

Autism Spectrum Disorder in the workplace: How does the timing of disclosure decisions affect
selection ratings?

Kyshira Simmons

Dr. Mark Frame

Middle Tennessee State University

Abstract

Despite the increase of working adults with an ASD diagnosis in society (Burgess & Cimera, 2014; Hensel, 2017), research has not addressed whether disclosure of one's ASD diagnosis results in differing decision-making outcomes as it relates to hiring and selection in the workplace. As more individuals with ASD enter the workforce, the need to know whether their diagnosis may serve as a limiting factor in this process will be a pressing concern of this population. The goal of this research aims to provide some initial insight as to when and how to disclose one's diagnosis to not only ensure their protection through current ADA laws, but also to instill a sense of confidence in these individuals as they pursue careers in a working society. The present study will focus on the extent to which disclosure of an ASD diagnosis during the hiring process could impact the downstream employment decisions made by employers. The findings of this study could make a meaningful contribution to the research in ASD and more importantly it could provide guidance and best practices for those with an ASD diagnosis when they are seeking employment.

Individuals with disabilities continue to be one of the largest unemployed groups in the United States (BLS, 2020). For physical disabilities, research shows that unemployment rates tend to be lower than those with learning or developmental disabilities (Roberts & Macan, 2006; Summer & Brown, 2015). One such group with neurodevelopmental disabilities, individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), continues to be an underemployed population within the U.S. and the antecedents and consequences of the underemployment of individuals with ASD is not well researched or understood. In the United States, the diagnostic rate for ASD continues to increase, therefore individuals with ASD seeking practical work experiences will also increase. While laws protect applicants and employees with ASD, the role that possible bias and attitudes towards individuals with ASD and how those might impact those seeking employment, is under researched. Unlike some other learning or developmental disabilities, ASD can manifest in behaviors and mannerisms that are salient to untrained observers and could likely be inaccurately interpreted by employers (Hensel, 2017; Patton, 2019). This study will be conducted using video recordings of mock interviews and an actor portraying signs of ASD, which include lack of eye contact, staggered speech as it relates to ambiguous questions, and other indicators of reduced emotional intelligence. During the interview, six (6) questions will be asked, each question will receive an individual rating, and then an overall selection decision will be made by the participant. This study will look at three conditions of disclosure in order to determine their impact on overall hiring. These conditions will be early, late, and no disclosure of one's ASD diagnosis. Multivariate Analysis of variance will be conducted to determine the impact that our independent variable has on our dependent variables. If results reveal that our hypotheses are correct, the practical implications that follow should substantially impact the direction of research for this population in regard to employment and selection.