anxiety, so it was to the point where I got physically sick every time I had to go to the university.

Anxiety and depression are frequently related to masking and burnout which in turn resulted in employment dissatisfaction. Autistic adults often brought up how they felt dissatisfied with their past employment experiences resulting from masking and the burnout that followed; needing to work in stressful environments with sensory overload and/or with many people exacerbated employment dissatisfaction.

Diagnosis

The quantitative research design attempted to differentiate self-determination skills into three separate categories: decision making, actions, and beliefs. However, the initial regression analysis found that the three categories were too closely related to each other and the three categories were pared down to only one category. Despite the paring down of self-determination skills in the regression analysis, the interviews found many significant self-determination skills that cannot be ignored in improving employment outcomes for autistic adults. Many of the interviewees spoke about seeking and accepting their diagnosis; according to BC,

> I didn't like the person I was, I didn't like almost anything about me for the first 35 years. Once I was diagnosed in my early 40's, then everything started to make sense and I had lots of oh wow, if I had known this then. Thinking about different jobs I had and things that happened, interactions where things would go south in that job. In reality, it was because of that conflict where you feel like you're not being read right or you're not reading them right.

According to HeG,

> Or I just haven't found my right career, then I'll fit, and I kept trying and trying and trying to fit in and that's one of the things the diagnosis gave me. I could finally go, "Okay, the good news is you don't fit in. The bad news is, you never will." The good news is not that it's got a name, maybe people will be a little kinder when you seem to up them with your metaphorical elbow if they know that you have autism.

Most of the interviewees were diagnosed with autism as adults and actively sought out a formal diagnosis because of their social and employment difficulties. The adults acknowledged their significant issues at work and with others and made it a goal to find out what was happening. When they found out about their autism, many felt relief were better able to speak up at work about their difficulties and necessary accommodations. The self-determination survey did not address this issue specifically because it was designed for a more general population in mind but the interviewees highlighted the importance of seeking a diagnosis to both employment and life in general.

Diagnosis was a common variable that helped autistic adults explain what they needed at work and in their lives. Many of the interviewees expressed relief and peace when they received their formal autism diagnosis. According to ER,

> It helped me trust my feelings. I'm so much better now. I can evaluate myself better. I can say, 'Okay I behaved like that because of that and not starting blaming myself for all those strange behaviors." And "getting diagnosed was really a very, very good thing. It helped me a lot. It's helped me with my depressions. It's helped me with my self-esteem because when I know there's a reason for this, I feel better with myself."

According to KGr, "It was a relief for me to have someone finally say it." According to BC, "If the proper diagnosis had been made back then so that I could have known this stuff, then it could have changed everything with my work experiences because I would have understood it better." And "Once I realized I was autistic then it was like ok, those are why those things are off. When you kind of can take a step back and see why, then it's not as personal and you can manage it better." Many of the autistic

adults that I interviewed were not formally diagnosed as autistic until much later in life. Without the formal diagnosis, many of the adults would blame themselves for their workplace difficulties and had no idea why they continued to struggle. According to HeG, adults that have spent most of their lives undiagnosed have left them, "…with a lot of social trauma and hurt." A diagnosis provided many of the adults interviewed a way to explain their difficulties succinctly. With a diagnosis, autistic adults gain self-knowledge as to why they have difficulties with certain social skills and workplace issues. The autism diagnosis makes advocacy easier as it not only provides for a concrete and defined explanation for behaviors and challenges; it also is an actionable step for many autistic adults to find help and deal with past traumas both in and out of the workplace.

An autism diagnosis makes it easier to not only explain difficulties but some autistic adults see it as motivating because their autism makes them better at their jobs. HeG says that being autistic and a therapist makes her, "[not make] assumptions about where people are coming from because I know I don't know, I just ask." HeG also feels that being autistic can actually gift people with a, "sixth sense empathy because we're like super-receivers of body language and other things and putting thing together." HeG is a clinical therapist that runs her practice and was the interviewee that talked most about her autism as a positive. KO, who runs her own non-profit, says that autistic employees, "…kind of really shake up the status quo and that can really ruffle feathers, but it's ultimately a really good thing." TG confirms this differential thinking by saying that autism can be referred to as, "An ability…we just process things differently." KO then adds, "If you give that person a couple of years to get used to your company, they'll be such a good employee for you. We don't like change, most of us. A lot of us are like if

we can get really comfortable in a job, we'll stay there for life if you let us." Both HeG and KO are self-employed and have more successful employment outcomes than most other autistic adults and my other interviewees. Seeing autism as a strength is a building block of advocacy, people learn and appreciate their strengths and find ways to work with their strengths while knowing where they still need help. Knowing strengths is a key self-determination tool, one that provides the foundation to make informed career choices and find better work environments.

Honesty about autism was also cited as a desirable course of action from many autistic adults. TG, "Most of my job apps I filled out or whatever and stuff, they would always ask if I had a disability and stuff. Of course, I'm always going to be honest on those. I'm not going to lie." AW, "With my colleagues, I was very open about it. I've always been open about my disabilities anyway, so I told them I had this. And most of the time it was okay. They just see me for me. I think I was a bit lazy at times, but they saw me for me." ER, "I was born like that. I am what I am and that's it. And I don't have to blame myself for being peculiar or strange, behaving other than... So I think it's just like being gay or something. You have to come out with it. You have to come out with to feel better with yourself. That's what I think is necessary." The autistic adults talked about disclosure both in the workplace and in their general lives. Knowing about their autism and how to talk about it has helped many of the autistic adults I interviewed. In the workplace, many of the autistic adults believed that being open about their autism yielded better treatment from both supervisors and colleagues and some workplaces were more willing to offer accommodations. Outside the workplace, many autistic adults felt that their diagnosis provided valid explanations for their behaviors and thoughts. Before

diagnosis, many of the adults felt lost and frustrated as to why they could not keep work or relationships. The diagnosis and acknowledging the diagnosis helped many to rationalize what they had been going through and cue in friends, family, and colleagues that their autism makes them behave in certain, unorthodox ways.

Accommodations

The regression analysis does not address accommodations and seeking out accommodations for the workplace. Many autistic adults discussed how crucial it was that they asked for and received accommodations at their work; MG on her ability to work from home,

> I mean, I think the working from home thing is a massive point that makes things easier. Mainly because, first of all, familiar environment, no loud noises all the time, unexpected noises with other people, not a lot of sensory stimuli that you're not used to, and also the factor that I'm there with my pets and my pets are a huge calming factor for me.

MJP on getting breaks to help her and her other employees,

> They were accommodating of breaks, if they sensed, and it wasn't just me. If they sensed any employee was being overwhelmed, they were pretty good about saying, "Okay, like, just tell someone else that you need to tap out for 10 minutes or so." And they'll handle. They're will cover you while you're gone and then you can come back in.

Autistic employees value many different accommodations and actively sought them out and used them. A common issue that motivated many of the interviewees to seek accommodations was their knowledge of their autism and sensory issues. Many of the

interviewed adults acknowledged that they had issues with noise and social settings at the workplace that made accommodations and alternative work environments important. Again, the quantitative survey used in the regression analysis did not reach the level of specificity that the interviewees did. More specific behaviors like taking necessary accommodations, asking for help from support persons in the office, and asking for alternative work environments should be discussed when talking about self-determination skills.

Seeking out and accepting help allowed autistic adults to adjust to their work or other environments. MJP on finding a therapist, “If you're able to afford it or swing it, I would definitely say, go find a therapist. And not just as, oh, you're emotionally erratic, but just, they're really great at being able to help you figure out what your limitations are.” AW on social training, “So I've had social training. That would be like how do you handle yourself within a workplace? How would you say this to someone? How would you say that to someone? That sort of thing.” HeG on her academic supports, “Previously I had been considered an exceptional student, and so I end up at university without skills. Somehow this South African professor, he recognized from having been in South Africa during the apartheid regime that a person can have the intelligence but not the skills, and so he actually tutored me on how to write exams and stuff like that. He personally took the time. The other thing he did was he went and got the dean to allow me to do an ad hominem degree. It was basically I could select courses that interested me.” The autistic adults here recognized that they had significant issues in the workplace or in other environments that had caused them significant stress. MJP had struggled to find help that was appropriate for her and not a one size fits all solution, AW sought out the program

that taught him social skills, and HeG acknowledged her academic struggles in college to accept the help her professor gave her. Knowing about and actively seeking out resources is a self-determination skill that helps autistic people; knowing about their strengths and weaknesses and being honest about them aids autistic people in finding the correct resources. MJP, AW, and HeG all knew their areas of concern and sought and accepted help specific to their needs. MJP went through several professionals and therapists before finding one that addressed her issues, AW knew he had issues with social skills and sought government programming to build his social skills, and HeG knew she was academically behind and accepted the help of her professor to guide her through college. As HeG puts it, “He supported me. If he hadn't had done that I wouldn't be where I am now because I would have believed that I couldn't do it, that I was a failure.” With the correct help and actively seeking that help, many autistic adults can learn vital skills or get treatment to help them navigate their lives and workplaces.

Accommodations at the workplace are frequently helpful in easing the stress at the workplace while allowing for autistic employees to better perform their jobs. In the workplace, there are several unique boundaries that negatively impact autistic adults. Some of these issues, according to my interviewees included, “working with people” (KGr), being, “expected to watch [someone] do something once and expected to mimic it perfectly.” (LH), having, “inflexible employers that wanted things done a very specific way.” (ER), encountering, “office politics”, and being placed into, “customer service jobs that I do not enjoy, especially when I have to deal with stupid customers.” Autistic adults were frequently dissatisfied with their jobs because their employers were unaccommodating. One case was so bad that one of the interviewees felt that they had to

sue the supervisor to rectify his behavior. Discrimination was a common occurrence at the job that impacted work satisfaction. One autistic adult adds, "[colleagues] would talk about me, they'd laugh at me…there was a lot of you can't do this, you can't do that." (AW). Another takes it a step further and was skeptical of laws to protect autistic employees saying that, "[employers] just need to offer accommodations that aren't specifically tailored to you… [the employers] do these superficial meetings just to show legally that they're doing the bare minimum that the ADA requires." (MJP). Other autistic adults, even when given specific accommodations are met with ire higher up on the chain, "[Getting a separate office] was seen by people above my supervisor as anti-social and me not liking my co-workers." (KO). Unaccommodating and discriminatory workplaces stifle not just enjoyment of work, but they also impact the self-efficacy of many autistic adults. Being gossiped about in the workplace, not getting individualized support, hostility towards necessary accommodations, and insufficient training are just some of the hurdles in keeping a job. One of the interviewees felt so strongly about the poor treatment of her due to her autism that she felt, "telling people you're disabled and need additional help is putting a target on your back." (MJP)

Individual Input

Autistic adults that felt unable to direct their employment and careers reported feeling burnt out and unhappy. MG on her parents attempting to decide her future career for her, "With the teaching, first of all, I think it's important to say that I didn't really want to be a teacher or a lawyer. That was all part of my parents wanting that for me and me not knowing what the hell I want in my life, so I think that was the first bit. And with the teaching, I remember I was in a practical, and I was supposed to teach a class, and I was

so nervous. I became physically sick, and I was so nervous I couldn't talk anymore." KGr on job coaches not considering her abilities, "other job coaches I had before, was they were trying to get me jobs that are kind of below my level. Jobs that I would be way over qualified for… I feel like I can do a little better than that." Some autistic adults encounter family members or professionals that ignore their child's or client's desires and skills. MG reported feeling left behind because of all of her burnout from chasing careers that she did not want; KGr has had more transient employment because of job coaches not helping her identify desirable jobs. Without respecting the input and building up agentic action, autistic adults are left behind feeling burnt out from undesirable employment or go from job to job looking for better work without knowing what they truly like.

