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HELP WANTED: PERCEPTIONS OF EMPLOYMENT BY YOUNG ADULTS WITH AUTISM AND THEIR PARENTS

A DISSERTATION

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By

Kathleen R. Purcell

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Janice Myck-Wayne, Chair
Associate Professor, Erica Howell, College of Education
Expert Member, Richard Rosenberg, California State University, Los Angeles

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The dissertation research proposal of Kathleen R. Purcell
is approved and is acceptable in quality and form
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Approved by:

Janice Myck-Wayne, Committee Chair

Erica Howell, College of Education

Richard Rosenberg, Expert Practitioner

California State University, Fullerton

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ABSTRACT

There is a distinct employment gap between disabled and non-disabled young adults with disabilities. Unemployment numbers are even higher for adults with autism. Recent statistics show Autism Spectrum Disorder is the fastest growing developmental disorder. The problem this dissertation addressed is the perceptions of employment experienced by young adults with autism and their parents. The literature review was perceived through the lens of a social justice view and disability theory. The review summarized overviews of special education policies, autism, and employment.

The purpose of this research was to give voice to the autism community through a qualitative single case study with multiple participants. Six high school graduates between the ages of 18-24 and their parents participated in individual semi-structured interviews. Questions were asked about participants' perceptions of the employment journey and perceptions of services received through the Individualized Transition Plan. Four participants made their Individualized Education Plans, Individualized Transition Plans, and psychological reports available.

Four themes emerged from the data collection: impact of autism on employment, social skills training, disclosure and self-advocacy, and expectations of students and parents about teachers. Data implied that a majority of young adult participants did not feel their disability would affect employment, whereas most parents believed autism would negatively impact future employment. Participants did not correlate social skills training to successful employment. No participants had a full understanding of the importance of self-disclosure or clear understanding of workplace accommodations. Half of parent participants were pleased with how their school districts serve students with disabilities, while the other half felt services should be continued, regardless of cost. The data led me to make several implications and recommendations.

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To my wonderful sons, whose support knows no bounds,

and

To the field of education which has given me not only a living, but a passion.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

How do you define yourself? Quite often, a typical adult will define himself by his occupation. With the 2013 unemployment rate at 8.9% in California (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013), and the national teen unemployment rate at 29% (Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, & Beard, 2010), there are many who may feel lost regarding how they define themselves. These numbers describe employable adults and youth who have the skills to find a job and keep a job. What if one doesn't have the skills to gain employment? Studies show this is the predicament facing young adults with disabilities, as the unemployment rate for adults with disabilities is higher than that of their nondisabled peers, although many of those disabled adults are interested in employment (Cimera, 2009; Cimera & Cowan, 2009; McDonough & Revell, 2010).

There is a distinctive gap between disabled and non-disabled working-aged young adults (Burke, Andersen, Bowen, Howard, & Allen, 2010). According to U.S. Department of Labor statistics from May 2013, the employment rate for non-disabled young adults aged 16 to19 is 26.4%, while the employment rate for young adults with a disability is 13.1%. The 2013 employment rate for young adults aged 20 to 24 without a disability is 61.7%, with the rate for the same age group with disabilities is 32% (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013). Unemployment numbers rise dramatically for transition-aged young adults identified with autism (McDonough & Revell, 2010). Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) go through higher joblessness, underemployment, more changes of jobs, and make less money than their typically developing peers (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009).

Background of the Problem

Autism is the fastest growing identified developmental disability as reported by the U.S. Department of Education (Cimera & Cowen, 2009). Autism is characterized as a developmental disability (Schaller & Yang, 2005), while behaviors are distinguished by communicative disorders, both verbal and nonverbal, weakness in social skills, and recurring, cyclical behavior (Schaller & Yang, 2005). This disability ranges in form from mild to severe, persisting throughout adulthood (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009). Autism disorders involve as many as one in 68 people, with one in 42 males affected (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). Analysis verified that the number of autism-identified individuals "has increased by more than 121 percent from 2002 to 2006" (Cimera & Cowen, 2009, p. 285). For the purposes of this study, *autism* refers to high-functioning autism, Asperger's Syndrome, ASD, pervasive development disorder, and pervasive development disorder, not otherwise specified.

Undoubtedly, the maladaptive behavior of the young person with autism impedes employment success. Behaviors can include self-injury, aggression (Taylor & Seltzer, 2011), and lack of social skills (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009). Research concluded that social interactions impede successful job placement for young adults and adults with autism (Yokotani, 2011). While young adults with autism can complete the job duties necessary for a particular job, it is the hidden social rules that he or she cannot master (Yokotani, 2011). Yet with the appropriate assistance, “experience has demonstrated that individuals with autism can work in a variety of community-based businesses and industries” with support services (Schaller & Yang, 2005, p. 4).

While nobody denies the inherent difficulties awaiting employment for young adults with autism, there are few studies from which to draw solutions (Burke et al., 2010; Hendricks & Wehman, 2009; Schaller & Yang, 2005; Taylor & Seltzer, 2011). Employment levels, salary, and closure rates measuring the time between unemployment and successful employment are available through Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies. The federally funded VR agency assists adults with disabilities in their employment search. VR statistics do not provide long-term information regarding successful use of social skills, promotions, or increased work hours following closure. Participation with VR does not guarantee success. VR clients identified with autism showed more work success than other disability groups, although they were paid less and worked fewer hours than disabled peers with other than ASD. These clients typically receive additional resources, such as supported employment provided by another state agency (McDonough & Revell, 2010).

Problem Statement

The problem this study addresses is the employment experiences faced by young adults with autism. Transition-aged young adults are ages 16 to 22.

When a young person receives a high school diploma, all compensatory educational services are terminated. When further transitional services are necessary, the student will become ineligible for educational services on his 22nd birthday. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the federal law that guides schools and educators in providing special education services to children aged 3 to 22, including important transition services for young adults over the age of 16 in the areas of training, education, and independent living skills (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Admittedly, transition from high school can be an arduous process for any young person. For young adults with disabilities, this process is decidedly more difficult (McDonough & Revell, 2010). When students graduate with a diploma, or turn age 22, they are no longer entitled to services allowed by IDEA. Unfortunately, federal and state human services programs define disability differently than does the education system, and those programs are not as readily available (McDonough & Revell, 2010). Some services take into account the severity of the handicapping condition, while others require a legal document verifying disability. The label of autism does not ensure assistance will be provided. In 2005, only one in five post-secondary young adults reported affiliation with VR (McDonough & Revell, 2010).

While the majority of young people with autism remain unemployed (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009), studies show that individuals with autism can be successful workers (McDonough & Revell, 2010). Employment is recognized as an integral component the quality of life of an individual with disability (Burke et al., 2010). With the appropriate social skills tools and transition services education, young adults with disabilities can meet the challenge of finding employment. "For many of us, our job helps define our identity, so it is unfortunate that employment is an area which presents such significant challenges for individuals with ASD" (Burke et al., 2010, p. 1231).

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research was to describe the perceptions of employment among young adults with autism and their parents. This study was focused primarily in Orange County, California and sought to understand the influence the Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) has on developing independent employment. The ITP is part of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that focuses on the transition needs of students with an IEP in the areas of education, employment, and community after high school. Young adults with autism and their parents shared their employment search experiences through interviews. The research aimed to provide a voice to young adults with autism and their parents through a single case study with multiple participants.

More children are being identified with autism (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). Much of the focus has been on early childhood intervention. As this population ages, the new concern is the ability of young adults with autism to achieve independence. The audience for this research comprises professionals who serve young adults via school districts, government agencies, and community service organizations. The intent is to describe the employment experiences of this population, demarcate any occupational strengths and challenges, and provide information that may lead to improving transition services.

Research Questions

1. How do young adults with autism describe their experiences in seeking and maintaining employment?
2. How do young adults with autism describe the impact of supports they received from their ITP in high school and how it relates to their employment experience?
3. How do parents perceive their child's journey to independent employment?
4. How do parents describe the impact of supports their children received from their ITP in high school as it relates to their employment journey?

The purpose of these questions was to explore the experiences of the autism community, comprising young adults and parents, as they maneuver the independent world of employment. The initial query of young adults with disabilities was to discuss their perceptions of the journey toward securing a job and solicit personal stories giving a voice to employment statistics. The second research question attempted to find a connection between transition services provided through the high school IEP and young adult's employment experiences to inform stakeholders on how to improve services to this group. Furthermore, parents were questioned about perceptions of their child's experience, which may assist in chronicling the narrative of young adult's understandings of transition and employment.

Significance of the Study

This research is important and makes a significant contribution to educational leadership because while it is implicit that young adults with disabilities struggle with employment, there is little research to delineate those barriers, especially for young adults with autism. When young adults with disabilities terminate their mandated educational services, they feel apprehension about accessing services as an adult. Subsequently, there is little research to evaluate how well young adults with disabilities, especially autism, claim those benefits in Orange County, California.

Recent studies about the rising number of children being identified with autism have brought the disorder into the national conversation. Many discussions center on the early years of identification: proper diagnosis, early intervention, and assistance with social skills instruction. Children with special needs do not outgrow their disabilities. These same difficulties experienced by children with autism impede the natural progress that many maturing young adults face in areas of employment, independence, and identity. This study seeks to bring clarity to this emerging struggle.

Scope of the Study

This study researched the perceptions of young adults with autism and their parents about employment. These young adults have graduated from high school with a diploma, not a certificate of completion. Participants reside in

Southern California and have attended high schools in this area. They have passed the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) with either a pass or a waiver. Participants have been identified with autism. The young adult participants are interested in employment. Parent participants support their adult child's interest in employment.

Assumptions of the Study

Several suppositions are made in the study. It is assumed that young adults and parents were participating voluntarily and made truthful statements to the researcher. Copies of psychological and medical records were not required for participation; therefore, it is implicit that a parent-reported diagnosis of autism is correct. Proof of graduation was not needed for participation, and young adult-reported data sufficed. Proof of employment history was not necessary. It is assumed that self-reported data is factual.

Study Delimitations

This study is delimited to the experiences of a purposeful sample in Orange County, California over a four-month period in 2013-2014. The participants met the criteria of being high school graduates aged 18 to 24 with a diagnosis of autism who are interested in employment; the parents of contributing young adults also participated. Participating young adults with autism had average to above-average cognitive functioning, which is defined in the field as over 70 Intelligence Quotient. An average cognitive ability can be assumed if a student earns a high school diploma, passes the CAHSEE, and is not conserved in the area of education. Higher functioning students have the capacity to be more independent, yet they tend to be under-served by adult support agencies. Findings from this study cannot be generalized to the larger population of young adults with autism, nor can conclusions drawn regarding effectiveness of support services be considered valid outside of the selected population.

Study Limitations

Participants volunteered for this experience. Their involvement was based on their schedule, their ability to find transportation to the interview setting, and their employment status. This study cannot be generalized to the larger community of young adults with autism outside of Orange County, California. This study cannot be generalized to young adults with comorbidity, such as intellectual disability or epilepsy. The limited numbers of participants also preclude generalization. Additional limitations include the effectiveness of the instruments developed by the researcher and the willingness and ability of participants to be forthright and truthful.

Definitions of Key Terms

Accommodations on the job refer to those supports to which an employee with a disability is entitled to in order to support employment by lessening the effects of a disability (Timmons, Podmostko, Bremer, Lavin, & Wills, 2005).

Autism refers to "a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences" (Timmons et al., 2005).

Autism community refers to young adults with autism and their parents, for the purpose of this study.

Closure means that the Department of Rehabilitation client's case file has been closed, due to successful employment for at least 90 days (California Department of Rehabilitation, 2011).

Department of Rehabilitation (DR)/Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) refer to a federal agency that supports people with disabilities in their vocational endeavors (Batshaw, 1998).

Eligibility refers to being entitled to IDEA-mandated special education services due to a disability and need for educational services (Timmons et al., 2005).

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) refers to educational services for students identified with a disability that are provided free of charge at public expense (Blackmon, 2008).

Hidden Disabilities refers to disabilities that are not readily noticeable (Timmons et al., 2005).

Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) refers to a written plan for a school-aged child with a disability based on the federal law of IDEA (Timmons et al., 2005).

Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) refers to the employment goal created by Department of Rehabilitation and client (California Department of Rehabilitation, 2011).

Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) refers to a written plan for a child aged 16 and over receiving special education services to assist in planning for post-secondary education/training, employment, and independent living skills (Timmons et al., 2005).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) refer to the federal law which defines and monitors educational directives (Batshaw, 1998).

Job Coaching refers to assistance given to a person while on the job (http://www.rehab.cahwnet.gov/Glossary/index.html).

Placement refers to the setting in which the special education service is delivered (J. Lerner, 1997).

Self-determination refers to the self-awareness and self-advocacy skills possessed by a young adult (Test & Cease-Cook, 2012).

Speech-language pathology services refer to communicative services usually provided by a Speech and Language Pathologist (Batshaw, 1998).

Supported employment refers to formalized provisions given to adults with disabilities while on the job. This can range from accommodations to job coaching and job placement services (Batshaw, 1998).

Transition-aged young adult refers to young adults between the ages of 16 and 22 (Timmons et al., 2005).

Transition Services refers to the services provided to young adults aged 16 to 22 to prepare for postsecondary education, employment, and independent living skills (Timmons et al., 2005).

Vocational education refers to programs that support employment readiness (Batshaw, 1998).

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 introduced the problem statement and research questions. Chapter 2 presented a critical review of the literature pertaining to the research questions. Chapter 3 described the research design, including data collection and methods of analysis. Chapter 4 presented findings from the data collection. Chapter 5 submitted results and conclusions from the findings.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter 2 is divided into three parts. The chapter begins with the theoretical foundation and conceptual framework that guided this study and a review of the relevant literature. The chapter concludes with a summary and a look at the implications for this study. The research questions this study investigated encompass the employment experiences of young adults with autism and their parents. Additionally, young adults with autism and their parents described the impact of supports they received from the ITP in high school and how it related to their employment experience.