Educational Attainment

Many autistic adults talked about education as a means to find more desirable careers. AW, "I'm going to do my Ph.D. as well…I'm probably going to do it on autism studies as well.". ER, "and I couldn't take the people anymore. I couldn't take the people anymore, nagging me and asking me all kinds of stupid questions. And my thinking was, "The next one who walks in, I will shoot him, because I can't take it anymore." And that's when I went into the computers, I started learning computers by myself." MG, "I mean, enjoyment, I always say I don't love my job. I don't, and that's the whole reason I'm doing my degree and I want to, it's not something I want to be doing for the rest of my life but it's convenient." Many autistic adults I interviewed saw education as an opportunity to develop an area of interest into a new career. LWW, "And I found that because I am looking for a new job because I finished my graphic design course. I've got my diploma, so I'm looking for a graphic design position." The autistic adults that had more

formalized educational plans in place were originally stuck in undesirable jobs; ER was doing customer service for a travel agency, AW is still working as a support worker and feels discriminated against by his managers, MG works in administration, and LWW works as an administrative assistant at a car dealership. The autistic adults sought education because they know their jobs mistreat them or their skills do not match well with the job responsibilities. The adults are choosing their course of action to find more desirable employment.

Individual Capacities

There were significant areas of silence in the regression analysis about self-determination skills. To perform the regression analysis, the researcher was required to remove two of the three self-determination skills due to collinearity issues. Even though the removal of actions and beliefs from the SDI: AR made the regression analysis possible, it resulted in the researcher being unable to use the quantitative analysis to answer questions regarding different self-determination skills. The researcher found in the interviews, however, that autistic adults used many different self-determination skills to improve their employment.

Agentic Action

Taking actions towards an employment goal frequently improved job satisfaction amongst autistic adults. Some of the actions taken by the autistic individuals included telling employers ahead of time about their autism and what accommodations they would need to succeed at work, pursuing personal independence to achieve career and life goals, and earning additional credentials via education. AW describes how he tells interviewers

about his autism, “I'd tell them to be honest from the start and make sure you've got things in place. Make sure you've got things in place with your employer. So make sure they know that you've got this, how it affects you, and what sort of in-house work support you need.”

KO discusses how she informs potential employers about her autism,

> I think you have to talk to the people you're going to interview with ahead of time and be like, "I have autism and here's what that means and here's what would be helpful for me in the interview if you're willing to accommodate." And really, if they're not, that should be a red flag, I think. I think that's where the fear comes in a little bit is like we want to be able to believe that it's going to be okay and so... But if people right off... Because you get an opportunity and you're like, "Oh, this is going to be the really good opportunity," and if you find out right off the bat they're not going to be willing to work with you and accommodate things that are very simple, basic things, then you don't want to work with them.”

Here, the autistic adults acted in their own best interests and came up with or advocated for advanced planning on how to disclose their autism. Telling job interviewers in advance of their autism improved job performance and satisfaction because this advanced disclosure served as a litmus test for employers and prepared employers to accommodate autistic employees. The litmus test for autistic employees helps to weed out potential problems; the unaccommodating employer for the job interview is unlikely to accommodate the employee on the job. Employers willing to accommodate the autistic employee will benefit from knowing in advance what the

employee needs to succeed on the job and the employee will have the necessary accommodations readily available.

'I look for new experiences I think I will like' would also be indicative of agentic action. One particular interviewee highlighted the importance of looking for new experiences when not allowed to practice her self-determination. The adult in question had parents who would demand she follow specific career paths despite her weaknesses and struggles with discussed career paths. As a result of her wishes being ignored, she moved to another country to live with her husband as a means to escape her parents to pursue the career she wanted. With this move, she felt better about her career prospects and life because she now had full control of her career development and experiences. Many of the interviewees also had quit jobs that they felt mistreated at and some were pursuing different careers to find better employment experiences.

Seeking accommodations was another skill that many autistic adults recommended to make work more manageable. Job autonomy was a common accommodation many employees were positive about; creating their work schedule allowed for the adults to better manage their sensory issues and focus their attention on issues they deem most important. The people I interviewed that discussed autonomy both were their own bosses and talked about how autonomy was vital to their success. Other autistic employees talked about workplace accommodations that helped make working more manageable. The interviewees talked about alternative schedules, avoiding specific tasks, and equipment to help deal with their sensory issues. One of my interviewees talked about how headphones and tinted glasses were essential to her success at her

warehouse job. Accommodations that ameliorated sensory issues were common tools that improved job satisfaction and employment success.

Some autistic adults also sought out advanced education to pursue their career interests. AW currently plans on earning a doctoral degree to serve other autistic adults due to his negative experiences with discriminatory treatment, “Yeah. The UK is as well. We have a lot of discrimination in the workplace in the UK. So sometimes I think... I'm looking for a job at the moment, which is making me want to go do my Ph.D.” MG describes how she is now pursuing the college education that she wants, “…so now I'm back in education, actually doing what I want, so I'm now nearly finished with my first year of part-time studying psychology. I hope to go into neuroscience eventually, so I'm on the right path and with the employment side of things…” Many adults aim to pursue their career interests and see education as a means to achieve their career goals. MG is still trying to earn her college degree despite her past negative experiences in college. The autistic adults who discussed education sought to use their knowledge to help other autistic individuals or to help others in similar positions.

The Self-Determination Inventory, Adult Report (SDI: AR) did not yield any significant relationships between employment outcomes and self-determination skills. However, specific questions asked by the SDI: AR can be used to verify the results found in the interviews. ‘I set my own goals’, ‘I choose activities I want to do’, and ‘I make choices that are important to me’ can be used to measure how autistic adults choose jobs and careers. However, the researcher found the SDI: AR did not satisfactorily address the unique needs of autistic adults. Action questions regarding how individuals discuss their autism and how they handle sensory problems would have better corroborated what the

researcher found in the interviews. The research found that the SDI: AR did measure some general skills that all people with disabilities can benefit. Goal choice and activity choice can be tied into planning, where questions regarding how much personal choice autistic adults had in finding their jobs and careers. Being ignored by support systems such as parents and service providers happened to a couple of the interviewees and limited their employment outcomes. The adults with this issue had additional difficulty finding a job and career and pushed back their career development by several years. Autistic adults with more autonomy talked about how much they appreciated choosing their schedules and who to work with. Having autonomy and the ability to make their plans was vital to the more successful adults; they presented as a tool to prevent burnout and maintain satisfaction in their work. Even an autistic adult who used to own their business talked about how much they appreciated creating their own schedule. With her current unemployment due to frequent burnout and sensory overload, she was able to work for herself for 10 years because self-autonomy slowed down the burnout she would encounter much more quickly at traditional workplaces.

'I figure out ways to get around obstacles' and 'I know my strengths' would correspond to my interviewees' abilities to find solutions to workplace problems and find more desirable employment situations. Many of the more successful interviewees discussed how they created their jobs as a way to work around their obstacles. Common obstacles included office politics where autistic adults clearly expressed their struggles, skepticism towards their needs for accommodations, being stuck in entry-level jobs that require face-to-face time with customers, and burnout. For the more successful autistic adults, creating their own business mitigated multiple obstacles. The adults created work

environments that eschewed office politics. The autistic business owners could also make their own schedule to prevent burnout; they could place meetings and appointments at more desirable times that made performing their tasks more manageable. Even autistic employees who liked their jobs but did not create their businesses were able to identify meaningful accommodations that prevented sensory overload and burnout. Some of the interviewees dissatisfied with their current employment planned on getting higher degrees to change their career paths. For the adults seeking higher education, they found that their current jobs did not satisfy them and they often faced discrimination or angry customers. By obtaining an additional degree, the adults felt they could work in environments that better suited their strengths.

Beliefs

Autistic employees with positive views of themselves also are happier at their workplace. HeG, a licensed therapist with her private practice, “I work really well with neurodiverse people or people from different cultures or elderly people or anything outside the box because I'm not relying on, I don't know, more neurotypical articulation in the spoken word to communicate.”. KO, a director of a non-profit on herself and her autistic employees, “Like if somebody tells me the honest truth, like, "We think that this is not the way to do this," like, "This isn't working this way and here's why," that's awesome. A lot of companies who are older companies that have been around for a long time that are kind of set in their ways and struggling to stay competitive, it would be so beneficial for them to have people who come in and say, "Here's why this is stupid." You know? Like, "Let me tell you..." Both of these autistic adults frequently talked about the importance of their jobs and why they liked what they do. HeG, “I'm collaborating with

the client for something that is really good for them to have, they really want. That's a nice way to interact with people. I always feel like my work as a therapist is meaningful and fulfilling and that I did something useful and helpful and I got paid a decent dollar for doing a really helpful thing." KO on why she likes running her non-profit, "I can have a little bit more control over the time. Like if I know I'm going to need an hour to recover from this one meeting or maybe one's going to be much more stressful and I think I'm going to need two hours to decompress, I can get to make those decisions for myself in a way where I'm not going to end up just completely melting down or burning out or both." Both of these autistic adults recognize both their strengths (how they think differently, how they are effective, direct communicators) and how to manage their weaknesses to direct their own career goals and manage their employment lives.

The interviewees that had more positive views about their autism and knew their strengths were more satisfied with their employment. The two autistic adults that talked most about autism as a strength and how they viewed autism as a selling point both created their own employment. Listing their strengths, countering traditional stereotypes of autism, and seeing autism as beneficial to the workplace was common amongst the business owners. Knowing strengths gave autistic employees power; this power corresponded to advocating for accommodations, taking proactive steps in creating employment, and confidence.

Valued Self-Determination Skills

Most autistic adults felt that seeking and advocating for accommodations were essential to keeping their jobs. HeG discussing workplace accommodations, "I always realized I always did better where there was a fair degree of autonomy in the job, which

now looking back, accommodated the autism.”, and MG talking about work from home, “I think the working from home thing is a massive point that makes things easier. Mainly because, first of all, familiar environment, no loud noises all the time, unexpected noises with other people, not a lot of sensory stimuli that you're not used to, and also the factor that I'm there with my pets and my pets are a huge calming factor for me.”

KO also described how her planning was vital to her job performance,

> So I am able to structure my own day. And I actually do a spreadsheet for the week every Sunday and I map out what the week is going to look like to remind myself that it's not probably going to go exactly like this and that's okay. But I have... I can set my own limits. I can say, "Okay, this looks like a really busy week. Maybe I only want to have two meetings a day," or something. And other weeks, I might set the limit at three. I can have a little bit more control over the time. Like if I know I'm going to need an hour to recover from this one meeting or maybe one's going to be much more stressful and I think I'm going to need two hours to decompress, I can get to make those decisions for myself in a way where I'm not going to end up just completely melting down or burning out or both.”

The most common workplace accommodation mentioned by the autistic adults that were interviewed was working from home or having flexible scheduling where they could make their own schedules. With flexible scheduling and work from home allotment, the interviewees felt less stressed due to less sensory stress in their environments or they felt the autonomy allowed them to do their work in a way that they felt their performance was optimal. Autistic employees also frequently discussed that

more accommodating managers and workplaces would change their work environment to better suit the autistic employee,

> My biggest issue is sensory issues, it's what I have the most trouble with. We can have music or podcast or something in one ear, but they allow me to have an earplug in the other ear too. I can still hear them but... So, that's an accommodation that I have. I also have these tinted glasses. I mean, I could wear those anyway, they wouldn't say anything about that, but... That really helps, I don't think I would make it without them." (KGr).

Accommodating sensory issues by giving breaks, equipment, or separate rooms typically increased job satisfaction for autistic employees.

Another factor affecting job performance and acquisition is the quality of government services accessible to autistic adults. Many autistic adults have noted the shortcomings of a variety of government services including laws, education, welfare, and vocational rehabilitation. KD discussed his non-usage of vocational rehabilitative services, "I never used [government job services]…they screw me over." LWW talking about the lack of services for older autistic adults in her region,

> Once you're 30 years old, they're done. They only want to look at you. I'm 36, so that doesn't help me. And a lot of programs that they do have is just teaching skills, like workplace skills. I mean, I've been working since I was 14. I don't need workplace skills per se. I need help with interviewing, finding positions, finding companies that are willing to hire somebody knowing they're autistic and things like that. But yeah, I know a lot of the programs that build in my area, it just social skills workshops, or you have absolutely zero workplace or zero skills that

> you could offer a workplace, like this is how you become a cashier, so I don't need that stuff."

KGr described her inadequate job coaching, "One of the issues with, at least one of the job coaches I had before, was they were trying to get me jobs that are kind of below my level. Jobs that I would be way over-qualified for." KO speaking about how welfare rules negatively impact many autistic individuals,

> People talk about going on disability and stuff. But then I see people get into this trap where they're like, "Oh, I have this job and they want to offer me more hours or they want to give me a raise or advancement and I'm scared to take it because I might have to give up..." if they're on food stamps or something.

KGr answering a question about her transition services, "So, what job preparation or transition preparation did you have before leaving high school and stuff? Nothings." TD remember how a lack of special education support negatively impacted his life and employment,

> I dropped out in grade seven, myself actually, and they didn't help me out. And I had a really bad learning disability all my life. Like I can't, I can't read very well. I can't even read out child books. And I was never in like normal classes in school. I was always out of class with a one-on-one person teaching me and I had behavioral issues and I never knew why I was so troubled as a teenager until I got to be an adult. I caused a lot of problems when I was younger and I, I never actually understood what was going on in my mind for quite some time. Yeah. It was basically the system basically failed me."

MJP describing the lack of support from laws,

I've stopped actually asking for disability accommodations because, I've been fired outright for asking them. I worked in HUD for a short while with their disability, the housing, and stuff. Kind of familiar, a lot of people don't realize that the ADA has a lot of loopholes. In my experience, all it really does, is it works a lot better for people who have physical disabilities or ones that are very visible. But you have a mental health issue or a neurological or neurodevelopmental condition like autism, you're kind of left hanging."

A common theme with many government services and supports was that they often leave autistic adults without promised supports, fall well short on delivering on the promised supports, or they make receiving the supports cumbersome. This affects autistic adults negatively; the autistic adult that was not taught basic reading skills struggles to hold down jobs, the person who did not receive transitional supports has a transient job history and is currently working in a warehouse with a college degree. The autistic person with a jaded view of the ADA does not practice self-advocacy and avoids seeking necessary accommodations at the workplace. The people on welfare do not take additional hours or promotions for fear of losing their benefits, preventing them from obtaining higher-paying jobs. The autistic adults with jaded views of vocational rehabilitation do not look for vocational help again and go into the job-hunting process without fully knowing their strengths and weaknesses.

Despite negative views from many autistic adults, some government services were viewed in a more positive light. Certain government programs have helped some of the interviewees, on work-related programs "A thing called Access to Work. The Access to Work pays for the support workers." (AW), "Autism Alliance of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Center for Independent Living, there's this whole network of centers for independent living that are also in some places called Disability Network, I think. And each county in Michigan has one. So having those folks that were very supportive, even people from the University of Michigan that are working in diversity, equity, and inclusion programs." (KO), "I would say that VR has been pretty helpful. Maybe they could get connected with them... Have some sort of support." (KGr), on financial supports, "I'm glad that you have the support that you do here financially." (TD), If we didn't have Medicaid we would be in huge trouble." (BC). Positive government supports supported vocational and financial independence. The adults that used a government program that they felt worked provided them with workplace supports in the form of coaching and advocacy. The programs allowed for one of the autistic adults to fight for his job when he felt that he was being discriminated against at the workplace and another program through the University system in the U.S. helped another autistic adult start her own non-profit. Job coaching helped another autistic adult find the accommodations she needed to succeed at her warehouse job. For financial supports, the autistic adults realized that their safety net helped them afford essential medications, food, and other essential expenses. The adult on Medicaid realized that her medications would cost too much without Medicaid. Government services that had beneficial impacts on autistic adults' lives were often programs that abetted advocacy and self-determination and financial supports were used primarily for essential expenses.

The multiple regression analysis found no significant relationships between self-determination decision-making, actions, or beliefs and employment outcomes. Income and vocational independence had no significant relationship with any of the self-

determination characteristics as defined by the Self-Determination Inventory, Adult-Report. Despite the lack of significance found in the regression analysis, significant results became more apparent in the interviews. Many of the autistic adults discussed how they made conscious decisions to improve their employment. Some adults pursued their special interests or formal education to change their careers to improve both their income and job satisfaction. Other adults sought more formal diagnoses to help them explain why they were struggling in the workplace. Many of the interviewees expressed relief upon receiving their formal autism diagnosis which in turn made them more effective self-advocates. The pursuit of getting diagnosed aided the autistic adults in explaining why they needed accommodations, why specific job types are troublesome, and improved their self-image.

Having knowledge of autism and what it meant to the autistic adults helped them take meaningful actions to improve employment. Often, the interviewees recommended full disclosure of their autism. A couple of the adults even recommended using their autism disclosure as a test for employers. The adults with the belief that the employer should adjust and accommodate the autistic employee were noticeably more active in their career planning and activities; they either run their own business or are planning on obtaining advanced degrees for their career. Autistic adults whose voices were ignored faced more hardships building their careers. Lack of inclusive guidance caused additional turnover, burnout, and doubt. The interviewees that talked about not being heard had multiple job changes, burnout incidents, and one even moved far away from her parents due to poor guidance.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

The following chapter will review the limitations of the current study; the limitations include survey design, sampling of subjects, and collinearity. Discussion of results of the present study will follow which will cover the need for autistic adult input in research, the importance of self-determination, and how the current system of work needs to change to help autistic adults. A critique of the current conceptual framework will be provided and a new conceptual framework that captures the nature of self-determination will be created and discussed. Recommendations regarding policies to better employment for autistic adults and directions for future research will conclude the chapter.

Limitations

Limitations in the present study included: survey design, sampling of subjects, and collinearity. The surveys used for the quantitative part of the present study were not specifically designed for autistic adults. The SDI: AR and Taylor Vocational Index are designed for people with disabilities in general; not specifically for autistic people. While people with disabilities face significant hurdles in employment, autistic individuals have worse employment outcomes than people with different disabilities. To improve on the current study for the future, specific tools should be developed to explore how autism issues specifically affect autistic adults in finding and keeping quality employment. The lack of specific instruments for autistic people impacted the discrepancy of results between the regression analysis and interviews. Particularly, there was no significant

relationship found between self-determination skills, income, and vocational independence. Despite the lack of relationships found in the regression analysis, autistic adults highlighted the importance of self-determination skills in their employment journey. Many adults discussed how diagnosis, self-knowledge, obtaining accommodations, receiving supports, and general advocacy helped with employment outcomes.

Another limitation to the present study was the sampling of the survey respondents and interviewees. Initially, the researcher attempted to recruit autistic adults from national autism groups but could not obtain the desired number of individuals. As a result of this shortcoming, the researcher recruited subjects from online autism groups to acquire the necessary participants. Autistic individuals were able to volunteer for the study and were not randomly sampled. Within the autism population, this poses significant limitations: autistic adults less likely to speak about their employment would not participate in the study potentially limiting the sample to more vocal participants and volunteers more likely to have more desirable employment outcomes due to the need to share personal information. The lack of random sampling potential led to a biased sample where the autistic adults gathered were perhaps faring better in employment than the general autism population. Individuals were also required to read and answer surveys also limiting the characteristics of the sample that did not have significant reading difficulties. Autistic individuals with reading difficulties may have additional issues finding and keeping employment and the nature of the surveys may have limited their participation. Additionally, the researcher attempted to gather potential interviewees through the subjects that completed surveys and indicated interest. Despite randomly sampling from

the survey sample for interviews, no one from the surveys when contacted participated in the interviews. Again, interview subjects were gathered via online autism groups and were opened to volunteers. The nature of interviewing required the subjects to be verbal and at least somewhat comfortable with extended communication, further limiting the traits of the interview subjects. Autistic individuals who are less verbal or more socially anxious would likely not participate in an interview, limiting the types of voices included in the current study. Individuals who do not communicate verbally and are socially anxious are a significant part of the autism community as well and face unique employment challenges that could not be sufficiently captured in the current study.

Another limitation in the present study was collinearity. Both the regression analysis and interviews helped the researcher understand how many factors affect autistic adults and their employment outcomes. Using the regression analysis, the researcher confirmed findings from past literature. Anxiety, depression, and performing specific vocational activities such as seeking out job supports played roles impacting income and vocational independence. However, the researcher did not find the hypothesized variable, self-determination, had any significant relationship with either income or vocational independence. The researcher also eliminated two of the three self-determination capacities from the regression analysis due to collinearity. The researcher found interviewing autistic adults informative. The interviewees confirmed how anxiety and depression negatively impacted employment outcomes. The autistic adults would most likely disagree that self-determination played no role in employment outcomes. The interviews provided the researcher with very rich data on how depression and anxiety had specific influences on employment; the researcher discovered that masking and burnout

significantly added to the stress from many employment situations and ultimately lead to many autistic adults leaving many jobs. The researcher learned how seeking out, receiving, and accepting an autism diagnosis played a key role in making employment possible or even enjoyable.

Participants of the present study were not asked about their cognitive or language abilities. Autism has a wide range of characteristics; a significant number of autistic people have limited spoken language or have cognitive impairments. The researcher did not specifically address the subset of the autistic population with cognitive and language differences, limiting the application of the present study to autistic individuals without cognitive and language differences. Autistic individuals with cognitive and language differences face unique challenges that even autistic individuals without these differences do not face. Future research should address the needs of all autistic individuals to widen the scope of the results.

Discussion

Overall, the research found that both opportunities to use self-determination skills and the skills themselves were important to employment outcomes for autistic adults. The quantitative results did not support the relationship between employment outcomes and self-determination skills, but the interviewees did verify a relationship. Interviewees describe how difficult the job environment is for autistic people, how self-determination skills aided them in making employment more tolerable, and what needs to change in employment to make work easier for autistic individuals. The major findings from the emergent themes can be discussed in the following categories: autistic adult input, self-

determination is important but personally defined, and the system of work needs to fundamentally change to help autistic adults.

Autistic Adult Input is Needed

While surveys and regression provided insights into general trends for autistic adults, the interviews provided far richer and valuable data. Autism is an idiosyncratic condition that impacts every individual differently. The nature of quantitative research and surveys could not capture how autism impacted each adult that was interviewed. Generalized tools in the regression analysis could not fully capture the nature of self-determination's true relationship with employment; it could only be expanded upon by the interviewees. The autistic adults provided the most valuable data to the researcher, explaining how their autism was personal and how it affected their employment and lives in general. The interviews helped the researcher to find the most significant relationships and to capture the voices of an often-ignored group in disability research.