Theoretical Foundation

Maxine Greene exhorts educators to bring philosophy out of books and into real life. "To do philosophy is to become highly conscious of the many facets of the world as it presents itself to consciousness, to be 'wide awake' to new possibilities" (as cited in O'Brien, 2000, p. 22). Current educators may benefit from a jolt to become wide awake as Greene commands. For educators, this means opening ourselves to new methods to complete routine tasks while we view each student as an individual, especially those in marginalized populations. Social justice is attainable, one student at a time. Mertens (2010) reinforces the vision of “vulnerable populations” deserving value and security (p. 11). This position is the foundation of my research.

The theoretical foundation for this study—of the perceptions of employment of young adults with autism and their parents—is based on the philosophy of social justice. Johnson (2008) characterized social justice as “the fair, equitable and impartial distribution of the resources, opportunities and benefits of society to all of its members, regardless of position, place or other exclusionary criteria deemed unfair” (p. 303). His definition recognizes sentiments of oppression, democracy and economic gaps that many deem central to this discussion. Furthermore, his description can easily be applied within the reach of education, given that marginalized groups exist within education, as it mirrors society.

Watson (2012) spoke of disability theory’s recognizing the individual versus the collective, especially in divisions of power: “political, social, and cultural experiences” (p. 194). Theorists no longer look at the physical or mental deficit, but at the way society reacts to the disability. What is society’s response to disability (Sleeter, 2010), and who holds power (Pothier & Devlin, 2006)? “The goal of critical disability theory is to challenge these assumptions and presumptions so that persons with disabilities can more fully participate in contemporary society” (Pothier & Devlin, 2006, p. 2). This investigation anticipates learning about the perspective of the autism community and their viewpoints on employment. The aspiration is to gain information to empower these young adults and enhance their employment opportunities.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this research extends from three areas of study: (a) special education policies and their implications for transition services, (b) the analysis of autism as an educational disability, and (c) research literature on employment challenges experienced by young adults with autism. The review of literature begins with the history of current federal law and how it seeks to provide transition services through the IEP process. A second section provides an overview of the literature pertaining to the characteristics of autism, and how those qualities may act as barriers to success in school, and ultimately, the workplace. The third section reviews studies related to the employment barriers faced by young adults with autism. This final segment includes data from the public agencies that provide vocational services.

Review of the Scholarly Empirical Literature

Overview of Special Education Laws and Policies

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of special education policies, including the background of federal mandates that inform educators about how to serve students with special needs. How those mandates affect graduation and transition services was also scrutinized.

Historical background for IDEA. IDEA provides current federal guidelines for how to serve students with disabilities ages 3 to 22. The Civil Rights era in the United States was influential not only in terms of the meaningful changes it brought to ethnicity and gender issues, but also by its focus on disability inequities. The 1970s saw adoption of human rights not only in the area of gender discrimination, but also in disability parity (Greene, 2007). Prior to this legislation, there was no set policy regarding how to educate children with disabilities. States and local educational areas created their own systems, which left one million children outside the school system and four million children who did not receive appropriate services (Egnor, 1996; Greene, 2007). But the Disability Rights movement, along with a social justice perspective empowered by Civil Rights advances, "has been to change the way the work is constructed so that everyone can participate in life's activities to the greatest extent possible" (Loewen & Pollard, 2010, p. 6).

Initial public policy centered on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, where states could choose to utilize federal dollars to educate students with disabilities. Congress continued the voluntary nature of serving these students with Public Law 91-230, also known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 1970 (Boyer, 1979; Egnor, 1996). Two court decisions, *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens v. Commonwealth* (1971) and *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* (1972), resulted in the shift of responsibility for educating students with disabilities from the federal level to the states and local educational areas (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 introduced Section 504, which "guarantees the rights of handicapped individuals to jobs and services in school" (Boyer, 1979, p. 299). The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 evolved into Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975), which determined that every child with special needs should be provided the same educational possibilities as their non-disabled peers (Egnor, 1996, p. 195).

PL 94-142 became known as the Bill of Rights for the Handicapped (Egnor, 1996), and it had six essential set of guidelines for children ages 6 to 17:

> (a) entitlement to a free and appropriate education, (b) use of nondiscriminatory evaluation procedures for identification and placement, (c) development and implementation of an IEP, (d) education in the least restrictive environment, (e) access to procedural due process, and (f) parent participation and shared decision making. (Egnor, p. 195)

The severity of the child's disability had no impact on services offered. By 1975, it was federal policy to educate all children at public expense (Boyer, 1979). There have been multiple re-authorizations to PL 94-142, expanding services from birth to age 22, defining transition services for older students, and initiating early intervention (Egnor, 1996). In 1990, this statute was renamed Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA was revamped again by President George W. Bush, becoming effective in 2005, with final regulations published in 2006 (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Yet adequacy of service is not guaranteed by legislation.

IDEA requires systematic reviews of IEPs to ensure student needs are being met (Ruble, McGrew, Dalrymple, & Jung, 2010). A small study of several districts in one southern and one Midwestern state, queried 35 teachers of students with autism to gauge IEP quality, using the IEP Evaluation Tool. The study criteria utilized eight markers, including clear present levels of performance, connection between present levels of performance and curriculum, and techniques to measure goals (Ruble et al., 2010). Researchers found that IEP quality was poor across all sites. Children with experienced teachers did not fare any better than those with less experienced educators. In fact, "not only was there no apparent improvement in IEP quality with more experience teaching children with autism, there was evidence for poorer quality IEPs with more experience" (Ruble et al., 2010, p. 1465). These researchers also found inadequate teacher preparations and IEPs to be lacking in areas of: social and communication goals, accommodations, and specific interventions.

IDEA and high school graduation. Prior to the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a student with a disability was found to be meeting goals and objectives with a sole focus on an IEP. An IEP is the guiding document agreed upon by student, parent, and district regarding the course of academic and transition services provided. After NCLB, school districts were accountable for reporting graduation rates (Schifter, 2011), and California changed criteria for graduation via the CAHSEE. Education Code Section 60852.3 creates an exemption for young adults with disabilities in that they may receive a diploma if all state criteria are met and CAHSEE has not been passed (California Department of Education, 2012).

NCLB and IDEA differ regarding high school graduation. NCLB expects students to graduate from high school with competency in all areas within four years. IDEA allows students with disabilities to continue receiving special education services through their 21st year (Schifter, 2011). Graduating with a diploma terminates all special education services. Graduating with a certificate of completion extends special education services through age 22. Although a diploma is often desired by the parent, transition services can continue for four more years and meet non-academic needs of the student.

Schools would prefer students to graduate if they are able to meet the academic criteria. A post-school outcomes survey gathering information from 2003 to 2006 and focusing on 1,888 students with an IEP in high school, showed the methods of exit from secondary schools at a different rate with 450 students (24%) graduating with a diploma, 1,350 students (72%) finishing high school without a diploma, with 79 (4%) dropping out, aging out, or documented as "status unknown" (Curtis, Rabren, & Reilly, 2009, p. 33). The 2012 graduation rates for young adults receiving special education services in Orange County is 71.7%, while the California rate is 60.8% (Ed-Data, 2013).

Schools already have a financial motive to graduate students with an IEP in four years, because of the higher cost of services to educate a student with a disability compared to a student without a disability. Schifter (2011) wrote, "Because IDEA services are terminated once a student graduates from high school, the pressure on the school may prevent students from continued access to the services they need" (p. 410). The debate is further complicated by regulations from NCLB. By creating a system that favors students that graduate with a diploma, NCLB has put pressure on schools to reconsider the importance of transition needs for students with disabilities (Schifter, 2011).

IDEA and transition. The 2006 re-authorization of IDEA prioritized the transition process for students aged 16. It required transition planning as a focus of the IEP process (Hetherington et al., 2010). While it eliminated transition planning for young adults aged 14, it added measureable goals for young adults aged 16 in areas of "training, education, employment, and where appropriate, independent living skills" (Hetherington et al., 2010, p. 164). IDEA transition regulations include several important features. In addition to new high school and beyond-transition goal requirements, the child is now invited to attend IEP meetings that discuss transition services, as is any agency that may be providing services to the student in the future (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

These transformations changed the focus from a standards-based curriculum to one centered upon independent living skills, such as life skills, employability, and self-advocacy working towards autonomy (Hetherington et al., 2010). With these changes, the federal government stressed the responsibility of school districts for providing transition services. The significance of these changes is to refine the focus from academic needs to post-secondary basics that students must master in order to be successful adults. IDEA recognizes that a diploma alone will not predict education, employment, and independent living success in attaining a high quality of life for young people with disabilities.

Not all special educators feel expert in delivering these essential transition services to their students. Findings from 84 special education teachers surveyed on transition assessments showed educators received their transition strategies from other colleagues (60%), instead of from evidence-based research (Thoma, Held, & Saddler, 2002). Furthermore, although students did attend transition meetings, teachers reported they did not utilize evidence-based best practices, such as role-playing before transition meetings, using person-centered planning, or getting student input prior to developing ITP goals. Teachers reported that while 97% of students attended their ITP meetings, only 5% of those students plan and lead those meetings (Thoma et al., 2002).

Additional studies confirmed the findings by Thoma et al. (2002). Finn and Kohler (2010) confirmed the need for better supports in their qualitative study which found parents perceived obstacles from administrators and teachers in transition planning. Hetherington et al. (2010) found both parents and students experienced frustrations in working with school personnel in transition planning.

Over the last several years, young people with disabilities have not succeeded in the same manner as have their typical peers, facing substandard employment, educational, and social circumstances (Schifter, 2011). The emphasis the federal government put on transition is a positive facet of IDEA, because it focused educational organizations on supporting independence for young adults with disabilities.

Overview of Autism

This section presents examination of the disability of autism from psychiatric and educational viewpoints. Characteristics of autism that may present barriers at work and school, including social skills deficits, are described.

Structure of providing special education services. As federal regulations change, the program structure of schools and classrooms must adjust accordingly. This concept assumes the delivery method of special education services that emanate from the federal level, to the state, to the district, will successfully arrive in a teacher's classroom. NCLB adds another level of academic mandates, without taking into account a disabled student's specialized needs (Vannest, Hagan-Burke, Parker, & Soares, 2011). The school site administrator is the hierarchical leader of the school and determines how services will be implemented to meet student needs (Crockett, 2007). School principals, along with parents, have the greatest awareness of special education laws.

However, parent advocacy groups complain that issues with administrators can be a source of discord. "Among the more common flashpoints for conflict are administrator decisions on student programming and placement being made unilaterally, in the absence of any consultation or input from parents" (Zaretsky, 2004, p. 64). While IEP interaction is intended to be mutual, the power tends to lie with the administrator. Principals feel that factors beyond local control impact the structure of services being provided, yet parents would prefer their contributions be part of the process (Zaretsky, 2004).

A qualitative study based in the United Kingdom discussed the perceived imbalance of power. Although small in number, the parents of six children, ages 12-13, identified with autism participated. The focus group, made up of parents and school staff members, communicated the importance of relationship in successful transition planning. Eighteen staff members described the significance of interactions between home and school. The importance of staff's knowledge of autism fostered good practice, in the opinion of parents (Dann, 2011).

Educational definition of autism. Kanner first documented autism as a syndrome in 1943 (MacFarlane & Kanaya, 2009). Yet it was many decades until autism was recognized as a clinical disorder by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in 1980 (MacFarlane & Kanaya, 2009). The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,* 5th ed. (DSM-TR, 2013), defines ASD as being characterized "by persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts, including deficits in social reciprocity, nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction, and skills in developing, maintain, and understanding relationships" (APA, 2013, p. 31). The DSM-IV identified additional syndromes that fall under the umbrella of autism, including ASD, high-functioning autistic syndrome disorder, and pervasive development disorder not otherwise specified (Cashin & Barker, 2009).

Although the clinical definition from the APA may be used by medical professionals, school districts do not utilize this designation. A school does not diagnose a child, but it determines whether or not a child is eligible for extra services through special education. IDEA is the federal regulation that defines the areas of disability for children receiving services through a school district. An assessment team, made up of parents, teachers, and educational professionals including a school psychologist, determine if a child meets diagnostic criteria to receive special education services (MacFarlane & Kanaya, 2009), as delineated in the Code of Federal Regulations. The DSM definition of autism is not utilized.

IDEA defines autism as:

> a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change, or changes in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences. (U.S. Department of Education, 2007, p. 3)

The principal distinction between the APA definition and IDEA eligibility lies in the impact the autistic characteristics have on a child's education (MacFarlane & Kanaya, 2009). The two differing classifications indicate that a child may be diagnosed with autism by a pediatrician and receive no special education services at school because the child does not meet educational eligibility requirements. Another child may be eligible for school services without ever being diagnosed with autism by his family physician (MacFarlane & Kanaya, 2009).

A Dutch study investigating 356 children and adolescents examined the efficacy of autism diagnoses (Boomsa et al., 2008). Areas for diagnosis concentrated on the severity of traits, intelligence, and age of the children and adolescents. Research questions included whether a new indicator paradigm can be utilized for autism. The study determined that deficits in socialization and personal interactions are necessary in diagnosing children with autism (Boomsa et al., 2008), and must be included in any identification protocol.