For many autistic adults, employment outcomes are still lacking and leave them behind in society at large. Poverty, instability, lack of support, limited options, and discrimination are common issues faced by autistic adults when seeking or keeping employment. The current job environment is best captured by listening to autistic voices, something that much of the research base has not sufficiently explored. The regression analysis of the present study does not adequately capture the hardships that autistic adults face in the world of work nor does it highlight the vital skills and tools to ameliorate the employment situation. The interviewees provide valuable feedback on the world of employment and its many shortcomings for autistic people. Themes of falling through the cracks, burnout, and outright discrimination are prevalent. Interviewees point out a lack

of services or inadequate service provision in their areas, sensory overload, and unaccommodating workplaces as common hurdles to successful employment.

Many of the interviewees described inadequate services. Some pointed out how employment services only covered very specific job fields, limiting who could benefit. Others talked about how services were too rudimentary for their needs or were only available to children. To address employment opportunities for autistic adults, more services must be tailored to adults and expanded to more job fields to help more adults find jobs. As one of the interviewees talked about, a job search program that gives special tracking and additional help to autistic job seekers would be beneficial. Some interviewees indicated job coaching services were not always responsive to their needs. Other interviewees talk about how they felt government services left them behind due to the perception that they were too 'high functioning' to require help. More responsive job coaching and services would benefit autistic adults. Coaching and government services that are more specifically tailored to the person's skills, strengths, and needs would find better employment for autistic job seekers. Autistic adults value being listened to and educating the general public on what autism is truly like, both at work and in life.

Self-Determination is Important but Personally Defined

Even though the SDI: AR was used to measure self-determination in the current study, it was limited. The researcher could not find any significant self-determination skills from the SDI: AR because of collinearity, severely limiting the power of the survey. The interviewees provided more insight into the relationship between employment and self-determination skills. Even without collinearity, the SDI: AR was limited to three very broad self-determination skills: actions, beliefs, and decision

making. Many autistic adults provided more individualized definitions of self-determination for the study. Some adults shared how they valued autonomy as their own boss. Others discussed how they noticed how overwhelmed they felt at work and sought an autism diagnosis to help explain their struggles. Others sought out supports from the government, employer, or family to help them succeed with autism. Based on the interviews, self-determination could not be uniformly defined for the present study as autistic adults took a wide variety of actions to overcome their struggles at the workplace. Past experiences with self-determination were key factors in shaping how many of the autistic adults practiced and endorsed self-determination. The people with negative experiences in asking for accommodations were skeptical of asking for them in future settings. Autistic adults that were ignored by service providers were less likely to seek services in the future. Attitudes towards self-determination were frequently based on personal experiences. Most adults had positive experiences with self-determination but a couple did encounter difficulties despite using self-determination skills. Autistic people in the current study responded to how others reacted to their use of self-determination skills. The adults' attitudes towards self-determination were responses to their individualized use of it based on their individualized needs. A standardized measure of self-determination was insufficient for the purposes of the current study. The results of the current study suggest that self-determination should be more individually defined.

The System of Work Needs to Change to Help Autistic Adults

The present study provides valuable information into what environments are most and least desirable to autistic employees. Undesirable job environments for many of the interviewees included working with customers, office politics, working in a space with

many other colleagues, and sensory overload. Unfortunately for many of the adults, they faced bosses that were unaccommodating and discriminatory. Many adults relied on masking to handle the stress of the job environment. A majority of autistic employees in the present study, especially women, discussed masking in detail and how it led to burnout. A common burnout episode would include depression, quitting a job, and anxiety. Some adults were able to look for other jobs after burnout or look for a different profession via education. Other autistic adults responded to burnout by questioning the larger system of the work environment. Some of the interviewees questioned how our current economic system seeks out maximum productivity and workplace conformity. Others discussed how they felt dehumanized by many businesses' profit motives at the expense of their employees. A couple of employees created their practices/companies in response to the stressful environments and antipathic bosses. Some participants have retired from work and relied on family for support. Challenges unique to autistic adults must be addressed to successfully include autistic people in the workforce. Many programs are limited in their scope and only seek to simply get autistic people into a job.

A revised, universal design in employment must be used to successfully include autistic employees at work. Availability of separate work environments away from colleagues including work-from-home accommodations, equipment to mitigate noise and other sensory stressors, and changing up job roles within companies are beneficial to autistic employees. This, however, is not enough to make employment truly accessible and rewarding to many autistic adults. The system of work needs to fundamentally change to benefit autistic and many other employees. The reinforcement of unaccommodating workplaces, intense profit motive, and unyielding bosses must change.

Autistic adults that faced these systemic issues at their work experienced the worst burnout symptoms. Improving work for autistic adults includes both change at the individual company level and the culture of work in general.

Critique of the Conceptual Framework

The present study took into account two separate conceptual frameworks for self-determination. The first framework displays how opportunities and development to practice self-determination affect it. The second framework addresses how individual capacities are implicated in Causal Agency Theory. The researcher found, based on the regression analysis, that vocational activities boosted opportunities for self-determination as there was a significant relationship between these activities and vocational independence. However, the research could not find quantitative evidence to support the second framework as self-determination skills were not significantly related to employment outcomes. Collinearity for the self-determination traits limits the second framework as agentic action, volitional action, and beliefs are all pared down to a single concept of self-determination. The researcher found that the collinearity made it difficult to develop a working framework for self-determination skills. If the skills are all considered the exact same, then the framework cannot show how the skills interact with each other and how they help with psychosocial development.

Figure 11

Functional Model of Self-Determination

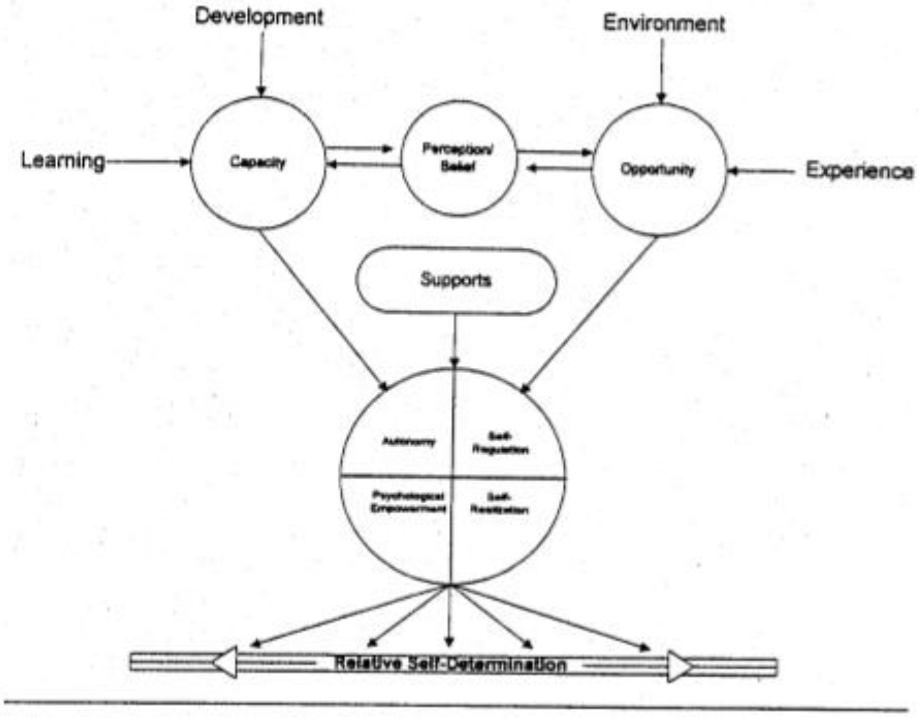


Figure 12

Causal Agency Model of Self-Determination

The researcher discovered that the interviews with autistic adults more closely aligned with both frameworks. Many autistic adults went into detail on how receiving services and supports were overall helpful in developing their self-determination skills and employment. Asking for accommodations, applying to government programs, talking with family and friends, and developing their own companies provided the adults with ways to build their self-determination skills and improve their employment. Adults with negative experiences seeking help and using their self-determination skills discussed with the researcher how they learned to seek help elsewhere and improved their lives through other means. Much of the help the interviewees used taught them what accommodations

they need on the job, how to advocate for themselves at job interviews, and even develop their own businesses. Through opportunities, the autistic individuals built their self-determination skills and felt more empowered to advocate for themselves and use their skills. The people who were ignored or not allowed to use their self-determination skills felt helpless, anxious, depressed, and lost. The person whose parents dictated what to learn and strive for ultimately dropped out of college and ran away to another country. Autistic people value being listened to and having meaningful decisions to make. The individuals that feel heard are more likely to develop their self-determination skills and will continue to use these skills in multiple settings.

The autistic adults also provide more support for the second conceptual framework through the interviews than they did through the regression analysis. The considerable amounts of silence from the regression analysis are addressed by the autistic interviewees; the participants add significant evidence supporting the Causal Agency Theory framework. Action-control beliefs, agentic action, and volition are all addressed by the interviewees. A portion of autistic adults interviewed discussed how they viewed their autism and autism diagnosis positively. The adults described how they felt their autism provided them unique advantages in work and life and how it allowed them to process the world in valued ways. The adults with positive views of their autism believed their work was valuable and they deserved just treatment in the workplace; their beliefs spurred them to action. The actions the autistic people took included starting their own companies, confronting discriminatory supervisors, going back to school for advanced degrees, and actively seeking supports.

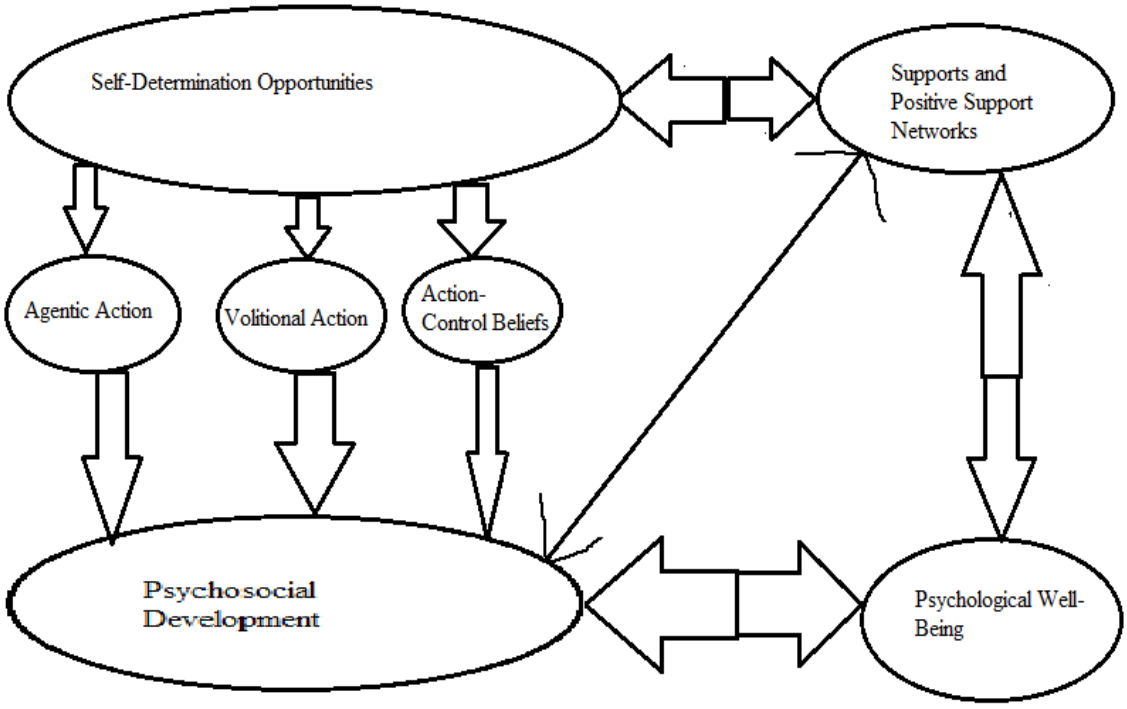
Autistic adults expressed the importance of agentic action throughout interviews as well. Many interviewees had professional and personal goals that they hoped to achieve. Interviewees expressed wanting to earn higher education, being treated with dignity, changing jobs, and improving other autistic peoples' lives as goals they wanted to achieve. Many adults took actions towards achieving their goals including going back to school, starting their own business or practice, applying for government services, quitting poor-fit jobs, and addressing grievances directly with supervisors. One adult even sued her former employer for discriminatory treatment. All of the adults' actions were consciously taken to serve as part of a larger goal.