If a child is diagnosed by a medical doctor, and parents do not request school services through the IEP process, then the child's autism may impact learning. Conversely, a child may receive special education services, as identified by a school psychologist, without ever being diagnosed by a physician. This becomes a bigger problem when adult agencies require doctor's records prior to providing adult services. IDEA and *DSM-5* cannot agree on the definition of autism. Further compounding the discussion is that the cause of autism is still unclear; there is no established cure (Adreon & Durocher, 2007).

Characteristics of autism. Specific characteristics are evident among children diagnosed with autism, especially in the areas of communication, social skills, behavioral flexibility, visual processing, abstraction, and theory of mind (Cashin & Barker, 2009). For the child with autism, communication is impaired in two distinct ways: restriction in range of expression and difficulty interpreting others' interaction. This spills into the area of social skills, with a lack of mutual communication. A child with autism typically holds limited areas of interest, which further inhibits the give-and-take expected socially. Consequently, autistic behavior is seen as rigid with poor transitions and "stereotypic behaviors" (Cashin & Barker, 2009, pp. 190-191).

Another study (Shattuck et al., 2007) investigating 241 adults with autism found that rigid formulaic actions, such as conversing with others on a single topic, lessened by 0.5 standard deviation over time. The researchers acknowledged that social deficiencies continued throughout adulthood.

Most children diagnosed with autism exhibit deficits in visual processing. While they process knowledge in a precise manner, the visual processing discrepancies further impair their ability to think conceptually. Children identified with autism tend to be concrete thinkers. This impaired ability lends itself to an impaired "theory of mind" where children with autism lack empathy and the ability to navigate social situations (Cashin & Barker, 2009; Colle, Baron-Cohen, & Hill, 2007; Kaland, Callesen, Muller-Nielsen, Mortensen, & Smith, 2008; M. Lerner, Hutchins, & Prelock, 2010). Ultimately, a child's inability to master social skills is the defining deficit of autism.

Flood, Hare, and Wallis (2011) studied two groups of 26 adolescents aged 11 to 15 years: one group identified with autism was compared with a second group of typical peers. Both groups were given literature with negative social stories and their responses were measured. The group of children with autism scored considerably lower than their peers on Theory of Mind concepts. The researchers report that children in this population "also have difficulty with other social cognitive skills involved in interpersonal interactions," which is the defining aspect of the disorder (Flood et al., 2011, p. 621). These results were also found by Sathiyaprakash et al. (2012), and Verhoeven et al. (2012).

This lack of social skills mastery comprises a complex set of deficiencies:

> Frequently identified problem areas include impairments in social pragmatics (e.g., turn-taking in conversation and the ability to take the listener's perspective), poor speech prosody (e.g., typical rising and falling of voice pitch and inflection that aids verbal communication), a tendency

> to dwell on certain topics, difficulty understanding and expressing emotions, and difficulty interpreting nonliteral language such as sarcasm and metaphor. (White, Keonig, & Scahill, 2007, pp. 1858-1859)

The characteristics of children with autism are not physical in nature, and are often unrecognized until a child begins communicating, thus relegating the disorder to that of a hidden disability. A longitudinal study in Australia researching communicative disorders at eight-, 12-, and 24-month intervals, showed that "significant markers of ASD were identifiable in this community sample at an early age," revealing differences with typical children at 12 months old (Veness et al., 2012).

Certain children sustain interfering behaviors which comprise recurring acts, such as rocking, and disruptive behaviors, such as tantrums (Neitzel, 2010). This connects back to the communicative disorders experienced by children with autism. Children are not able to communicate effectively, and engage in social behaviors, that others may deem unacceptable, in order to get their needs met (Neitzel, 2010). In a typical classroom, interfering behaviors will result in disciplinary measures, which further create negative educational attitudes. Moreover, behaviors may interrupt work completion (Burke et al., 2010).

A 2009 study reviewed the efficacy of using a social-skills intervention lasting 30 weeks for children diagnosed with autism and aged 7 to 11 (Cotugno, 2009). An interesting aspect of this study of cognitively-average children with supplementary language deficits was the measurement of teacher-preferred social behavior, as measured by the Walker-McConnell Scale of Social

Competence and Social Adjustment. Children showed improvement after the social skills intervention, with the oldest group of students aged 10 to 11 showing the "greatest improvement in school-adjustment behavior (*t* = 2.89, *p* <.01)" (Cotugno, 2009, p. 1273). This study of 18 children with autism and 10 typical classmates indicated that training focused on improving social skills can increase both teacher- and peer-preferred behaviors (Cotungo, 2009). Social impairments are not determined by cognitive delays or speech deficiencies (White et al., 2007).

Impact of social skills development on autism. Children with autism have differing levels of cognitive abilities, but they often share common obstacles with their lack of social skills at school. Students' inability to decipher nonverbal cues negatively impacts experiences in the classroom (Burke et al., 2010). Additionally, young adults with autism experience further traits, such as sensory deficits and behavioral difficulties, as well as other mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety (Schall & McDonough, 2010). Children's cognitive capacity also affects their ability to show improvement with social skills training. Children with higher levels of cognitive functioning experience greater improvement in social skills (Baghdadli et al., 2012). The behavioral component influences the classroom, which can create a negative experience for some children with autism.

Young people learn social competencies at school in addition to academics. A small study surveyed mothers of 19 youths with autism, aged 10-21 (Orsmond, Krauss, & Seltzer, 2004). Peer relationships and youths' participation in social activities were investigated. Eight percent of the parents reported their children had at least one independent, mutual friendship with no pre-arranged intervention from parent, 20% of children participated in some activities outside of pre-arranged settings, 24% reported that their children participated in only pre-arranged activities by parent, and 42% of parents reported their children with autism had no peer relationships (Orsmond et al., 2004).

Autism's hidden disability corresponds to the hidden set of shared expectations in society. A typical teenager will alter his or her behavior for time and place, while a teenager with autism may not understand unspoken rules that behaviors "vary by situation, not location" (Garcia-Winner & Crooke, 2011, p. viii). Educators recognize skills necessary for success in the classroom. Lane, Pierson, and Givner (2003) presented a study where 366 teachers were queried in Southern California regarding desirable skills for students to possess in order to flourish in the classroom. Their study found that successful students paid attention to directives, managed displeasure with peers and adults, and provided appropriate responses to peers. All teachers placed importance on "cooperation skills" (p. 427), which can be difficult for students with autism because of their deficits maneuvering typical social skills situations.

This is illuminated in a United Kingdom study which compared two groups, aged 15 years, one identified participants with autism and one composed of typically developing peers. The focus was concentrated on social skills situations via videotaped scenarios where the participants needed to solve a real-life problem (Channon, Charman, Heap, Crawford, & Rios, 2001). Youth with autism scored pointedly lower than their peers on several instruments. Additionally, they required additional prompts to understand the facts of the proposed episodes. The findings suggested that members of the group with autism were less likely to value the interpersonal issues necessary to find solutions to social scenarios. These struggles "may well reflect executive difficulties in using appropriate strategies to generate potential problem solutions" (Channon et al., 2001, p. 467). But the atypical group showed improvement when given multiple story options to choose from, rather than requiring that they create social solutions on their own.

Multiple studies investigated the use of social skills training in teaching children with autism how to improve their social communication. M. Lerner and Mikami (2012) followed 13 males with autism using Socio-Dramatic Affective-Relational Intervention (SDARI) and SkillStreaming social skills training, with benefits seen from both, although at a different pace: participants using SDARI showed greater communication initially, while participants operating SkillStreaming showed more growth over the course of the study. Laugeson, Frankel, Gantman, Dillon, and Mogil (2011) studied 28 youth ages 12-17 at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) utilizing the Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS) encompassing fourteen 90-minute sessions once a week. Researchers found overall improvement with friendship skills. Further research shows the improvement of social skills strategies using computer-based programs (Beaumont & Sofronoff, 2008;

Bernard-Opitz, Sriram, & Nakhoda-Sapuan, 2001; Faja, Aylward, Bernier, & Dawson, 2008; M. Silver & Oakes, 2001).

How characteristics of autism manifest with age. The repetitive nature of behaviors present in a school-age child with autism changes slightly for the young adult with autism. A young child with autism may demand routine for daily activities. Children with autism may become obsessive-compulsive in their behaviors (Boyd & Shaw, 2010). The attention to a narrow field of interest may continue through adolescence. This sense of self-importance continues to the area of communication, as conversations tend to be motivated by their own self-centeredness, instead of the interest of others (Boyd & Shaw, 2010).

The difficulty for a child in originating conversations continues in adolescence. Taylor and Seltzer's (2010) study found that the rate of improvement slowed after exiting high school. Parents of 48 young adults with autism reported that, in 44 cases, autistic symptoms stabilized over time. Children who were diagnosed with autism at age 2 still met defining criteria at 19 years old. If young adults had lower cognitive functioning, they showed less improvement in symptoms than their average cognitive peers (McGovern & Sigman, 2005).

The weakness in social skills continues from childhood to adolescence for people identified with autism. Children may have struggles in forming personal relationships, such as making friends. This "social awkwardness" is continued in adolescence and early adulthood (Boyd & Shaw, 2010, p. 212). The poor communication skills evidenced by social exchange continue from childhood to adolescence. Deficiencies in the area of perspective taking, as demonstrated by a lack of empathy, responsiveness, and social thinking, limit the adolescent (Boyd & Shaw, 2010).

Young people do not generally outgrow autism. A small study in California tracked 48 young adults, beginning in early childhood with a middle school follow-up. Utilizing parent interviews and standardized assessments, McGovern and Sigman (2005) found that 98% of those children diagnosed with autism in their early childhood still met criteria for the disorder in middle school, while 96% met criteria in young adulthood. Advances in social skills behavior was experienced by high-functioning youth (McGovern & Sigman, 2005).

Overview of Employment Issues

This final section examined the supports that exist for young adults with disabilities after mandated services end, as well as employment statistics for adults with autism. The topic of disclosure and self-advocacy was also discussed.

Employing young adults with autism. When young people exit the school system, their deficits do not disappear. Obstacles that impede progress in an academic setting will present as difficulties in the next phase of life: work or post-secondary education. Young people with autism experience underemployment, and social difficulties on the job, as well as disparate compensation compared to typical peers (Cimera & Cowan, 2009). Young adults often under-disclose their disability to employers because they do not want to be pigeonholed (Timmons et al., 2005).

Communication discrepancies negatively impact young adults with autism (Zager & Alperin, 2010). Additionally, "due to the social-communication deficits associated with the disability, traditional job training and coaching methods (e.g., lengthy verbal instruction) are often counterproductive to helping individuals with ASD find and keep a job" (Burke et al., p. 1224). But three researchers discovered a way to give verbal directions to three high school students with autism utilizing a two-way radio and earbud speakers (Bennett, Ramasamy, & Honsberger, 2012) during an unpaid work experience making photocopies. Initially, written directions to making photocopies were given with no verbal prompts, and many mistakes were made. The intervention included verbal prompts, support, and correction via radio. Two of three students were able to master the task after the intervention, with the third student gaining mastery after additional training (Bennett et al., 2012).

Strickland, Coles, and Southern (2013) researched the use of JobTIPS employment curriculum in preparing young adults with autism for employment. Using a computer-based program, they found the training assisted the small treatment group with interview preparation. The researchers felt this program overcame Theory of Mind deficits, in preparing participants for employment (Strickland et al., 2013).

Employment supports for young adults with autism. Supported employment is one means to assist people with disabilities in the workplace. Supported employment can range from accommodations to job coaching and job placement services (Batshaw, 1998). A recent study followed 33 high school graduates with autism in their search for employment (Wehman et al., 2012). Records showed 91% had no previous employment history. Data were collected by the adults' Employment Specialists, who were employed by a local university. On average, 107 hours were spent by the employment coaches to provide on-site job training and supports to ensure employment. Of the initial 33 participants, 27 have maintained successful employment, while the time expended by the employment coaches decreased over time. "This supports the hypothesis that supported employees with ASD can and do become more independent in performing competitive employment and can maintain positions for extended periods of time" (Wehman et al., 2012, p. 167).

Furthermore, research has shown a cost-benefit from utilizing supported employment. Cimera (2009) followed three young adults who had mild intellectual disabilities who were employed at McDonalds. These three males were matched with non-disabled employees. The findings indicated that it cost less than $2.00 per hour to provide supports to these employees, because not all work accommodations cost money. One young man, Adam, actually cost less to supervise than his matched typical peer, Zach, with a savings of $64.15 over 138 weeks (Cimera, 2009). Altogether, young adults with disabilities maintained their employment three times longer than their non-disabled matched peers. Cimera reported, "in all three cases, supported employees produced greater net benefits to employers than did their non-disabled coworkers" (p. 117).

Transition from mandated services to public agencies that provide vocational services. When students receive a high school diploma or reach age 22, federal IDEA services are terminated (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). At this point, young adults have the option of requesting services from other human services agencies. While this referral process is supported through transition services section of the IEP, teachers are not required to make referrals (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Teachers may be relatively uninformed of the human services agencies that serve adults with disabilities.

Additionally, after IDEA mandated services end, eligibility requirements differ for different vocational service providers (Timmons et al., 2005). Federal legislation approves supports for adults with disabilities through the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA). Although IDEA provides strict regulations as to who can receive services, the states are allowed leeway in determining eligibility for DR services and WIA (Timmons et al., 2005). Furthermore, these consortiums can decide who receives services first, referred to as "order of selection" (California Department of Rehabilitation, 2011). Predictably, these groups serve adults with the most severe disabilities first, while those with milder disabilities are put on a wait list or denied provisions altogether (Timmons et al., 2005).

One multiple case study examined the experiences of three graduates and one student with autism as they moved through the transition process. Joshua, a current student, participated in several unpaid work experiences with a job coach that his teacher hopes will facilitate independence after high school. Joe, Jill, and Chad were placed at adult vocational centers where they could continue the skill building introduced in high school. These supported employment programs were funded by the federal VR system. Although these students exemplify success, program caseworkers lamented that special educators should be better informed of the programs available post-high school (Nuehring & Sitlington, 2003).

Services provided by state and federal agencies to adults with disabilities.

Multiple vocational services are provided by DR to adults with disabilities, including young adults with autism. Such services include vocational needs assessment, job search services, technical assistance, and post-employment supports (California Department of Rehabilitation, 2011). Each client receives individualized services based on their needs. WIA funds multiple organizations, such as One-Stop Employment Center and Young adults Services.

One Stop assists adults over 18, with support from various community partners, including WIA. One-Stop serves adults seeking employment, including the disabled, with like vocational services as DR. WIA Young adults Services (for ages 14-21) have different eligibility requirements: poor, at risk, in the criminal system, in addition to having a disability, based on client needs (Timmons et al., 2005).

A longitudinal study from 2002 to 2007 investigated the employment results of individuals with autism who received services from Vocational VR agencies (Cimera & Burgess, 2011). During this time period, 3,782,314 people with disabilities applied for VR services, with 19,436 identifying themselves as autistic. The age of the applicants for the six years ranged from 26.2 to 24.7 years, with up to 60% characterized with a secondary disability (Cimera &

Burgess, 2011). Employment outcomes for the disability of autism are described in Table 1, as presented by Cimera and Burgess (2011).

Table 1

Employment Outcomes for the Disability of Autism—2002-2007

Outcome	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Successful employment	46.8%	39.0%	40.7%	39.8%	39.9%	41.8%
Hours worked per week	23.38	23.21	22.97	23.68	23.67	24.45
Wages per month	\$836.03	\$789.12	\$772.89	\$772.89	\$786.68	\$811.70
Monthly rent	\$689.35	\$648.02	\$625.90	\$625.90	\$635.58	\$654.92

As shown in Table 1, in 2002, 46.8% of clients identified as autistic were successfully employed. They worked 23.38 hours per week on average, resulting in a monthly net income of \$689.35. From 2002-2007, on average, 40.88% of clients with autism were employed. Working adults averaged 23.69 hours per week bringing home a net monthly total of \$643.20. Cimera and Burgess (2011) found that the conclusions remained fairly steady over the time period examined.

This study also brought forth discrepancies among the states. Two states compared were Oklahoma and Delaware. Respectively, the former employed 17.44% of VR clients with autism, whereas the latter employed 65.45% of their population with autism. During this time period from 2002-2007, California employed 45.48% of its VR clients with autism, with average earnings of \$822.20 monthly while working 26.05 hours per week. Cimera and Burgess (2011) explained that while "individuals with autism generated much more monetary benefits from working in the community than monetary costs" (p. 177), the average earned per year was still below the poverty level of $13,690 during that time frame.

However, when young adults with disabilities were queried one year after graduation and asked if mandated school services supported their current post-school status, 82% of those questioned responded positively (n=1,879), with 18% saying no (Curtis et al., 2009). Young adults self-reported that 67% were employed and 34% were unemployed. Of those that are unemployed, 256 respondents stated they were unable to find a job. A parental focus group pulled from this study affirmed that it was difficult for them to identify services once their children leave school (Curtis et al., 2009).

When reviewing long term data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2, researchers found that young adults with autism were vulnerable the first two years post-high school (Shattuck et al., 2012). Telephone surveys with 500 young adults and parents found that 55% of those queried participated in paid employment, with 28% attending a two-year college, and 12% in attendance at a four-year college. Thirty-four percent of the respondents reported no participation in school or work. Researchers reported that "compared with young adults in the three other disability categories, those with an autism spectrum disorder had significantly lower rates of employment and the highest overall rates of no participation" (Shattuck et al., 2012, p. 1046). The study further reported that deficits in functional skills implied inferior results.

Disclosure of disability to employers. The American with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) provides worksite protections for adults with disabilities and "prohibits discrimination and ensures equal opportunity for persons with disabilities in employment, State and local government services, public accommodations, commercial facilities, and transportation" (Americans with Disabilities Act, 2010, para. 1). The ADA, along with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, guides workers with disabilities on how to disclose their needs to employers. In order to declare this protection, a worker must disclose his or her disability to an employer if requesting a reasonable accommodation (Ellison, Russinova, MacDonald-Wilson, & Lyass, 2003). This disclosure can take place during the employment process: interview, initial placement, or at any time while employed.

Madaus, Foley, McGuire, and Ruban (2002) queried 209 college graduates with learning disabilities who self-disclosed their disability while at university. After graduation, the researchers found that while 90% stated their disability influenced their work in some way, only 30% self-disclosed to their employer. The participants gave multiple reasons as to why they disclosed, including use of advanced technology on the job, additional time needed for tasks, and the need for detailed directions. Fifty-three percent of participants who chose not to disclose felt there was no reason to reveal, while 20% were concerned about negative outcomes from their boss, and 13% feared negative consequences from co-workers. Twelve percent feared their job security if they disclosed (Madaus et al., 2002).

These results were similar to those found by Greenbaum, Graham, and Scales (1996). Forty-six employed college graduates with disabilities were studied and 20% disclosed their disability during the interview process, with 22% disclosing after employment. Nineteen participants indicated that workplace accommodations had been made. However, 39 participants, 80%, specified that their learning disability affected their lives at work or home (Greenbaum et al., 1996). Similar results were seen by P. Silver, Bourke, and Strehorne (1998) in their study regarding college graduates and workplace disclosure. While all participants received academic accommodations in college, only 10 of 47 disclosed to their employers and received workplace accommodations. The majority chose not to disclose due to their fear of workplace discrimination (P. Silver et al., 1998).

Disclosure and self-advocacy. The full responsibility of disclosure falls upon the employee, if one desires workplace accommodations (Madaus et al., 2002). Disclosing a disability is a monumental decision for an adult with a disability, and " 'self-advocacy' has emerged as both a strategy . . . and as a means of ensuring their greater participation in decision-making processes" (Skelton & Moore, 1999, p. 134). Self-advocacy, or self-determination, is accentuated by an awareness of strengths that fortify personal choices (Wehmeyer, 1996).

A small qualitative study followed six young adults who received tutoring from typical peer mentors to practice work readiness skills (Bobroff & Sax, 2010). The researchers found that "peer tutoring provides an effective and creative option for teaching vocational skills and addressing skills in self-determination and self-advocacy" (Bobroff & Sax, 2010, p. 154). Wehmeyer et al. (2012) created a larger quantitative study which followed 312 secondary students. Half of the students participated in the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI), while the control group did not. SDLMI is a model of instruction centered on self-advocacy and problem-solving. Students self-reported increases in self-awareness scores. The control group's scores showed a distinct decrease in self-determination (Wehmeyer et al., 2012).

Chapter Summary

This study is based on a philosophy of social justice and equity in opportunity, concentrating on young adults with autism. The historical origin of rights for the disabled in the educational setting was reviewed, as well as current federal law. The definition of autism was explored in both the psychiatric and education settings while exploring its characteristics and how the disorder manifests itself as the child ages. Educational and vocational supports were studied, and current employment data presented. Findings indicated that transition services in high school may not sustain the graduated young adults as they move forward on their post-secondary journey.

Results from current research show that many young adults with autism experience barriers in their employment journey. While the research provides employment statistics, current studies do not verbalize the experiences of young adults with autism or their parents on their employment journey. The lack of personal information advocates the need to understand the perceptions of the autism community in describing the supports received from transition services in high school as it relates to the employment journey.

The literature in this review confirms the need to understand more about the dilemmas faced by young adults with autism as they search for employment. These findings affected the instruments the researcher used in the study, because previous literature does not give a voice to the marginalized population of young adults with autism and their parents. The researcher gathered data from young adults with autism and their parents through one-on-one interviews. Documents and archived records gave further strength to the voice of the autism community. For purposes of this study, *autism community* referred to young adults with autism, aged 18 to 24, and their parents.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this single case study with multiple participants was to investigate the perspective of the autism community, young adults and their parents, about employment. Findings report a distinct employment gap between disabled and non-disabled working-aged youth (Burke et al., 2010). Unemployment numbers rise dramatically for transition-aged youth identified with autism (McDonough & Revell, 2010). Yet there are few studies from which to draw solutions (Burke et al., 2010; Hendricks & Wehman, 2009; Schaller & Yang, 2005; Taylor & Seltzer, 2011), and there is no voice behind the statistic. Chapter 3 describes the research design, the research methods, instrumentation and data collection, and data analysis and management. The chapter concludes with a chapter review followed by a summary of the research proposal.

Research Design

This single case study with multiple participants focused on transition young adults (ages 18-24). The phenomenon studied was the experiences of the autism community regarding employment and the supports received through the ITP. For study purposes, *autism community* is being distinguished as young adults with autism and their parents. The primary feature of a case study is an emphasis on commonplace interactions in natural situations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Searching for employment is a natural situation in which most young adults participate. Investigating an ordinary event is the cornerstone of case study. In order to better understand the autism community, this study was designed to give a voice to an often-marginalized group, by informing the reader of the experiences of young adults with autism and their parents.

A case study is appropriate when the topic being studied is a contemporary experience with genuine influence and the ability to use multiple forms of evidence which can strengthen a case study (Yin, 2009). Data was collected through one-on-one interviews and a review of relevant documents. Incorporating the real experiences of the autism community through a young adult and parent perspective created a significant evaluation of perceptions of employment.

The single case study format allowed me to compare experiences among multiple participants with the same context, in this case the experience of young adults and their parents in moving toward employment. Findings from case studies can be drawn if the experiences are similar or disparate (Baxter & Jack, 2008). I studied views from multiple perspectives. If a participant is employed, then his or her perspective on work may differ from an individual who is searching for employment. The hope was to find young adults at varying points in their employment journey. Participants shared commonalities of disability, cognitive ability, and the desire for employment.

Research Methods

Setting

The study took place in Orange County, California. Orange County is in the southern portion of California, comprised of 48% Latino, 30% White, 14% Asian, and 6% other populace (Ed-Data, 2012). Autism ranks as the third most identified disability in California. In 2011, 8,614 children with autism were being provided Special Education services in Orange County, representing 12% of the total state's population of students with special needs (California Department of Education, 2011). IDEA stipulates that students over the age of 16 are supplemented with transition assistance in addition to their academic goals. Transition goals must be in the area of community, training or education, and employment with the aim to support independence (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

Sample

Participants were a purposeful sample of young adults diagnosed with autism between the ages of 18 and 24 living in Orange County, California who received a high school diploma, are of average cognitive ability, and who desire employment. Additionally, participants did not have a secondary disability associated with a cognitive impairment, such as Intellectual Disability. Young adult participants were not conserved by their parents in the area of education. While these six young adults generated the main focus group, a second group was composed of six corresponding parents.

The Grandparent Autism Network, OCAutism.org, and OC Asperger's, all advocacy groups, were utilized to recruit participants. These autism support groups are located in Orange County, California. Stakeholders meet monthly to discuss topical issues, such as recent educational rulings, and provide support to young adults and adults with autism as well as their caregivers.

After receiving approval from California State University at Fullerton (Appendix A), I contacted these organizations asking to attend a monthly meeting and present the study premise to recruit participants (Appendix B). I interviewed likely candidates in person and over the phone to ensure their understanding of the study before mailing home a consent form (Woodring, Foley, Rado, Brown, & Hammer, 2006).

Young adult participants were over the age of 18, had completed high school with a diploma, and are no longer receiving mandated special education services through a school district. Additionally, participants do not have a secondary disability associated with a cognitive impairment. Participants met the following criteria: proof of disability, such as a copy of IEP, 504 document, medical records, or DR agency participation. Additionally, participants were asked to give permission to review archived data and documents, such as IEP, transition plans, Summary of Performance, and psychological reports. All participants signed a consent form specifying that participation is voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time (Appendix C).

Parents of participating adult children with autism were asked to participate. Parents characteristically are more knowledgeable about the types of services their children received through their IEP and bring a breadth of knowledge regarding a child's journey with his or her disability. This second group provided a textured background to the experiences of young adults with autism. Parent participants were asked to sign a consent form specifying that participation is voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time (Appendix D).

Participants' names and data were kept confidential, using pseudonyms in all instances. I recorded all interviews. Participants have an assigned letter and number: a parent participant is identified as P1. The master list was saved electronically and by hard copy and kept in a locked cabinet at both home and work (Creswell, 2007).

Table 2 presents the demographics of the young adult participants. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 24. All received Special Education services in high school through the IEP process.

Table 3 displays significant data on the parent participants. All six participants were female. Five mothers belonged to autism support groups, while one did not.

Ethical protection of the autism community is paramount in order to observe the theoretical framework of social justice advocacy. Creswell (2007) indicated that ethical protection of groups is necessary not wanting to "further marginalize the individuals participating in the research" (p. 22). This was supported by making the process accessible to parents and facilitating open communication between participants. The priority is guarding participants against injury, which is central to social justice philosophy (Yin, 2009).

Table 2

Autism Study Participants—Young Adults

	Young Adult #1	Young Adult #2	Young Adult #3	Young Adult #4	Young Adult #5	Young Adult #6
Gender	F	M	M	M	M	F
Age	24	24	19	18	20	21
Ethnicity	White	White	White	White	Hispanic	White
IEP or 504	IEP	IEP	IEP	IEP	IEP	IEP
District	HBHSD	HBHSD	IUSD	CUSD	IUSD	HBHSD
Diploma	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Agency support	RCOC DR	RCOC DR SSI			RCOC	RCOC DR SSI

Note. In Chapter 4, Young Adult #1 will be referred to as YA1. School districts attended are: Huntington Beach Unified High School District (HBUHSD), Irvine Unified School District (IUSD), and Capistrano Unified School District (CUSD).