The interviewees also discussed how they felt deciding on their course of action. Many of the autistic people expressed how they took volitional actions towards employment and their lives in general. When volitional action is disallowed, autistic people may find ways to take back their agency. With one particular interviewee, her parents tried to overly protect her at the cost of her making her education and career choices. Her parents did not understand her point of view nor understood her struggles with autism. As a result, she could not find a desirable career or course of study until she left home for another country to live with her now-husband. Her husband understood her needs and desires and allowed her to pursue her goals, resulting in her making her own decisions that she feels serve her own professional desires. Other adults describe how their autonomy is valuable; how leaving their traditional jobs behind allowed them to accommodate themselves by leaving a toxic environment. With their autonomy, the professionals who started their businesses made their own decisions rather than serve an undesirable company or boss.

Overall, the researcher found the regression analysis did not corroborate the conceptual frameworks while the interviews provided evidence supporting both frameworks. Results from the regression analysis suggest self-determination opportunities built self-determination skills. However, the results indicate that self-determination could not be broken down into multiple skills, therefore, invalidating the second conceptual framework. The adults interviewed for the qualitative part of the study provide evidence counter to the results from the regression. Many autistic employees discuss the importance of beliefs, agentic action, and volitional action. The interviewees corroborate the second framework; the self-determination skills they used helped address their psychosocial needs and significantly improved their lives. Adults that faced obstacles using their self-determination skills felt threatened, depressed, anxious, unfulfilled, and burnt-out. To improve on the conceptual frameworks, they should be combined into one larger conceptual framework. Creating one comprehensive conceptual framework emphasizes that self-determination skills cannot exist or grow without opportunities. Using self-determination plays a role much like volitional action, agentic action, and beliefs in supporting psychosocial development. Many autistic adults discussed how important their families and other service providers were to their successes. Truly supportive people and services allowed the adults to develop their self-determination skills while also directly supporting their psychological well-being. The autistic individuals described how the support they received, the self-determination opportunities provided to them, and the self-determination skills they used and developed all led to positive development and well-being.

Figure 13

New Conceptual Framework



New Conceptual Framework Summary

The new conceptual framework is a combination of the two original frameworks guiding the current study. Based on results from both the regression analysis and interviews, opportunities to use self-determination skills and positive support networks lead to autistic people building their skills. There were significant differences in self-determination skill development between individuals who had and did not have positive support and opportunities to use their skills. Autistic individuals who had more support and opportunities discussed how they believed their autism was beneficial, how they were able to develop their own personal and career goals, and decide on how best to pursue career and personal goals. Individuals who were not provided self-determination

opportunities and did not have positive supports could not develop any self-determination skills, impacting their psychosocial development and well-being. The adults would often report anxiety, depression, burnout, hopelessness, and a lack of direction because they could not determination their professional future nor had a supportive network.

Individuals who were able to build and use their self-determination skills often felt more empowered, positive about themselves, purposeful, and hopeful. The feelings described by autistic individuals who could use self-determination skills and had positive supports developed psychosocially and have integrated themselves successfully in the world of work. The most successful interviewees accommodated themselves, recognized that their autism had benefits, actively sought and used services to help develop professionally, fought back against mistreatment, identified their weaknesses, and set long-term professional goals. All of these actions are self-determination skills; the autistic people that used these most often ultimately were happiest and felt the most like they had a purpose, often to help other autistic individuals succeed.

Policy Recommendations

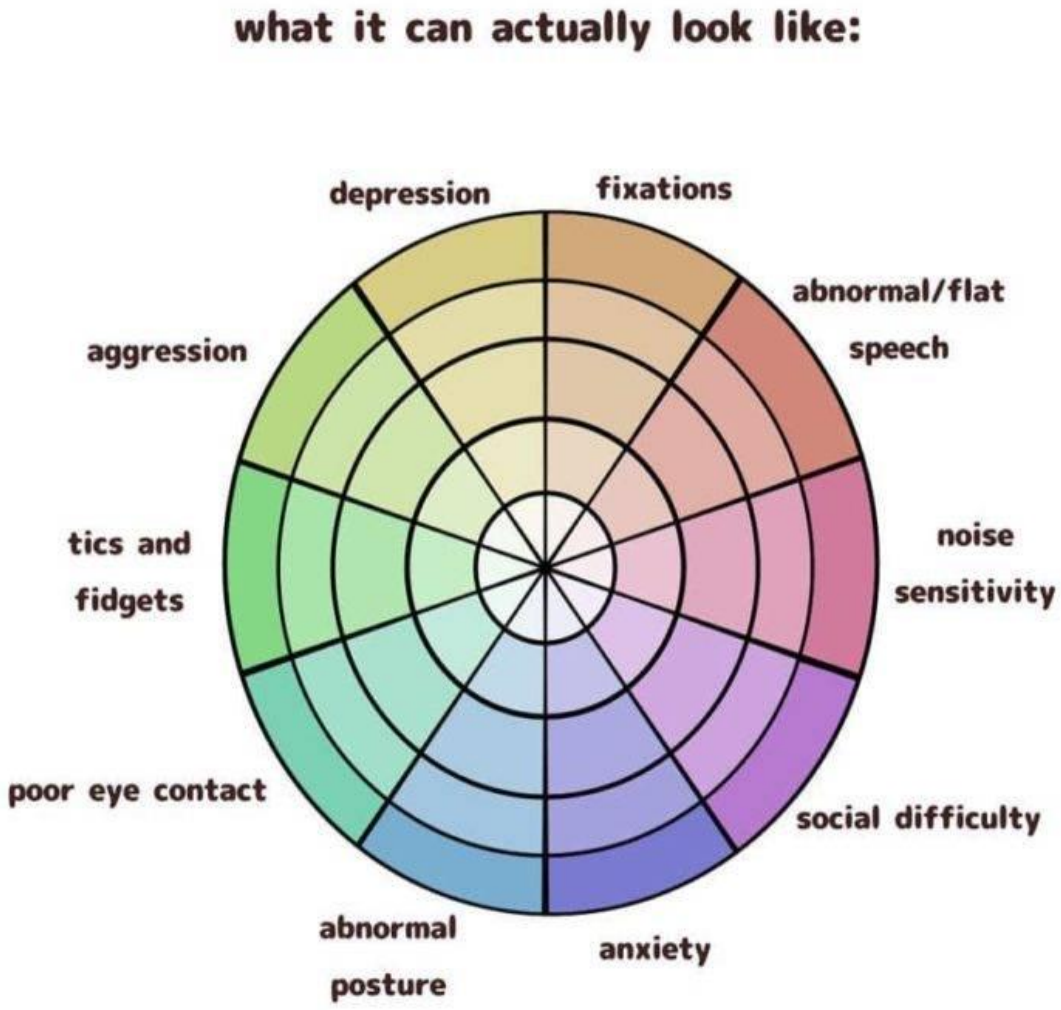
Service Provision

Throughout the interviews, some autistic adults pointed out some shortcomings of policy that had a significant yet negative impact on their employment outcomes. Some of the adults discussed how hard it was for them to obtain vital job services. Interviewees cited being too ‘high functioning’, age limitations, or not enough services in their area. To improve service provision, governments and service providers must change what they currently know about autism.

Recommendation 1: Change the definition of functioning used by service providers: Multiple autistic adults described how they were denied services because of the false perception that they were too ‘high functioning’ to benefit from any support. The idea of ‘high functioning’ vs. ‘low functioning’ autism is a gross oversimplification of autism. MG on autism knowledge in general, “I just wish people would read more about the condition and just speak to people.” For many of the adults interviewed, their social skills, degree attainment, and community participation were all used against them as they were labeled ‘high functioning’ and denied help. A basic lack of understanding about autism persists throughout the world of work. AW on workplaces’ current understanding of autism, “Workplaces themselves, they won't hire an autistic person because they don't really know much about autism.” LH on her workplaces’ accommodation of autism, “You don't need to be like, "Do you know how to grill a po-ta-to?" "Yes, I know how to grill a potato. It's not hard. It's grilled, whatever." You know? Like it's not that difficult. But they talk to me like I'm unintelligent, and that they're the greatest people in the world for hiring an autistic person.” People in positions of service and power must learn that an autistic individual is not simply high or low functioning; many skills impact overall functioning in autism and each autistic person has unique skills and needs. Rather than seeing autistic functioning as linear, policymakers and service providers must learn that autism functioning is more like a collection of skills that are individually defined and better capture the individual needs of autistic people. By using a new definition of functioning, policy and services can better capture the needs of their autistic citizens and understand that the autism community has many strengths but many varied needs.

Figure 14

Autism Functioning



Note. The proposed autism functioning chart that better captures how autistic individuals' skills and capacities should be measured. From *This Graphic Shows What the Autism Spectrum Really Looks Like*, by Nera Birch, 2020. (https://themighty.com/2020/03/autism-spectrum-wheel/).

Recommendation 2: Expand vocational services to less-serviced areas and age groups: Another significant issue autistic individuals face when looking for services is the lack of availability and coverage, especially in rural areas. The people interviewed who were from more isolated regions often described how services and supports were difficult to find. The lack of services made more isolated autistic adults feel lost. Autistic adults wanted to find services to help them find jobs or even find social opportunities in their local area. Even autistic individuals who were not in rural areas, suggested that job preparation services were inappropriate for their needs. At least one interviewee described that they aged out of the job training program. Another autistic person discussed how current programs only focus on building rudimentary job skills they have long known. A couple of other autistic people pointed out how many job training programs only focused on tech jobs and there were no programs for autistic individuals who were not interested in tech. The overall lack of appropriate services, whether due to location, career fields, or skills is related to an overall lack of funding as found in multiple studies concerning employment and community-based services (Harmuth et al., 2018). The underfunding is still persistent today; rural areas lack money to fund programs for autistic adults, ‘high functioning’ autistic people are rejected from service programs because they are deemed unneedy of job programs, and job training programs do not have the resources to truly individualize their content to many different autistic people (Harmuth et al., 2018). An overall increase in both state and federal funding must address the lack of appropriate programming for autistic adults looking for job training programs. Funding should be devoted to differentiating programs to include more career fields and abilities, as well as providing underserved areas with necessary programs.