Table 3

Autism Study Participants—Parents

	Parent #1	Parent #2	Parent #3	Parent #4	Parent #5	Parent #6
Gender	F	F	F	F	F	F
Ethnicity	White	White	White	White	Hispanic	White
Young adult lives with parent	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Belongs to support group	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

Note. In Chapter 4, Parent #1 will be referred to as P1.

The caring approach is best embodied by the tenet of relationship. Understanding the connectedness of stakeholders is crucial. I took heed to establish a positive rapport with all participants. The study was explained at length to the participants with the proviso that data would be used to assist other young people with autism. The researcher embodied respect by deferring to participants' experiences without critique.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role in this qualitative study was one of outside observer, as an instrument for data collection, because "data take on no significance until they are processed by the human intelligence of the researcher" (Hatch, 2002, p. 7). My professional background includes working with students with special needs for 16 years. My educational experience includes teaching transition and social skills classes for students with autism at the secondary level. My administrative experience entails a district-level position for three years by managing two grants that help young adults with disabilities prepare for and secure employment. While my professional background has been in special education, I have no personal connection with any family member diagnosed with autism. The sole purpose of this research is to gather information to provide a more effective program for high school students with autism. None of this information was given to participants. I was introduced as a doctoral student with interest in the opinions of the autism community.

My biases, based on 17 years of experience working with youth with disabilities, include the belief that young adults with autism struggle to acquire and maintain employment and that access to transition services is not equitable in high school. This can result in a lesser quality of life than that of non-disabled peers.

Because of this bias shaped by working with young adults with disabilities, I created interview questions excluding a positive or negative connotation. Rehearsed interview roleplaying strengthened unbiased connotations. Intentions were clearly acknowledged to each participant: why I was interested in the topic, what I hoped to learn, and what I will do with the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I tried to recruit young adults who are already employed, in order to balance out data.

Data Collection and Management

I used the following data collection process in this multiple case study: one-on-one interviews of young adults with autism, one-on-one interviews of parents, and a records review. The one-on-one interviews were semi-structured with no more than 20 probes per research question. The interviews lasted up to 60 minutes each, allowing for any communicative delays. The questions were developed based on the review of literature and similar studies (Appendix E). The interviews took place in a private room in a public library, at the university, and over the phone.

Parents were interviewed separately after their adult child participated. The interviews were informed by the young adults' one-on-one interviews, the literature review, and the researcher's experience of IEPs and ITPs (Appendix F). I took field notes throughout the process. The participants consented for all interviews to be audiotaped. Data was professionally transcribed. I coded data and created matrices to produce themes.

The initial interaction took place with the young adults. It was imperative to learn the perceptions and experiences of this group without filter from their parents. To maintain a fair-minded opinion, one must respect young adult's perception of his or her own experience.

The purpose of the interviews was to gather information about the personal experiences of young adults with autism and or their parents regarding the journey to employment. While statistics are clear with employment data, the individual stories have not been told of the autism community in Orange County, California. Stronger data is produced when information can be reported firsthand through an interview (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Yin (2009) describes six forms of data collection, five of which were used in this study: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, and physical artifacts. To maintain verity, I did not utilize participant-observation. Documents comprised employment records (of young adults who were employed), while archival records consisted of: IEPs, transition meeting notes, summaries of performance, and 504 records for the purpose of reviewing transition services. The purpose of examining this data was to understand the specifics of IEP transition services offered versus those provided to the student. A spreadsheet was created to study the types of services offered in the IEP, the ITP goals, and the satisfaction of young adults and their parent with services provided. I coded data and created matrices to build themes.

The data collection timeline was completed within four months. Table 4 outlined the study timeline.

Table 4

Autism Study Timeline

Timeline	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4
Action	Participant recruitment; consent given; request for documents; begin 1:1 interviews with young adults	Complete 1:1 interviews with young adults	Complete 1:1 interviews with parents; observation of employed young adults	Review documents; transcribe; create matrices

Electronic documents were kept in a code-protected file at home and at work. Hard copy documents will be kept in a locked cabinet at work, in a locked office. Videotapes, cassette tapes, and recorders were kept in a locked file cabinet at work, in a locked office. All tapes were destroyed after transcription, although hard copy of interviews will be kept for further possible research.

I looked for areas of agreement and disagreement among the young adults and parents, the young adults and other young adults, and among parents. I found employed young adults with autism to bring perspective to the study.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data was analyzed by creating descriptive (Miles & Huberman, 1994) codes using: employment language and feelings about employment, characteristics of autism language, and feelings about support services language. A matrix was created to evaluate data. "Matrices can be descriptive (depicting existing conditions or situations), outcome oriented (concerned with consequences and results), or process-oriented (focused on the dynamics of change)" (Averill, 2002, p. 856). I reviewed emerging themes and determined if current research questions support data.

Relying on convergent validity, I used data from multiple sources (Yin, 2009), to verify findings. Data from all sources of collection were synthesized, including documents, archived data, and one-on-one interviews. Triangulation "assesses the extent to which scores yielded from the instrument of interest are highly correlated with scores from other instruments that measure the same construct" (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Sutton, 2006, p. 81). I believed the data corroborated evidence from interviews and documents to generate a strong triangulation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Yin (2009) reiterates the magnitude of using various types of data to secure convergent validity. A matrix was created to evaluate information.

Additionally, content-related validity compelled the researcher to create discussion items that were pertinent to the participants (Collins et al., 2006). Goals to keep in mind when recognizing content-related validity include verifying discussion items correctly reference intended participants, making the topic applicable to the participants, and confirming that all items are accessible with the instrument used (Collins et al., 2006). The processes used in the study protocol, interview procedures, and data analysis strengthened study reliability (Yin, 2009). Moreover, I kept field notes to help maintain trustworthiness throughout the investigation (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this single case study with multiple participants was to describe the perspectives of young adults with autism and their parents about employment. Data was provided through one-on-one interviews and documents. Research questions reflected the desire to understand the participants' perceptions as they maneuver the independent world of employment. The participants were a purposeful sampling of young adults diagnosed with autism between the ages of 18 and 24, and their parents, living in Orange County, California. Confidentiality was protected to the extent permitted by the law. The utmost care was given to keep participants' names and data confidential. Ethical protection of young adults with autism and their parents was paramount by preserving the theoretical framework of social justice. This process had no negative effects on the participants. Participating young adults possessed average cognitive functioning and were able to understand and express their opinions and experiences objectively.

The role of the researcher was one of outside observer, with a predisposition to the belief that young adults with autism struggle to acquire and maintain employment. Each participant was interviewed individually. Additional forms of data collection were gathered to review transition services and employer data. The data collection timeline lasted four months.

When analyzing the data, I reviewed emerging themes and determined current questions support data. I relied on convergent validity to verify findings.

Matrices were generated to synthesize data. I kept field notes and a journal to manage information.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the study findings regarding the perceptions of young adults with autism and of their parents about employment. The introduction revisits the purpose of the study. Recruitment and introduction of participants will be described. Subsequently, findings from each research question will be presented. A summary will conclude the chapter.

Introduction

The purpose of this single-case study with multiple participants was to learn the insights of the autism community regarding employment. Through one-on-one interviews with young adults with autism and their parents, data was collected to understand their experiences with employment. Data was also collected to discern how the school system prepared high school graduates for work through transition services in the IEP. While employment statistics are readily available, this study sought to give voice to young adults with autism and their parents. The four study questions sought to elicit the perceptions of both the young adult and their parents.

Participants

All participants reside in and attended school in Orange County, California. Participants were recruited from Autism Advocacy organizations and word of mouth. A total of 12 adults participated: six young adults with autism and their mothers. Four young adult/mother pairs were secured from Orange County Asperger's Organization. Two young adults and their mothers were referred by their friends who saw the recruitment flyer in the community. The participants did not know the researcher prior to the study. Participants contributed voluntarily, and no compensation was given. Participants were not graduates of the researcher's current employer or school district.

Experience Seeking and Maintaining Employment

One of the questions in this study examined how young adults with autism describe their experiences in seeking and maintaining employment. Participants were asked a series of questions about their paid and unpaid work experience, their feelings about paid and unpaid work experience, and their feelings about autism in relation to employment. Data was collected about both paid and unpaid employment.

All six young adult participants reported that they were interested in employment. Four of six participants stated that they have held paid jobs in the past. Two of those four young adults were currently employed. Two of those four employed participants were retained by their fathers in the family business. One of those four participants was not currently working because he is attending community college full-time. Participant YA4 stated that he will continue working in the summer at his father's law firm. All four working young adults held entry-level positions. The paid work experience data reported by the young adult participants is reported in Table 5.

Table 5

Paid Work

Probe	YA1	YA2	YA3	YA4	YA5	YA6
Are you interested in employment	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Have you ever held a paid job	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
How long did that job last	6.5 years	1.5 years/ *3 mos.*		3 mos.		1 day
Employer	Albertsons	Father/ *Albertsons*		Father		Joann's
How many hours worked per week	16	40/*20*		5		4
What was your rate of pay?	$8.30	$9.75/ *$8.00*		$5.00		$8.00

Note. YA2 held two jobs: one with his Father and a second at Albertsons. Information about the second job is italicized.

In regards to their perceptions about employment, the responses were mixed from the participants. YA2 was enthusiastic about his current position. He works in the accounts receivable department of his father's business and enjoys the solitary work stating he goes in "sometimes on the weekends if I have time because there's always something to do; it keeps me busy."

Conversely, he did not enjoy his previous job at Albertsons, a local grocery store, because of the customer interaction. YA1 appreciated the customer interaction at her current job, at Albertsons, affirming she likes the "friendly customers, nice people, and respectful co-workers." YA4 and YA6 stated a negative aspect of their job was boredom. YA4 scanned documents at his father's law office, stating that "just getting documents over and over again" was boring. They both indicated a variety of work tasks may have improved their perspective. YA4 stated a positive aspect to his job was "getting paid." Table 6 delineates the young adults' feelings about their paid employment.

Table 6

Perceptions of Paid Employment

Probe	YA1	YA2	YA4	YA6
Did you like your job	At times	Yes/ *No*	Kind of	No
If yes, what were positive aspects	Friendly customers	Keeps me busy	Getting paid	
Improvements		Workload varies		
If no, what were negative aspects		*Customers*	Boring	Boring
Improvements			More variety	Work different task

Note. YA2 held two jobs: one with his Father and a second at Albertsons. Information on second job is italicized.

Table 7 reports the unpaid work experiences of the young adult participants. All six young adults reported they participated in volunteer experiences. YA3 and YA6 participated in their high school WorkAbility programs. Their unpaid work experiences were part of a job enclave overseen by a job coach funded by WorkAbility. YA4 participated in a post-high school program, paid by his parents, which supported a work enclave overseen by a job coach. YA1's and YA4's parents organized their volunteer experiences. YA2 volunteered with an animal shelter, an opportunity organized by his life coach while in a group home. YA5 participated in a volunteer opportunity organized through his church's youth program.

Table 7

Unpaid Work Experiences

Probe	YA1	YA2	YA3	YA4	YA5	YA6
Unpaid work experience	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Where	O.C. Mem. Hospital	Animal Shelter	CVS/ *Petco*	Temple/ *Smart& Final*	Crystal Cathedral	Buffalo Wild Wings
Length of job	6.5 years	2 years	Summer/ *Summer*	Ongoing/ *Summer*	Ongoing	Semester
Who set up the position	Parent	Life Coach	IUSD WA	Parent/ *NewVista 12+*	Church	Rossier WA

Note. YA3 and YA4 each had 2 volunteer positions; the second position information is italicized. WA refers to the school WorkAbility program.

All six participants stated they enjoyed at least one of their unpaid work experiences. YA2, YA4, and YA5 commented on the "rewarding" nature of the work. YA6 stated that the work "was less stressful because there are no customers." YA4 mentioned the positive aspect of "socializing" during his temple volunteering which translated into a negative characteristic of his work enclave because "I talk too much and am still working on things." The two unpaid work experiences that could show improvement were both work enclaves with job coaches. Feelings about their volunteer experiences are revealed in Table 8.

All young adult participants disclosed their disability to supervisors for their paid or unpaid work experiences except for YA5. YA1 explained that her employer knew of her disability when she was discussing a Walk for Autism. P1 stated she informed YA1's employer when the parent requested a job

Table 8

Perceptions of Unpaid Work Experiences

Probe	YA1	YA2	YA3	YA4	YA5	YA6
Did you like your job	Yes	Yes	Yes/ *No*	Yes/ *OK*	Yes	Yes
If yes, what were positive aspects	Nice staff	It was rewarding	It was repetitive	Socializing	It was rewarding	Not stressful
What could be done to improve	Allow me to do more					
If no, what were negative aspects			*Disliked coworker*	*Unable to socialize*		
What could be done to improve			*Not insult me*			

Note. YA3 and YA4 each had 2 volunteer positions; the second position information is italicized.

application. YA2 and YA4 believed the work sites were aware of their disability because their fathers had discussed family dynamics. YA2 has a DR job coach work on site with him twice a week, which he referred to as a "workplace accommodation." Only YA2 believed his disability impacted his work, stating "I had to work 1.5 hours without standing; that was a long time."

Two of the six participants stated they would disclose their disability to their next employer because they were DR clients and DR would assist them in finding a job. YA1 stated that she "would be too afraid to tell them. I'd want to say it right without making them feel bad." YA3 stated he would "possibly" disclose, although "they might discriminate against me." YA4 stated his family "keeps his disability a secret" and would disclose only "if it's required." YA5 stated he will not disclose his disability in a future job. Table 9 outlines the perceptions of the young adult participants regarding their autism and work.

Table 9

Perceptions of Autism and Work

Probe	YA1	YA2	YA3	YA4	YA5	YA6
Did you disclose your disability to your employer	Indirectly	Yes; is my Dad	WA did	Yes, is my Dad	No	WA did
Did the employer provide accommodations	No	Extra breaks; DR job coach 2 days x wk.	No	No	No	No
Did your autism impact your job	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Will you disclose to next employer	I don't know	Yes, I work with DR	Possibly	If it's required	No	Yes

Note. WA refers to the school WorkAbility program. DR refers to the Department of Rehabilitation.

Impact of Supports

A second question examined in this study focused on how young adults with autism describe the impact of supports they received from their Individualized Transition Plan in high school and how it relates to their employment experience. Participants were asked a series of questions about their IEP, ITP, and their perceptions about services they received in high school as it relates to employment.

All six young adult participants received Special Education services in high school through an IEP. YA3 attended one public site placement in his four-year high school experience. YA1 attended a comprehensive high school for four years and an Adult Transition Program for three years before receiving her diploma. YA5 and YA6 attended a comprehensive high school before transitioning to a non-public school (NPS) funded by the school district. YA2 attended a comprehensive high school before transitioning to a residential treatment center (RTC) funded by the school district. YA4 attended a NPS privately funded before transitioning to a comprehensive high school for the last two years. All six participated in their IEP meetings. All participants except YA6 participated in a Social Skills class.

Three young adults took Regional Occupational Program (ROP) elective classes in high school. YA5 took two community college classes while enrolled at his NPS, with one focusing on Careers. YA1 participated in her district's Adult Transition Program, concentrating on functional skills. The following Table 10 provides demographic information about high school from the young adult participants.

Table 11 provides information on transition services provided in participants' IEPs. Five of six participants reported that they had taken a vocational assessment in high school. Two participants remembered the Summary of Performance being presented at their IEP meetings. Three participants did not remember, while YA5 stated it was not presented. YA1 and YA2 referred to WorkAbility staff members providing vocational activities, and not their case carriers. Three participants stated their teachers taught them how to complete job applications, while a different three stated their teachers practiced mock interviews with them. When asked about being referred to government

Table 10

High School IEP Information

Data	YA1	YA2	YA3	YA4	YA5	YA6
Name of HS	Huntington BeachHS/ *ATP*	Marina HS/ *Cathedral*	Irvine HS	NPS:NewVista/ *Aliso Niguel HS*	Irvine HS/ *Alton School*	Fountain Valley HS/ *Rossier*
SpEd services	Speech & Language/ *All SpEd*	Endeavors/ *RTC: all SpEd*	1 Directed Studies	All SpEd/ *1 RSP class*	2 RSP/ *NPS: all SpEd*	All RSP/ *NPS: all SpEd*
ROP/CTE classes	ATP for 3 years: transition skills	ROP Computer Graphic Design	ROP Photo ROP Welding	ROP Computer Web Design	Cypress College: Career Class	
Attend meetings	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Social skills training	10th grade; before school	Class/ *groups*	In the English class	Class/ *One semester*	Class/ *Class*	No

Note. All participants except YA3 attended at least two schools in their high school experience. The last placement is italicized.

Table 11

Individual Transition Plan

Data	YA1	YA2	YA3	YA4	YA5	YA6
Vocational assessment	In WA	Yes	Yes	Yes	At Cypress College	I don't know
Summary of Performance	Yes	I don't remember	Yes	I don't remember	No	I don't remember
Complete applications	In WA	In WA	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Mock interviews	In WA	In WA	Yes	I don't know	Yes	Yes
Refer to agencies	In WA	In WA	No	No	Yes	No
Which agencies	DR	DR			DR	

Note. WA refers to WorkAbility. DR refers to Department of Rehabilitation.

agencies that provide job support to adults with disabilities, YA1 and YA2 stated WorkAbility staff members made the referral to DR. YA5 stated his NPS made a referral to DR. YA3, YA4, and YA6 received no referrals.

The young adult participants had diverse thoughts on what the purpose of the IEP was. Two of six participants mentioned "goals" while two participants cited the word "help." The fifth participant did not know, whereas the sixth young adult stated "so I could have a social life." When asked the purpose of the ITP, four young adults did not know. YA2 mentioned a "roadmap" that was "unrealistic for me." YA3 understood transition related to life after high school.

The final probe for the second research question asked: now that you're graduated, what do you think your high school teachers should do to help prepare future students for employment? YA6 had no answer, but the other five participants had assorted responses. YA5 cited the importance of college in transition plans. Other key words participants used were "should have had an idea," "do more," "help guide," "interview, and "applications." Tables 12 through 17 charted the perceptions experienced by the participants related to their IEPs and transition services.

Parent Perceptions of the Employment Journey

One of the inquiries made of parent participants questioned how parents perceive their child's journey to independent employment. Parent participants were asked a sequence of questions about their child's expectations about work, the job search, and future employment.

Table 12

Perceptions of YA1 Toward IEPs and Transition Services

Probe	Response
What is the purpose of an IEP	So that I could do well in school. So I could have a social life.
The best part of an IEP	DR attending.
The worst part of an IEP	I hated attending meetings and missing class.
What is the purpose of the ITP	No.
What should teachers do to assist their students for jobs?	Teachers should have had an idea as to what I wanted to do for a career.

Note. IEP refers to an Individualized Education Plan. ITP refers to Individualized Transition Plan. DR refers to Department of Rehabilitation.

Table 13

Perceptions of YA2 Toward IEPs and Transition Services

Probe	Response
What is the purpose of an IEP	I'm not sure really.
The best part of an IEP	That they had the support for me.
The worst part of an IEP	I don't think it addressed my goals; not realistic.
What is the purpose of the ITP	Have a transition, a roadmap; it was unrealistic.
What should teachers do to assist their students for jobs?	They should do more hands-on with the job search and explain it.

Note. IEP refers to an Individualized Education Plan. ITP refers to Individualized Transition Plan.

Table 14

Perceptions of YA3 Toward IEPs and Transition Services

Probe	Response
What is the purpose of an IEP	It really helps.
The best part of an IEP	Getting help.
The worst part of an IEP	The meetings were too serious.
What is the purpose of the ITP	What I was planning on after high school.
What should teachers do to assist their students for jobs?	It would be good to help guide, really, just show them the basics.

Note. IEP refers to an Individualized Education Plan. ITP refers to Individualized Transition Plan.

Table 15

Perceptions of YA4 Toward IEPs and Transition Services

Probe	Response
What is the purpose of an IEP	To help me plan out what classes I'm going to take.
The best part of an IEP	Helped me choose what classes to take.
The worst part of an IEP	I liked everything
What is the purpose of the ITP	I don't remember.
What should teachers do to assist their students for jobs?	Probably just talk about like how to do an interview and how to fill out applications.

Note. IEP refers to an Individualized Education Plan. ITP refers to Individualized Transition Plan.

Table 16

Perceptions of YA5 Toward IEPs and Transition Services

Probe	Response
What is the purpose of an IEP	To decide goals, learning outcomes and behavior.
The best part of an IEP	In the early years: getting help.
The worst part of an IEP	I didn't like being watched and recorded.
What is the purpose of the ITP	Never heard of it.
What should teacher do to assist their students for jobs?	I don't know about employment but I can tell you about higher education, while in high school enrolling in college

Note. IEP refers to an Individualized Education Plan. ITP refers to Individualized Transition Plan.

Table 17

Perceptions of YA6 Toward IEPs and Transition Services

Probe	Response
What is the purpose of an IEP	Goal
The best part of an IEP	
The worst part of an IEP	Talking about goals.
What is the purpose of the ITP	I forget.
What should teacher do to assist their students for jobs?	No idea.

Note. IEP refers to an Individualized Education Plan. ITP refers to Individualized Transition Plan.

The Table 18 reveals parent perceptions of their child's expectations about work. Five out of six parent participants stated their adult children had unrealistic expectations about their first job. P5's adult child's expectations were post-college graduate which she believes to be appropriate. Two parent participants believe those expectations have changed as their adult child has aged. P2 stated her adult child has realized he cannot work in customer service, but "he says he wants to be a ride operator at Disneyland." P4 explained to her son "that nobody's dream job is to work in a grocery store" as part of their discussion.

Table 18

Parent Perceptions About Their Child's Work Expectations

Did your child have:	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Realistic expectations of their first job/ why?	No/ I found her first job	No/ Customer service aspect	No/ Like any typical teenager	No/ Unrealistic	Yes/ First job after college	No/ Wants to be a teacher
Those expectations change with age/ why?	Yes	No/ Wants to work at Disneyland	A bit/ Interning is a good start	No/ Nobody gets dream job	No/ Still wants a job after college	Yes/ College was difficult
Concerns about AUT and work/ why?	No/ She was naive	At times/ Concerns about being fired	No	At times/ Using it as an excuse	Yes/ It depresses him	No/ It will have no impact

When asked whether their adult children expressed concerns about their disability, three of six parent participants stated their children expressed no concerns. P1 believed her daughter to "be naïve" while P5's daughter believed her disability to "have no impact." P2 stated her son had concerns about "being fired even though he works for his father." P4 stated "it's just a good excuse. It's more of self-esteem as opposed to a disability." P5 believed her son had no concerns until DR discussed possible work-site issues and "he was depressed after hearing them."

Table 19 connects these thoughts as they relate to the job search. When asked if they thought their young adults' autism would impact their job search, five of six participants answered yes. P4 explained their family philosophy of mixing "together his disability and his personality." All six parent participants believe autism will impact their first job. P1 explained how she had to speak to her child's supervisor and intercede on her daughter's behalf to retain her job. P2 mentioned that her son "thinks he's more capable than he is," while P5 realized a job needs to "be a good fit." P3 believed her son's "concrete thinking" will impede work success. P6 felt her child gets "bored easily."

When asked if those concerns have been realized, two of six parents answered yes; three of six answered "somewhat' or "partially"; one parent answered no. P2 and P6 referenced unsuccessful job attempts. P1 stated her daughter's "anxiety gets in the way." P3 and P4 noted their child's work experiences were "learning opportunities." P5 did not feel her concerns were realized and stated that the volunteer experience has been positive.

Table 20 outlines parent perceptions of their young adults' future employment and their ability to be financially independent. Parents were asked if their adult children would be self-sufficient in five or 10 years. In five years' time,

Table 19

Parent Perceptions on Child's Autism and Job Search

Did you have concerns that AUT:	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Impact the job search/ why	Yes/ Anything new is frightening	Yes/ He thinks he's more capable than he is	Yes/ He has been in denial about his AUT	Somewhat/ We mix together his AUT and his personality	Yes/ We called the Dept. of Rehab	Yes/ She has behavioral issues
Impact the first job/ why	Yes/ I had to intercede in her job	Yes/ He lasted 3 months at Albertsons	Yes/ He doesn't understand you have to do more than what's asked	Yes/ There's a lot of competition	Yes/ He cannot work in all kinds of jobs	Yes/ She gets bored easily
Concerns been realized/ how	Partially/ Her anxiety gets in the way: been brought to tears	Yes/ His dad has been close to firing him	Somewhat/ He had an internship without a job coach	Somewhat/ Issues turned into learning opportunities	No/ Volunteering has been positive	Yes/ She only worked 45 minutes on one day at the job

Note. AUT refers to Autism.

P6 stated her child would not be self-sufficient. P2 was doubtful, while P1 gave it a "50% chance." P4 believed her son might still be in college in five years, while P3 believed her son will always need family assistance. P5 answered yes, as her son "will get a good job because he's studying something he likes."

When asked the same question regarding events in 10 years' time, P5's answer remained the same, while P2 and P4 each stated "I hope so." Two of six parents mentioned the need for "family assistance." Three of six participants stated that living in Orange County, California may be a barrier to self-sufficiency because of the high standard of living. P6 mentioned the need for "government

Table 20

Parent Perceptions of Future Employment

Will your child be self-sufficient:	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
In 5 years	50% chance	I have doubts	He'll always need family assistance	We might need to support him in school	Yes	No
In 10 years	We may need to live somewhere else	I hope so	He'll always need family assistance	I would hope so	Yes	Possibly with family assistance
Why?	If she gets enough experience and job coaching, then yes	Because of the economy and his disability	Applying for govt assistance would mean he's a failure	Where we live is an important factor	He'll get a good job because he's studying something he likes	She may need family and govt assistance

Note. Govt refers to Government.

assistance" while P3 stated "applying for SSI would mean he's a failure, and we think (YA3) can overcome that."

Perceptions of the Individualized Transition Plan

The final query for parents concerned how they describe the impact of supports their children received from their ITP in high school as it relates to their employment journey. Parent participants were asked questions about their perceptions of the transition plans in IEPs. Additional queries were made of their opinions of teacher and district duties toward transition services.

Four of six parents made school documents available to the researcher. Four parents shared their children's last ITP, while three parents shared their last

IEP. Two parents shared a report created by a private psychologist while two parents shared a report authored by a school psychologist. Those documents are outlined in Table 21.

Documentation verified that four young adult participants were eligible for Special Education services in the area of Autism. Three of four young adults had a secondary disability in the area of Speech and Language Impairment. Three of four young adults were given a research-based vocational assessment, while YA5 was given a teacher-made assessment.

All four young adult participants were given one ITP goal in three areas. All participants were given an Education/Training ITP goal of attending college. Half of the group was assigned researching colleges as an activity, while the other half was presented with contacting Disability Support Programs and Services (DSPS) in college. Three of four employment goals proposed getting a job, while YA4 specified a specific occupation. The corresponding activities were varied. YA1 had a basis in social skills, while YA5 and YA6 referenced a particular vocational task. YA4 focused on a specific occupation. The last ITP goal was focused on Independent Living Skills. YA5 and YA6 had budget-based activities, while the remaining two participants had the goal and activity based in social skills.