Recommendation 3: Tackling discriminatory treatment**;** reimagining the work environment: Unfortunately for many adults interviewed, discrimination and mistreatment were very common. The individuals discussed a wide range of mistreatment including low expectations from managers due to the person's autism, bullying, demands for non-work social interaction, withholding of accommodations, not giving autistic employees support, and being deliberately forced into undesired tasks for jobs (i.e., customer service). All of this mistreatment made autistic employees feel unvalued, unwanted, depressed, anxious, and burnt-out. Some adults were able to overcome poor treatment but other adults decided that, in part because of discrimination, they do not belong in the job force and had subsequently retired. The struggles the interviewees faced at work were consistent with other autistic adults' experiences; adults found managers unsupportive of their needs for accommodations, stressful and sensorily overwhelming job environments, and demands to socialize with colleagues (Griffith et al., 2011). Interviewees also confirmed past literature that employers often find autism spectrum disorders and support needs hard to understand (Griffith et al., 2011). An up-to-date autism spectrum disorder resource center for employers would help combat negative stereotypes and a general lack of information that many have regarding ASD. One of the interviewees in the current study spends some of his time talking to workplaces about autism and educating businesses about it. AW describes why he teaches workplaces about autism, "they won't hire an autistic person because they don't really know much about autism. So they haven't had the autism training. Which is what I've managed to do in my spare time is deliver autism training to workplaces." Few autistic people currently can teach a workplace about their condition but empowering their voices and allowing

them to be part of the resource center would keep information up-to-date and promote more positive ideas of autism. Past research confirms the need for more autistic voices in professional settings, “When I see people, and I’ve been to the conferences, everybody is an expert bar the person with a diagnosis. That needs to change. That, if anything, is a biggie.” (Griffith et al., 2011)

In conjunction with autism training and educating employers about autism from autistic adults, anti-discrimination laws must be strengthened to ensure meaningful protection from discriminatory practices. At least one interviewee confirms the current weakness of anti-discrimination laws for autistic employees,

> I've stopped actually asking for disability accommodations because, I've been fired outright for asking them. I worked in HUD for a short while with their disability, the housing and stuff. Kind of familiar, a lot of people don't realize that the ADA has a lot of loopholes. In my experience, all it really does, is it works a lot better for people who have physical disabilities or ones that are very visible. But you have a mental health issue or a neurological or neurodevelopmental condition like autism, you're kind of left hanging.

Past literature supports this statement. Autistic job employees and job seekers still face discriminatory treatment when both looking for a job and in the workplace. It was advantageous for autistic employees not to disclose their disability due to the lack of understanding of the condition and many autistic employees do not disclose for fear of stigmatization (Patton, 2019). In addition to the stigma associated with autism, many employers demand that employees act as a team and build relationships with colleagues as essential to the job, further impacting autistic adults (Patton, 2019). Unfortunately for

many autistic adults, workplace ‘fit’ is often essential for many employers; they can fire autistic employees while still arguing that the employee could not meet a core function of the job (Patton, 2019). The adults interviewed for the study also confirm they faced discriminatory treatment on the job without receiving any recompense for their experience. MJP describes what happened after asking for an additional break as an accommodation,

> I worked as a phlebotomist in a donation center and actually got an award for... I ended up getting more donations in a day than any other phlebotomist. I also got awards for outperforming people who've been there a decade longer than me. When I asked for an accommodation, they flipped out and they wanted to put me in the warehouse. They said that autistic people don't do good with other people, so you need to be back in the warehouse. It's like, you just gave me all of these awards for outperforming my coworkers, but really all I asked was a 30 minutes extra for lunch just to help cool down. After that, it was like I suddenly had tons and tons and tons of performance checks after that.

MJP’s experience is common amongst autistic adults. The denial of accommodations and other discriminatory treatment dissuades autistic people from working. To address discrimination, employers must show more burden of proof they handled the autistic person’s needs and accommodations. Punitive actions towards asking for accommodations, bullying, and not adapting job roles to better fit the autistic individuals’ strengths should be included as discriminatory treatment.

Recommendation 4: Universal design of the workplace: Many autistic adults describe how the workplace is not autism-friendly. A significant amount of the

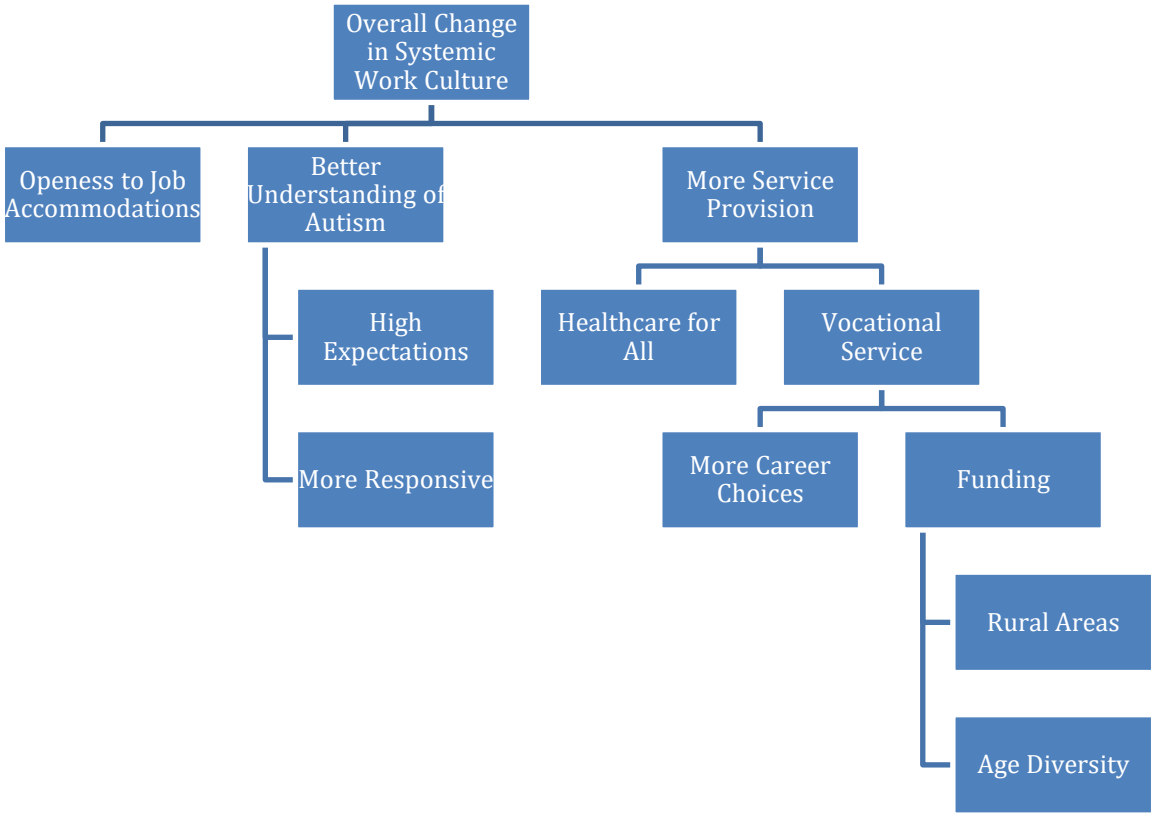
interviewees highlight how they felt ignored or discredited because managers did not understand their autism nor believed they needed vital job accommodations. Some of the participants retired from work prematurely because they believed they could no longer fit into the working world. Others created their own businesses to accommodate their own needs and the needs of other autistic employees. More skeptical interviewees cast doubt on the larger system of employment and how business is mainly based on the profit motive. Autistic employees discuss other work environment issues that systemically disadvantage autistic people including the need to be social at work, bullying, office politics, and skepticism towards accommodations. The workplace disadvantages rise from a poor understanding of autism coupled with the profit motive. Some businesses believe accommodations are prohibitively expensive and will therefore hurt the company's profits. Businesses may underestimate their autistic employees and give them menial tasks or micromanage them. A better understanding of autism will help improve working conditions for autistic individuals; businesses will acknowledge that accommodations are necessary and easily affordable while also having higher expectations for their autistic employees. Higher expectations for autistic employees may manifest as less micromanaging, allowing advancement and promotion of autistic employees, and trust.

Some interviewees also discuss larger issues with work culture. While not directly tied to the workplace, general society's skepticism of government spending and programs had negatively impacted many of the interviewees. A lack of government services in rural areas, unavailability of vocational services due to age or career, and non-individualized services are results from a lack of funding into programs. Many autistic adults described

the lack of services in their area and how they felt the services offered were insufficient. Insufficient service provision included only providing career opportunities for autistic individuals in STEM fields and job training programs being only tailored to younger people that need help learning workplace basics. More government funding would improve the diversity of vocational services and make services more accessible to underserved areas. Some of the interviewees also describe how health insurance is tied to employment in the US. Autistic people face rampant unemployment which affects their access to healthcare; they either remain uninsured or rely on government programs for health insurance. Providing universal healthcare would make employment easier for autistic individuals in the US; they would feel less pressured to stay in a toxic work environment if their health insurance was guaranteed.

Figure 15

Universal Design in Employment



Recommendation 5: Changing the nature of work: The larger work system must also change to better include autistic people. Currently, the overall job environment is not inclusive of autistic individuals. Many of the interviewees discuss how ‘hustle culture’ hurts autistic employees and dissuades them from taking much-needed breaks and using accommodations. KO describes the general hustle culture today, “Here is my limit. This is what I'm going to realistically be able to get done. If I need to take a break because I'm feeling overwhelmed, I'm going to do that rather than pushing through. I think for me, it really was just like I didn't realize that I had the right to do that because there's so much

pressure in our society to... You hear it in all the media and the advertising and stuff like no limits, I have no limits, I'm going to do it all." The emphasis to work constantly and without breaks permeates throughout work culture; many companies do not want to provide accommodations nor let employees 'slow down' because it impacts profits. Some of the interviews discussed how they view the overall current economic system with ire. BC describes how the current economic system works, "If as a country we put more emphasis on actually caring about our people rather than our capital, it would make a huge difference. Most big companies and corporations, their job is actually to do things that benefit their shareholders, even though their worker's labor is what gets them anything to pass off to their shareholders. But it's like that doesn't matter to most corporations." MJP further elaborates on how our general culture prevents psychosocial development, "I think, in our culture overall, things like self-introspection and personal insight are undervalued. We kind of definitely live in a culture where it's automated. You need to go with the flow and you need to assimilate with the rest of the population and do exactly what everyone else's doing. But most autistic people are not like that." Many of the autistic adults interviewed acknowledge that our current economic system and the values that it espouses are unsustainable, especially for autistic adults. Many autistic adults felt pressured to overwork themselves to the point of burnout or deal with mistreatment because that is the status quo. The current culture has left many autistic adults far behind either because they break masking their issues to fit in or are held in ire for needing extra accommodations or help at the workplace that values profit above all else. The current economic climate is exacerbated by a lack of a social safety net for many autistic adults. MJP discusses how lack of affordable healthcare is a pressing issue,

“I just sit there and tell her a lot of mainstream medical insurance companies absolutely refuse to cover things like electric wheelchairs or specialized treatment. They're considered, "pre-existing" disorder. So it doesn't require him to cover it. I had a friend who went through something similar and she wasn't able to divorce from her husband until they could get her wheelchair covered. Because without his insurance out of pocket, her wheelchair would have been like 35,000 dollars. An electric wheelchair cost as much as a car.” BC shares on how a need for Universal Basic Income would help them and many others, “a UBI that covered basic needs so I didn't have to, when I was working, put as many hours in probably would have been huge for me because then I would have been able to still go and work on more of a part-time schedule, part-time didn't pay the bills so it didn't work. I wasn't able to, I didn't have enough spoons to be able to get through a workday. Day after and day after.” For many autistic adults, especially in the United States, work was the only thing that provided health insurance and money so that people do not starve. A more expansive safety net that includes universal health insurance and income will solve problems for many autistic adults. Health insurance should not be directly tied to employment. The adults can get much-needed therapies and diagnoses with universal health insurance and a basic income would afford work choice and flexibility for adults that are unable to work at least 8-hour days.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendation 1: Create more specific survey tools: There are many directions for future research into autism, self-determination, and employment. One potentially valuable field of study includes the development of self-determination assessments specifically geared towards autistic adults. The current study used the SDI: AR which

was developed for people with disabilities. However, the results from the survey were incongruous with what the research found in the interviews. The research found, based on the SDI: AR, that self-determination skills did not predict income nor vocational independence but the interviewees discussed how important self-determination skills were to their employment and lives in general. A specific self-determination inventory would include items to measure how autistic individuals disclose their condition, their self-knowledge as it relates to their autism, how often and what they do when they face potential burnout, how they ask for accommodations at work and in the community, their personals views of their autism and themselves, and how much agency they feel they have in their lives. Many of the interviewees discussed with the researcher the process of their diagnosis, their views on autism and themselves, burnout, accommodations, and advocacy. By developing an instrument to capture the voices of autistic adults, more rigorous and valid research will be created.