One of six parents reported that Speech and Language services were provided all four years of high school. Two parents conveyed that no social skills training by the school district was provided to their children. Four of six parents reported that social-skills training was provided by the school district as an IEP

Table 21

Documents: IEPs, ITPs, Psych Reports

Data	YA1	YA4	YA5	YA6
Primary DIS	AUT	AUT	AUT	AUT
Secondary DIS	SLI		SLI	SLI
Services at last IEP	ATP mod schedule; Career/ consult: 2xmos@30m Driver's Ed: 1200min/ Year	Consult from case carrier	SpEd all day; Indiv counseling; SLP consult	SpEd all day
ITP assessment	Cognitive Style; Coastline ROP; MyersBriggs	Career Decision Maker	Teacher made	Holland Code; Work Values Survey
Education/ Training goal	Attend college	Attend college	Attend college	Attend college
Education/ Training activity	Enroll in DSPS in college	Research colleges	Enroll in DSPS in college	Research colleges
Employment goal	Get a full-time job	Become a Special effects designer	Get a part-time job	Get a part-time job
Employment activity	Work on team-building skills	Research req's for SpEffects designer	Create a resume	Practice with mock interviews
Independent living goal	Live with a roommate	Work on friendships	Continue to live at home	Get a CA ID card
Independent living activity	Participate in CBIs	Call a friend outside of school	Take reality check on careerzone. com	Practice balancing a checkbook

Note. DIS refers to Disability. AUT refers to Autism. SLI refers to Speech and Language Impairment. ATP refers to Adult Transition Program. Mod schedule refers to modified schedule as student was attending community college two days per week. SpEd refers to Special Education services. 2xmos@30m refers to twice a month at 30 minutes each visit. DSPS refers to Disability Support Programs and Services in college. Req's for SpEffects refers to requirements for a Special Effects Designer. CA ID refers to a California Identification card. CBI refers to Community Based Instruction.

service. Three of four received ongoing services throughout high school, while P4 declined service after one semester, as the student wanted to take another elective. Three parents reported paying privately for two social skills training programs. P2 utilized Circle of Friends, while YA3 and YA5 participated in the UCLA PEERS program that they found on their own. Parent participants reported social skills training received by their children in Table 22.

Table 22

Parent Reported Social Skills Training

Data	YA1	YA2	YA3	YA4	YA5	YA6
SLP in HS	9th grade only	No	Yes	Consult	No	No
SS in HS/ frequency	Yes/ 1 hr./wk. Before school	No	Yes/ English class	1 semester/ Elective class	Yes/ Elective class	No
SS privately paid/ where	No	Yes/ Circle of Friends	Yes/ UCLA PEERS	No	Yes/ UCLA PEERS	No

Note. SS refers to Social Skills training. SLP refers to services provided by a Speech and Language Pathologist. HS refers to High School. 1 hr./wk. refers to one hour per week. UCLA PEERS refers to the Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills at University of California at Los Angeles.

When parents were asked what transition looked like for their children aged 16 to18 in high school, 3 out of 6 answered no differences were seen between transition services and no transition services. P2 stated “I don’t think they ever really talked about it (transition) because he was having so much trouble.” P5 referenced transition as the Adult Transition Program, as she stated “because he got the diploma” that she “really didn’t notice” any transition services. P1 referenced the Transition Partnership Project (TPP) while P6 discussed WorkAbility. P3 stated that they, through their advocate, "guided the discussion" about transition.

A second probe queried how teachers prepared their students for employment. P1 and P6 again referred to outside agencies, TPP and WorkAbility. Three out of six parents expressed that teachers did not prepare students for employment. P3 specified her son was prepared for college, stating "they prepared him just for the next step, because it was always our goal that he go to higher education." When asked if the teacher referred parents to any outside agencies that supported adults with disabilities, four out of six parents stated no; while two out of six stated yes, with a referral to DR. Table 23 charts the attitudes of parents of young adults with autism regarding the transition services outlined in their children's IEPs.

Continuing the thread of how teachers support students in transition, Table 24 presents parent perceptions of schools and districts. Parent participants gave varied replies to the question of what teachers should be doing to prepare students for employment. P1 stated that teachers need to be more informed about post-high school programs. P2 and P6 were similar in stating that more should be required of students with an IEP; the phrase "work ethic" was used. P3 believed "critical thinking is going to be very important." P4 specified that after a vocational assessment was given to her son, there was no development of a vocational pathway.

Table 23

Parent Perceptions of Transition Plan in IEP

In high school:	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
What did transition look like?	TPP took over transition activities	It didn't look different from other years	I had an advocate, we got what we wanted	I never knew any difference	I didn't notice	We had Work-Ability services
How did the teacher prepare for employment	Referred her to TPP	They didn't; at the RTC he had a little job	They prepared him for college	I didn't have any prior knowledge	I didn't notice	We had Work-Ability services
Did staff refer you to any govt agencies	Yes/ DR	No/ RCOC referred to DR	No	No	No/ RCOC referred to DR	Yes/ DR

Note. TPP refers to Transition Partnership Project, a federal grant partnering a school district with Department of Rehabilitation. DR refers to Department of Rehabilitation. RCOC refers to Regional Center of Orange County. WorkAbility is a state grant supporting vocational readiness.

The final question involved a broader topic of what school districts should be doing to prepare students for employment. Two of six participants mentioned services being continued to age 22, regardless of a diploma being given. P3 stated "the higher students fall through the cracks because academically they get through." P1 mentioned the lack of social skills moving forward post-high school while P2 wanted a "workable, achievable" transition for students. Two parents stated the school district "just wanted to be done with them."

Chapter Summary

Young adult and parent participants provided significant data for this study. Noteworthy findings from the young adult participants included their paid and unpaid work experiences, perceptions of work readiness and feelings of how

Table 24

Parent Perceptions of Teacher and District Duties

For future work	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
What should teachers be doing	They need to be aware of all programs; not as umbrellaed as well as it could have been	They should expect more out of them, academic-wise. Help them learn a work ethic	They would pick his classes and teachers that was a godsend	Give follow-up after the vocational assessment	IUSD needs to be more like Alton; he was better prepared for college	Make them aware of the work involved; IEPs are written where they answer 6 out of 10
What should districts be doing	There are no social skills at the college; there's nobody	They need to focus on transition that's workable and achievable for the student	Being able to show them the big picture; but that applies to typical teenage too	Personal Finance class. Being able to interview and applications too	Students get more help with Certificate of Completion diploma: nothing. Offer one employment class	They need to keep the kids until age 22. Everything was pushed toward graduation

their disability impacted current and future employment. Young adult participants experienced varied Special Education services in high school, with some vocational programs supported by WorkAbility staff. Participants were unclear as to the purpose of the IEP and ITP, although they voiced suggestions for how teachers can assist future students. Young adult participants did not voice a connection between employment difficulties, social skills, and their disability. Additionally, participants were unclear about disability disclosure in relation to employment.

Most parents thought their children had unrealistic expectations for their first job and for the impact their disability had on employment. All parents believed that autism would impact their children's job search and employment. One parent stated those fears had not been realized and that her adult child would be self-sufficient in five years. The other five parents were hopeful for independence within 10 years. Parent participants delineated the Special Education services received, especially in the area of social skills training. Parents were unclear about transition services during and after high school. Only half of participating parents received agency referrals. Parents whose adult children attended the same districts received very different services. All parents had suggestions for how schools and districts can assist future students.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the culmination of the research study. An overview of the study is provided, including the problem this study addressed, purpose of the study, and its research questions. The limitations of the study are discussed. The summary of findings are described, centering on four themes with implications for each. Recommendations for practice in educational leadership are presented. Finally, a summary of the dissertation is provided.

Introduction

The problem this study addressed was the employment experiences faced by young adults with autism. Greater numbers of children are being identified with autism (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). A concern, as with any child, is their prospects for the future. For children with autism, the concerns center on the ability for young adults with autism to achieve self-sufficiency through employment. Studies have shown the unemployment is higher for young adults with disabilities (Burke et al., 2010; McDonough & Revell, 2010; U.S. Department of Labor, 2013b). The purpose of this study was to learn the perceptions about employment from young adults with autism and from their parents. Additionally, it sought to identify the effect the ITP has on developing independent employment. An additional function of the study was to give a voice to a marginalized group.

The young adults' queries focused on perceptions of employment and their opinions on the services received in high school. Parents were asked about their perceptions of the young adults' employment journey, as well as their insights about transition services from the IEP in regards to employment. This data was obtained through a qualitative single-case study with multiple participants. Study participants live in Orange County, California.

The researcher utilized a single-case study with multiple participants. Six young adults with autism participated in individual semi-structured interviews. Their mothers were then interviewed with the same semi-structured design. The researcher then evaluated the interviews, archived records, and created matrices. The literature review was studied and significant themes emerged.

Limitations

The study has limitations and cannot be generalized to a broader audience. The limited number of participants precludes the research data from being generalized. The six young adult participants attended three different school districts. Three participants attended one school district and encountered three different educational services. Two participants attended the same school district, and received varied services. One cannot assume their experiences reflect all school districts in Orange County, California.

The researcher sent study recruitment flyers to various organizations, including Autism Speaks, OC Asperger's, Orange County Adult Transition Task

Force, and Grandparent Autism Network. Parents contacted the researcher directly with their interest. The researcher then spoke to the young adult participants to authenticate interest. Five parents learned about the study from OC Asperger's support group. The sixth parent was recruited from a friend of a teacher. An assumption cannot be made that these parent participants' experiences reflect the experiences of other parents in Orange County, California.

All young adult participants received a high school diploma. Two young adults had a typical high school experience, lasting four years. One young adult (YA1) participated in an Adult Transition Program (ATP) after high school. The district held onto YA1's diploma, which she received after two years at ATP. Two young adult participants graduated from an NPS financed by their home districts. One young adult participant graduated from an out-of-state Residential Treatment Center subsidized by his home district. It is not believed that these experiences represent a typical high school experience for the larger population of students identifying with ASD in Orange County, California.

Summary of Findings

Research questions for the young adults mirrored the questions asked of their parents. The interview probes specifically focused on their perceptions of the employment journey as well as perceptions of transition services received in high school. Four themes emerged from the data collection. These themes were reflected by both groups of participants. Parent responses correlated with the young adult responses. The four themes which emerged are the impact of autism on employment, social skills training, disclosure of disability to employer, and participants' expectations of teachers and school districts.

Interpretations

Impact of Autism on Employment

The first theme identified is the impact of autism on potential employment. Four of six young adults appeared not to understand connections between their characteristics of autism and how those factors would impact future employment. One participant, the oldest at age 24, understood the connection between his disability and his job. A second participant understood the connection to a lesser extent; she realized its impact but was unable to manage her deficits to facilitate employment. Parent participants fully understood the impact autism would have on their children's job search.

Half of young adult participants believed their autism would have no impact on their current or future jobs. Five of six parents believed their children will be negatively impacted on their job search by their autism. Four of those five parents stated those fears have already been realized. While parent participants vocalized fears to the researcher, they admitted conversations had not taken place with their adult children. P6 explained her daughter's reluctance in identifying with her autism: "she doesn't feel like she needs to be with people that are like her because she's more normal, though she's not."

Findings explained that the rate of improvement in autistic characteristics slowed after high school (Taylor & Seltzer, 2010). YA2 was the most aware of his situation and how his autism affected his job search, answering "because of my personality, I'm not as open or social." YA2 has a DR job coach come to his workplace twice a week. "She monitors my work and checks with my dad." YA2 believes DR support to be the main reason for his work success. Findings from Wehman et al.'s (2012) study exhibited that 27 of 33 employed participants' maintained employment with the assistance of job coach support.

P2 also expressed concern about the impact of autism on job retention, stating, "I'm always afraid that, he's going to do something and they're going to fire him even though he's working for his dad." P2 has cause to be alarmed, as researchers found adults with autism prone to unemployment after high school (Shattuck et al., 2012). This was true for YA6 who is unemployed; P6 stated that YA6 "doesn't think that her disability is going to impact employment; the social aspect primarily." Findings from Flood et al. (2011) bore this out when finding that children with autism scored lower than typical peers on social interactions.

Social Skills Training

A second theme seen throughout the interviews concerned Social Skills training. The young adults were unclear as to the purpose of the class. Those that participated could make no connection between social skills and future employment. In the same vein, when parent participants spoke about social skills training, they referenced making friendships, and not future employment.

Five of six young adults participated in some type of social skills training while in school. YA1 specifically stated that her social skills group helped when looking for a job. When further prompted, YA1 stated "well, actually, I also was involved in their WorkAbility program as well. That helped me." When encouraged, she was unable to associate her social skills class to her job. P1 felt that YA1's social skills training was minimal: "I would say that she didn't get much social skills training even though they said she had it." The majority of young adult participants felt a social skills program had limited impact on successful employment.

Other young adult participants stated their social skills class helped "very little" with their paid or unpaid work experiences. YA2 stated social skills "was more for personal," while YA3 was considered the "leader of the group because I talked a lot." YA4 thought the class "was cool" but could not remember any specifics. YA5 stated the purpose of the class was "friendships, stuff like that." Young adults did not offer concrete positive attributes of social skills training. Findings from Channon et al. (2001) determined youth with autism had less value for interpersonal relationships than their typical peers. While young adult participants understood social skills deficits as a characteristic of autism, they could not communicate any lasting effects from social skills training to the interviewer.