Recommendation 2: Create measures of job satisfaction for autistic employees: Future research in employment for autistic individuals should include job satisfaction. Current measures on employment for autistic people only capture basic definitions of satisfactory employment, amounts of working hours and income are the two most common variables included in the research. Less common employment variables include benefits such as vacation time and health insurance. While these variables are important for gainful employment, they do not capture the full picture of employment outcomes. The adults interviewed for the current study emphasized burnout. Ill-fitting job environments and roles and discriminatory treatment lead to anxiety and depression. Jobs where autistic adults felt they could make meaningful decisions in their work, were

valued for their input, and could effectively advocate for job accommodations was linked to job satisfaction based on the interviewee feedback. Research based on how autistic employees emotionally feel about their jobs and why they feel satisfied or dissatisfied will add to the knowledge base.

Recommendation 3: Research into more professional development programs: Research into professional development programs can positively impact the future of many autistic people. Past literature has only focused on a couple of job programs like Project SEARCH. While Project SEARCH and programs like it are valuable for autistic high school students, many more autistic adults remain unemployed without the support of an employment program. Some adults interviewed for the present study further highlight the lack of employment programs; some programs are limited to younger autistic people, many programs are tailored only to STEM fields (especially computer science and programming), and many programs remain inaccessible. LWW describes what they'd look for to help autistic people get jobs,

> So a lot of the ones that are close to what I would be looking for only service people in tech world, so unless you're a computer engineer or software engineer, like you don't use that before you, so it'd be great if there is a company that would help people find a job at a company that hires autistic people and hires them properly, not just for tech roles

Research into job development programs outside of STEM fields will address a critical need for many autistic adults and provide a larger group of autistic people the chance to get training and pursue a career that truly interests them.

Recommendation 4: Provide more transition programs for autistic students in high school and opportunities to use them: With more children diagnosed with autism in recent history, the population of autistic students in schools has significantly increased and the demand for transition services has followed. Despite the increase in autistic students and demand for high-quality transition programming, many teachers are struggling to find and implement curriculum to improve future employment outcomes. The literature found for the present study did not find many specific transition programs and the programs backed by research are sparse. Many teachers cite how funding cuts have further limited access to community transition programs and how deprioritizing transition programming has hurt employment outcomes (Crane et al., 2021). Government services are also impacted by funding cuts as they are less able to service autistic students who would benefit from transitional programming (Crane et al., 2021). Some interviewees from the present study corroborate how limited access and resources have negatively impacted their transition. KD discussed in his interview how transition planning failed them in preparing for work after high school; government services did not offer KD the help they needed. MG also had difficulties finding desirable career paths after high school and struggled in college because they did not know what they wanted to do. With better-equipped services, MG may have had more opportunities to explore career options and found a desirable field of study in college. The lack of services, supports, and programs limited many autistic students as they became adults; they often had to guess at potential job fields they would like and hoped for the best. The trial-and-error approach, based on the interviewees, has mostly led to frustration and aimlessness.

To improve employment outcomes for autistic people, greater investment in transition programs and education would give more options to autistic students and their families.

Conclusion

Employment outcomes for autistic adults remain a significant barrier. Past research has extensively highlighted how autistic individuals struggle to earn well-paying and full-time employment. The present study used a mixed-methods design to capture how self-determination skills and opportunities to practice these skills could improve income and vocational independence. Overall, results from the regression analysis did not find that self-determination skills significantly predicted income or vocational independence.

The autistic adults interviewed for the present study, however, provided evidence contrary to the regression analysis. The interviewees shared how they advocated for necessary accommodations, sought support, developed their own businesses, pursued advanced degrees, sought a formal diagnosis, and developed positive self-worth. The interviewees also described significant hurdles to employment: discriminatory treatment, bullying, denial of essential vocational services, being forced into undesirable jobs, low expectations, poor support systems, and being unable to make personal life and career decisions. Despite varying life outcomes, the interviewees endorsed common themes leading back to self-determination. Obtaining a formal autism diagnosis led to many autistic adults learning more about their condition and building their self-acceptance. Receiving individualized supports led the adults to believe that obtaining accommodations and services were impactful and worth the effort. Individuals who were not provided individualized supports, unaware of their autism, unable to get a diagnosis,

or faced discriminatory treatment masked to cope with an overall lack of support or knowledge to help themselves. Unfortunately, the adults who masked to cope with life and workplace stressors eventually succumbed to burnout. The autistic individuals who suffered burnout faced anxiety, depression, hopelessness, and felt lost. Overall, autistic individuals who were allowed to practice their self-determination skills and obtain helpful resources felt more positive about themselves which in turn supported them in advancing their careers and/or actively pursuing their passions. Adults who did not know to practice self-determination or were actively disallowed in using these skills resorted to masking their autism which in turn hindered their personal and professional development.

Despite the lack of support for self-determination from the regression analysis, the researcher found support for the relationship between self-determination and employment outcomes in the interviews. Not only did self-determination skills improve the employment outcomes of the autistic adults; they also improved their overall quality of life. For the future, capturing the voices of autistic adults in research should be mandatory. Autistic adults are an often-ignored group in research and their input is valuable if the research community seeks to address critical needs. Through inclusive research, professionals can improve the knowledge base on how best to help autistic individuals and significantly improve their lives.

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Appendix A

https://sdiprdwb.ku.edu/survey.php?pglnk=586096935

Figure 16

PHQ-9 Test

	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1. Over the *last 2 weeks*, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?				
a. Little interest or pleasure in doing things	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Trouble falling/staying asleep, sleeping too much	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Feeling tired or having little energy	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Poor appetite or overeating	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. Feeling bad about yourself or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down	☐	☐	☐	☐
g. Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television.	☐	☐	☐	☐
h. Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed. Or the opposite; being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual.	☐	☐	☐	☐
i. Thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way.	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. If you checked off any problem on this questionnaire so far, how difficult have these problems made it for you to do your work, take care of things at home, or get along with other people?	Not difficult at all ☐	Somewhat difficult ☐	Very difficult ☐	Extremely difficult ☐

Scoring:
Count the number (#) of boxes checked in a column. Multiply that number by the value indicated below, then add the subtotal to produce a total score. The possible range is 0-27. Use the table below to interpret the PHQ-9 score.

Not at all (#) _____ x 0 = _____
Several days (#) _____ x 1 = _____
More than half the days (#) _____ x 2 = _____
Nearly every day (#) _____ x 3 = _____

Total score: _____

Interpreting PHQ-9 Scores		**Actions Based on PH9 Score**	
		Score	**Action**
Minimal depression	0-4	< 4	The score suggests the patient may not need depression treatment
Mild depression	5-9		
Moderate depression	10-14	> 5 - 14	Physician uses clinical judgment about treatment, based on patient's duration of symptoms and functional impairment
Moderately severe depression	15-19		
Severe depression	20-27		
		> 15	Warrants treatment for depression, using antidepressant, psychotherapy and/or a combination of treatment.

Figure 17

GAD-7 Test

Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-Item (GAD-7) Scale

Name: Click here to enter text. **Date:** Click here to enter text.

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?	Not At All	Several Days	Over Half the Days	Nearly Every Day
1. Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge	☐ 0	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3
2. Not being able to stop or control worrying	☐ 0	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3
3. Worrying too much about different things	☐ 0	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3
4. Trouble relaxing	☐ 0	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3
5. Being so restless that it's hard to sit still	☐ 0	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3
6. Becoming easily annoyed or irritable	☐ 0	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3
7. Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen	☐ 0	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3
Add Scores for Each Column	☐ +	☐ +	☐ +	☐
Total Score (Sum of Column Scores)				

If any of the above problems were identified, how difficult have these made it for you to do your work, take care of things at home, or get along with other people?

☐ Not Difficult At All ☐ Somewhat Difficult ☐ Very Difficult ☐ Extremely Difficult

GAD-7 Important Notes and Scoring

The GAD-7 is based on the diagnostic criteria for GAD described in DSM-IV. *However, the GAD-7 is also sensitive to severity of symptoms of social phobia, post-traumatic stress disorder, and panic disorder.*

Please note: This questionnaire is designed for use by a health professional. Since the questionnaires rely on patient self-report, all responses should be verified by the clinician and a definitive diagnosis made on clinical grounds, taking into account how well the patient understood the questionnaire, as well as other relevant information from the patient (e.g., presence of DSM-IV GAD symptoms). A diagnosis of Generalized Anxiety Disorder should not be made based on GAD-7 scores alone.

A score of 10 or greater indicates that further evaluation is required.

Scoring Criteria: Total score (adding all the numbers) provides a possible score from 0-21.

GAD-7 Total Score Symptom Range

0-4 Minimal Anxiety
5-9 Mild Anxiety
10-14 Moderate Anxiety
15-21 Severe Anxiety

Figure 18

Vocational Activities and Vocational Environments Test

LIFE EXPLORER		
5. Demonstrates work habits through performing chores at home	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3
6. Demonstrates appropriate work habits: punctuality, task completion, ability to accept redirection and correction	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3
7. Participates in career preference counseling, situational assessments and discovery	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3
8. Participates in 3-5 work training/internship opportunities	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3
9. Participates in an in-depth community-based employment assessment	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3
10. Explores work opportunities by job shadowing, volunteering	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3
11. Participates in informational interviewing	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3
	Total _____ out of 35 = _____%	Total _____ out of 21 = _____%
LIFE SEEKER		
12. Demonstrates appropriate work habits: punctuality, task completion, ability to accept redirection and correction	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3
13. Participates in basic work-related social skills: appropriate communication, conversation and self-management	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3
14. Participates in a job training program and/or secures 6 week internship training opportunity	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3
15. Demonstrates work site specific safety skills	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3

RATING KEY

Level of Independence:

1 -- Does not do
2 -- Requires physical prompting to complete
3 -- Requires extensive prompting, verbal, model, pictorial or written
4 -- Requires limited prompting, gestural, verbal, pictorial or written
5 -- Requires no support (shadowing or independent with no supports)

Environments Where Performed:

1 -- None
2 -- One to two known natural environments
3 -- Generalized to three or more environments

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CAREER PATH AND EMPLOYMENT	Level of Independence	Environments Performed
16. Applies for jobs (completes a resume, prepares for job interview with or without support, secures appropriate interview clothes, secures proper identification to begin work)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3
	Total _____ out of 25 = _____%	Total _____ out of 15 = _____%

Figure 19

Taylor Vocational Scale

	Score	Category
Most independent	9	Employment in the community *without* supports greater than 10 h a week
	9	Postsecondary, *degree-seeking* educational program greater than 10 h a week
	8	Postsecondary, *degree-seeking* educational program or employment in the community *without* supports—total activities 10 h a week or less
	7	Employed in the community *with* supports greater than 10 h a week. No time spent in sheltered settings.
	6	Employed in the community *with* supports (no time spent in sheltered settings)—total activities 10 h a week or less
	5	Sheltered vocational setting and supported community employment—total activities greater than 10 h a week
	4	Sheltered vocational setting and volunteering in the community—total activities greater than 10 h a week
	4	Sheltered vocational setting (workshop or day activity center) with no community employment/volunteering—greater than 10 h a week.
	3	Sheltered vocational setting—total activities 10 h a week or less
	2	Volunteering with no other activities or postsecondary *non-degree seeking* education with no other activities
Least independent	1	No vocational/educational activities

Table 21

Flexibility Scale Revised

Transitions and Changes Scale

Think about your behavior DURING THE LAST TWO WEEKS for each question, and rate your behavior.

	0 = No or Not True
	1 = Somewhat or Sometimes True
	2 = Very Much or Often True
I have difficulty with changes in my routine/schedule.	3 = Almost Always or Always True
	0 = No or Not True
	1 = Somewhat or Sometimes True
	2 = Very Much or Often True
I am perfectionistic and do not tolerate error or small deviations.	3 = Almost Always or Always True
	0 = No or Not True
	1 = Somewhat or Sometimes True
I insist on sameness.	2 = Very Much or Often True

3 = Almost Always or Always True

0 = No or Not True

1 = Somewhat or Sometimes True

2 = Very Much or Often True

I closely follow rules.

3 = Almost Always or Always True
0 = No or Not True

1 = Somewhat or Sometimes True

2 = Very Much or Often True

I complain when asked to do things differently.

3 = Almost Always or Always True
0 = No or Not True

1 = Somewhat or Sometimes True

2 = Very Much or Often True

I can't shift gears even if I am told to do so.

3 = Almost Always or Always True
0 = No or Not True

1 = Somewhat or Sometimes True

2 = Very Much or Often True

I am generally insistent and like things to stay the way they are.

3 = Almost Always or Always True

Social Flexibility Scale

Think about your behavior DURING THE LAST TWO WEEKS for each question, and rate your behavior.

0 = No or Not True

1 = Somewhat or Sometimes True

2 = Very Much or Often True

I am a "good sport".

3 = Almost Always or Always True
0 = No or Not True

1 = Somewhat or Sometimes True

I share my possessions.

2 = Very Much or Often True

	3 = Almost Always or Always True
	0 = No or Not True
	1 = Somewhat or Sometimes True
	2 = Very Much or Often True
I am interested in other people's interests and hobbies.	3 = Almost Always or Always True
	0 = No or Not True
	1 = Somewhat or Sometimes True
	2 = Very Much or Often True
I have difficulty taking turns.	3 = Almost Always or Always True
	0 = No or Not True
	1 = Somewhat or Sometimes True
	2 = Very Much or Often True
I get upset when losing a game.	3 = Almost Always or Always True

Appendix B

Table 22

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Research Question	Interview Question 1	Interview Question 2
What self-determination capacity variables predict gainful, high-quality employment for autistic people?	What personal skills did you use to get your job?	What help did you need in finding your job?
How do the individual capacities (volitional action, agentic action, and action-control beliefs) of self-determination affect employment outcomes for autistic people?	What supports and services have helped you the most in finding or keeping a job?	What personal skills are most valuable in helping you perform your job?
What self-determination skills do autistic people	What would you recommend other autistic	What skills helped you overcome any difficulties you had at the job?

value the most in finding and maintaining high-quality employment?	people do to make getting a job easier?	
What makes autistic people satisfied with their employment?	What job do you or did you like the best? Why?	What help should other autistic people seek out to make a job more enjoyable or easier?

Appendix C

Table 23

Power Analysis Data Input Table

F tests – Linear multiple regression: Fixed model, R^2 increase

Analysis:	A priori: Compute required sample size	
Input:	Effect size f^2	= 0.15
	α err prob	= 0.01
	Power (1−β err prob)	= 0.99
	Number of tested predictors	= 3
	Total number of predictors	= 11
Output:	Noncentrality parameter λ	= 30.7500000
	Critical F	= 3.8846878
	Numerator df	= 3
	Denominator df	= 193
	Total sample size	= 205
	Actual power	= 0.9900655

Figure 20

Informed Consent for Participation in Study

Informed Consent for Participation in a Research Study

IRB # **NCR202777**: Making Work Work: Self-Determination Behaviors and Quality Employment for Autistic adults
Principal Investigator: Dr. Elisabeth Rice, Associate Professor, ***ehess@gwu.edu***, 202-994-1535 (GSEHD)

You are invited to participate in a research study under the direction of Dr. Elisabeth Rice in Department of Special Education and Disability Studies in The Graduate School of Education and Human Development, at The George Washington University (GWU). Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary. Further information regarding this study may be obtained by contacting Dr. Elisabeth Rice, Associate Professor, ehess@gwu.edu, at telephone number (202) 549-3222.

My doctoral student, Adam Berman, and I are conducting a study to explore how self-determination affects the employment of autistic adults and the quality of employment. The purpose of this study is to gain a greater understanding of how teaching self-determination and practicing self-determination impacts employment for autistic adults. We are interested in interviewing and surveying autistic adults who meet the following criteria: (1) are employed or ever have been employed and (2) are 18 years or older.

There will be a electronic survey that will take 15-30 minutes to complete and one interview lasting 30 to 45 minutes in length. After completion of the survey, you will be placed into a drawing to receive a $25 gift card. After the completion of the interview, you will receive a $10 gift card to thank you for your time. There may also be one follow-up phone conversation lasting no more 10 - 20 minutes. Your identity and recorded data will be kept private and confidential throughout the study, and no identifying information will be shared.

The purpose of this study is to gain a greater understanding of how teaching self-determination and practicing self-determination impacts employment for autistic adults. In this study:

- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

You are being asked to take part in a research study about your employment experiences as an autistic adult. Your participation is completely voluntary. You have been found eligible for this study because you meet the following criteria: (1) You are currently employed or have been employed in the past and (2) You are over the age of 18.

This page will give you key information to help you decide whether or not you want to participate in this study. More detailed information can be found on the next pages.

Figure 21

Recruitment Email

Dear[[Name of Participant],

My doctoral student, Adam Berman, and I are conducting a study to explore how self-determination affects the employment of autistic adults and the quality of employment. The purpose of this study is to gain a greater understanding of how teaching self-determination and practicing self-determination impacts employment for autistic adults. We are interested in interviewing and surveying autistic adults who meet the following criteria: (1) are employed or ever have been employed and (2) are 18 years or older.

There will be a electronic survey that will take 15-30 minutes to complete and one interview lasting 30 to 45 minutes in length. After the completion of the interview, you will receive a $25 gift card to thank you for your time. There may also be one follow-up phone conversation lasting no more 10 - 20 minutes. Your identity and recorded data will be kept private and confidential throughout the study, and no identifying information will be shared.

Attached to this email is an informed consent document for potential participants that provides further details about our study. After reviewing this document, if you are interested in participating in the study, please contact me via email *ehess@gwu.edu* or

phone *(202-549-3222).*

If you or any other Autism Society of America (or ARC) members who you believe could contribute to this research study, please feel free to pass this message along.

Thank you in advance for your consideration to participate in this research

Sincerely,

Dr. Elisabeth Rice
Associate Professor and Chair
Special Education and Disability Studies Department
ehess@gwu.edu
202-549-3222

Adam Berman
Doctoral Student
brrman77@gwmail.gwu.edu
301-928-9078

Figure 22

Phone/Email Conversation Protocol

Hello _____,

How are you today?

I am calling to see if you would be interested in participating in a research study that I am working on, to explore self-determination and its effects on employment for autistic adults.

The purpose of this study is to gain a greater understanding of how teaching self-determination and practicing self-determination impacts employment for autistic adults. I am interested in interviewing and surveying autistic adults who are employed or ever have been employed and are 18 years or older.

If you are interested in participating in this study, I would like to set up a time for us to discuss
your experiences. Please email me!

Thank you,

Dr. Elisabeth Rice
Associate Professor and Chair
Special Education and Disability Studies Department
ehess@gwu.edu
202-549-3222

Adam Berman
Doctoral Student
Brrman77@gwmail.gwu.edu
301-928-9078

Figure 23

Follow up Email for Interviewee

Dear [Name of Participant],

> Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. The purpose of this study is to gain a greater understanding of how teaching self-determination and practicing self-determination impacts employment for autistic adults. We believe that learning of the employment experiences of autistic adults will help autistic people, professionals, and schools learn what skills can lead to gainful and high-quality employment.

We are interested in interviewing and surveying autistic adults who meet the following criteria: (1) are employed or ever have been employed and (2) are 18 years or older. We believe that hearing the voices of autistic adults will provide valuable and unique perspective on how to address and improve employment for autistic people. There will be an electronic survey that will take 15-30 minutes to complete and one interview lasting 30 to 45 minutes in length. After the completion of the interview, you may receive a $25 gift card to thank you for your time. There may also be one follow-up phone

conversation lasting no more 10 – 20 minutes. Your identity and recorded data will be kept private and confidential throughout the study, and no identifying information will be shared.

Your identity and recorded data from the interview will be kept private and confidential throughout the study, and no identifying information will be shared. While email addresses will be linked to the data, in order to contact you, all personally identifiable information will be confidential and will be stored separately from the data at all times. The only people with access to the data will be the research team. All correspondence and data will be destroyed after the completion of this study.

If you are interested in participating in the study and sharing your experiences, please let me know a convenient date and time to meet via videoconference (Zoom or Webex). At the time of the interview, I will review with you the study's goals and interview process, as well as the measures to prevent any personally identifying information from being shared. Please be assured that respecting your privacy and confidentiality is of primary concern to us. Participation in this study is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any point in time. Thank you for taking the time to review this and for considering participating in this study. We are excited about the possibility of your participation. Please email (ehess@gwu.edu) or phone/text at (202-549-3222).

Sincerely,

Dr. Elisabeth Rice
Associate Professor and Chair
Special Education and Disability Studies Department
ehess@gwu.edu

Adam Berman
Doctoral Student
brrman77@gwmail.gwu.edu

Figure 24

Interview Confirmation Email

Dear [Name of Confirmed Participant],

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of my research. As previously agreed, the interview will take place on [date] at [format/location name and address] starting at [time]. The interview should take approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Approximately two-four weeks after your
interview, you will be sent an email asking if you would agree to a short follow-up phone conversation of approximately 10-20 minutes at which time you will be given an opportunity to
offer any additional sharing of experiences. You may request to decline the follow-up phone call.

As you know, the purpose of this study is to gain a greater understanding of the experiences of key staff who interface with both students and teachers. Before the interview goes ahead, I would like to be sure you are aware of the following:

- The George Washington University Office of Human Research has given permission for
  this research to be carried out.
- With your permission, the interview will be video and audio-recorded. The interviews will be conducted via Zoom or Webex videoconferencing software.
- A transcript will be sent to you after the interview.
- Your confidentiality will be maintained, and no comments will be ascribed to you by
  name in any written document or verbal presentation. Nor will any data be used from the
  interview that might identify you to a third party.
- You are free to withdraw from the research at any time.
- You are free to request that your data not be used in this research study.
- I will write to you upon completion of the research and a copy of the final research report
  will be made available to you upon request.

If you have any questions regarding the nature of the research and your participation or are
unclear about any of the provided information, please contact me at (ehess@gwu.edu) or phone (202-549-3222).Thank you again for taking the time to help me with my research. I look forward to our interview on [date] at [time].

Sincerely,

Dr. Elisabeth Rice Adam Berman

Special Education and Disability Studies
The George Washington University
ehess@gwu.edu
202-549-3222

Doctoral Student
brrman77@gwmail.gwu.edu