Three parent participants paid for social skills training out-of-pocket after deciding school services were unsatisfactory. P3 believed UCLA PEERS program will ultimately assist with employment. P2 and P5 believed the skills practice involved would improve their children's social interactions. Findings clearly state that social skills mastery increase preferred behaviors (Cotungo, 2009), and cooperation skills (Lane et al., 2003).

The literature is filled with studies touting the positive aspects of social skills training for youth with autism. M. Lerner and Mikami (2012) studied specific curriculum models which netted positive results. Laugeson et al. (2011) utilized the UCLA PEERS program finding improvement in friendship skills. Multiple studies found success with computer-based social skills training (Beaumont & Sofronoff, 2008; Bernard-Opitz et al., 2001; Faja et al., 2008; M. Silver & Oakes, 2001). Yet the participants were detached from the initial training they received as children. They saw no correlation between social interactions and successful employment.

Disclosure and Self-Advocacy

A third emerging theme was in the area of disclosure. Neither young adult nor parent participants could voice a clear understanding of disclosure, ADA, or work accommodations. One young adult participant stated his DR counselor would disclose his disability to a future employer, refuting his own self-advocacy. Three parents have never had a discussion about disclosure with their adult children.

All young adult participants had worked in unpaid volunteer positions, while two were currently employed. YA2 was employed by his father, and his disability was known to his work colleagues, as a DR job coach visited the worksite twice a week. YA2 and YA6 were most vocal about disclosing to future employers, voicing no negative connotations with disclosure. YA2 stated "I would. I work with the Department of Rehab."

The remaining four young adults gave varying answers when explaining why they would not disclose to a future employer. Madaus et al. (2002) found comparable statistics when they found that only 30% of their 308 participants self-disclosed to their employers. YA1 stated that it "depends on where I go . . . I would be too afraid to tell them; it's like knowing how to say it in a right way without making them feel bad." YA3 worried that he would face discrimination if he disclosed. Findings of 37 of 47 participants from P. Silver et al. (1998) voiced the same concern about possible prejudice as the reason for non-disclosure. YA4 stated his family keeps his autism "kind of secret" while working at his father's law office. Regarding future employment, YA4 stated "no, not if they don't need to know." YA5 felt it "unnecessary" to disclose.

Parent participants did not associate self-disclosure with self-advocacy. Skelton and Moore (1999) equate self-advocacy with self-determination and self-awareness. While P5 and P6 have not had discussions about disclosing to future employers, they both believe their children should disclose their autism when the time comes. P1 and P2 told their children's first employers that they were autistic, instead of allowing their children to communicate their own needs to their supervisors.

Four participants made IEPs available to the researcher. Academic accommodations were a prominent part of IEP discussions. Yet those considerations were not extended to future vocational discussions. Findings from Greenbaum et al. (1996) found 80% of study participants believed their learning disabilities affected home and work lives. Summary of Performance documents focused on the importance of accommodations in a college setting. No IEP notes mentioned a discussion of potential work accommodations.

Half of the parent participants had not had discussions with their adult children about disclosure. P3 suggested to YA3 that he not disclose, because he "is still very, very sensitive about his autism." P4 recognized that the researcher kept using the word "disability" remarking, "you keep using the word disability, but we don't really talk about it that way in the house . . . it is who you are; part of your personality." Yet, findings from Wehmeyer et al. (2012) found students who were taught a curriculum concentrating on self-determination reported an increase in self-awareness.

Expectations of Participants

The final emerging theme centered on participant expectations of teachers and school districts in providing transition services. The young adults reported that teachers played a minimal role in providing pre-employment activities. Four young adults referenced their school sites' WorkAbility program in providing vocational readiness skills. Both groups appeared unsure of the difference in services after the age of 16. Half of the parent participants were pleased with how their school districts served students with special needs, but all parents voiced concern about financial independence for their children.

When the young adults were asked if their high school teachers prepared them for employment, four participants spoke of WorkAbility staff helping them complete job applications and resumes, in addition to finding paid and unpaid work experiences. The only reported teacher interaction was from YA4, when she "gave me two fake ones (job applications) just for practice." YA5 declared the "case carrier never talked to me about employment." Findings from Thoma et al. (2002) discovered that teachers do not actively involve students in planning transition services.

When asked how teachers should prepare youth for future employment, WorkAbility was not mentioned. YA5 felt college preparation should be foremost in teachers' minds. YA6 had no suggestions. YA3 stated teachers should "guide" students, while YA1 thought it depended on the needs of the particular student. As the oldest young adult participant, YA2 had concrete suggestions. "They should do more hands-on with the job search and explain it; help them build their skills so they can get a job." Findings from Wehman et al. (2012) determined adults with ASD "can and do become more independent in performing competitive employment" (p. 167).

Parent participants offered input as to what teachers should be doing to prepare high school students for employment. P2 and P6 would like to see their children learn a strong "work ethic." P1 believed teachers "need to be aware of all the programs; it wasn't umbrellaed as well as I thought it could have been." Curtis et al. (2009) discerned this from their study of parent groups finding it was difficult for parents to ascertain services after students graduate. Findings from Nuehring and Sitlington (2003) realized that teachers should be knowledgeable of agencies serving adults with disabilities.

One parent gave praise to her school district for how it served students with special needs. Her family moved to Irvine specifically for the school district.

P3 stated “I do have an advocate; we didn’t get any resistance whenever we said this is what we want. And that was important to me.” When answering if parents were pleased with how their district served students, P1 and P4 said yes and no, based on the fact that “I didn’t want to be someone who pushed too hard” (P1) and “I didn’t ask for much” (P4).

Dann (2011) found that staff knowledge of autism fostered good relationships with parents. P5 did not experience a good relationship with her son’s teachers, as YA5 learned of his autism at school, without his mother’s permission. P5 stated clearly that YA5’s public school teachers were ill-prepared, “I realized that the teachers are not prepared for autistic children.” Findings from Ruble et al. (2010) bear this out, as teachers reported poor IEP quality and teacher preparation.

Findings from Hetherington et al. (2010) reinforced the frustrations of parents’ experiences with school districts, as three parent participants were distinctly unhappy with how their children were served. P2 stated her exasperation when she said “I don’t think they prepared him for anything after high school.” P5 asked for a non-public school site as “most of the teachers, they didn’t know how to handle (my son’s) situation.” P6 favored her non-public school setting, as she specified “the school district wants to get out of this as cheaply as possible. And it all comes down to the almighty dollar.”

Implications

The data collection provided from this study warrants implications for policy, practice, and future research. While this research study cannot be generalized, sufficient data was provided to create inferences for future recommendations. In addition, the survey developed for this study could be used with other groups of young adults and parents in order to garner more data on this issue.

Implications for Policy

Data from the study suggested policy problems in serving students with autism. The policy problems, as evidenced by the data collected, were the loose understanding and implementation of transition services. The California Department of Education's (2013b) vision statement included the phrase "to ensure fulfilling personal lives and careers" (para. 1) for all California students. Study participants voiced a desire for independence and self-sufficiency that were unmet after graduation. P6 observed "18 is kind of maybe a little bit young to try and be responsible enough to try and hold down a job."

IDEA provides the framework that all school districts follow in delivering services to students with disabilities. Federal guidelines mandate transition services are to be provided to students aged 16-22 (U.S. Department of Education, 2007), with all services terminating when a youth receives a diploma or reaches age 22. IDEA mandates the minimum services that a school district must provide. School districts determine how they interpret those guidelines and serve their students.

YA1 was allowed to attend an Adult Transition Program after finishing her four-year high school program. YA1 had met graduation requirements, and the district decided to hold her diploma, until her transition goals were met. Two young adult participants, YA2 and YA6, also attended the same school district as YA1, but they were not offered extended services. YA2 and YA6 had private high school placements, while YA1 was served through typical channels. P2 and P6 believed extending services was cost prohibitive. Schifter (2011) found students may need additional services, but stated the cost of services precluded additional assistance. P5 and P6 cited cost as reasons why they believed services terminated. P6 felt policy was determined by "the almighty dollar." Parent frustrations toward administrators and school districts were revealed by Hetherington et al. (2010) and Finn and Kohler (2010).

Implications for Practice

School districts are ultimately responsible for how their teachers implement federal policy in the classroom. Data from this study suggested a chasm between what is stated in IDEA and how teachers implemented transition services. Practice did not fulfill the promises implied by policy. A disconnect was seen between policy and practice in the following areas: preparing for future employment, making social skills meaningful to the workplace, understanding disclosure, and providing transition activities.

The impact of autism on employment is crucial when considering the quality of life for young adults. Independence and self-sufficiency can be found through employment. While studies show autism is the fastest growing identified developmental disability (Cimera & Cowen, 2009), findings show an employment gap between the non-disabled and disabled (Burke et al., 2010). These statistics would imply an understanding among young adults and parents about the potential struggle with employment. Yet only two young adult participants believed their autism would prove troublesome in the workplace. Parent participants understood the impending employment conflicts, but felt powerless to support their adult children. Limited conversations occurred about potential employment problems.

Social skills training was seen by parents as an important tool to help children to form friendships and improve personal interactions. Findings from Burke et al. (2010), Baghdadli et al. (2012), and Laugeson et al. (2011) reinforced the positive outcomes of social skills training. Yet young adult participants were unclear as to the purpose of their social skills classes. Parent participants were unable to voice a connection between social skills training and interpersonal skills needed in the workplace. No correlation was voiced from any participant between social skills training and future employment. Participants reported that teachers did not assert the importance of social skills in the workplace.

The value of disclosing disability to a potential employer appeared to be of little benefit to the majority of participants. While parent participants voiced a clear understanding of academic modifications, there was no relationship seen between academic and work accommodations. This reflects findings from Greenbaum et al. (1996) and P. Silver et al. (1998) showing fewer work accommodations being utilized by adults who had received academic accommodations. The researcher surmised an insufficient understanding of ADA laws from participants. Findings from Wehmeyer et al. (2012) suggested self-advocacy can be found through classroom instruction.

Young adult participants shared that most of the vocational readiness instruction was imparted by WorkAbility staff. Only one young adult identified a teacher who had taught him how to complete a job application. Both young adult and parent participants believed teachers and school districts should do more to encourage transition activities. Findings from Nuehring and Sitlington (2003) suggested education specialists should have a better understanding of post-school programs. Two parents lamented the termination of services when their children received a diploma, while P6 stated a "need for some kind of program where it's extended beyond that."

Implications for Future Research

The purpose of this research was to describe the perceptions of employment from the autism community, made up of young adults and parents. Findings from Hendricks and Wehman (2009) and McDonough and Revell (2010) revealed that adults with autism have higher rates of unemployment and underemployment. Watson's (2012) disability theory focuses on the importance of the individual. Future research must provide data that can be generalized to the larger population of adults with disabilities in order to enrich their employment opportunities.

An additional voice that needs to be heard in future research is that of the educator and adult agency provider. The researcher would like to hear the teacher perspective about providing transition services. Do teachers feel sufficiently trained in understanding IDEA mandates regarding transition services? Do teachers feel competent in writing ITPs? Do teachers feel they can concurrently meet academic goals and provide meaningful transition services? Do teachers feel knowledgeable in referring students and parents to agencies that serve adults with disabilities? Similar questions can be asked of adult agency providers, such as DR counselors. Do DR counselors feel young adults with disabilities are sufficiently prepared for employment after high school? Do DR counselors feel young adults with disabilities understand their rights in regards to ADA guidelines?

Recommendations

Several recommendations are proposed to improve transition services to students with autism. These suggestions are based on the impact of autism on employment (Shattuck et al., 2012), providing appropriate transition services in high school (Ruble et al., 2010), the importance of social skills training (M. Lerner & Mikami, 2012), and self-advocacy and knowledge of ADA protections (Wehmeyer et al., 2012).

Statewide Supports

The state of California provides resources to school districts and teachers in various ways. Services are provided to students with disabilities with funding from local, state, and federal resources (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2013). Support is offered to teachers through the Commission for Teacher Credentialing.

1. California Department of Education officials, as guided by the Governor of California, need to authorize monies to school districts to be used specifically for transition services. Currently, two-thirds of California districts receive monies through the WorkAbility grant, providing vocational readiness programs to secondary students. The grant serves students with an IEP in grades 7 through Adult Transition (California Department of Education, 2014). Protocol is already in place to provide financial accountability. If extra monies are unavailable to fund new sites, then current funding models should be re-configured to equally serve all students.
2. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing needs to advance teacher training in regard to Transition. Whereas there have been additional authorizations made available in the areas of Early Childhood Education and ASD (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2014), there continues to be a need in the area of Transition Services.

Local Supports

Orange County provides supports to teachers and parents on a local level through collaboration with Orange County Department of Education and local Community Advisory Committees (CAC). California Education code 56190 (2014) mandates each school district have a CAC to facilitate communication between all stakeholders.

1. Secondary teachers need to be trained on how to serve students through the ITP. Not only do they need training on how to write suitable ITPs, but they also need guidance in how to deliver activities outlined in the ITP. Teachers need to take ownership of the ITP: transition needs are as important as academic needs. Teachers also need to be aware of agencies that serve adults with disabilities; agencies have distinctive eligibility requirements (Timmons et al., 2005). Referrals need to be made during the IEP.
2. Teachers, parents, and students need to understand social skills training as it relates to future employment. Theory of Mind curriculum can be easily translated from the classroom to the workplace (Strickland et al., 2013). Social skills curriculum needs to have a transition viewpoint.
3. Teachers, parents, and students need to understand disability employment rights. In order to fully comprehend these rights, students need to be proficient with self-advocacy. Parent participants in this study were practiced advocates. Students need to be taught how to advocate for themselves: first in school, and second in the workplace. Teachers need to present self-determination curriculum while teaching precepts of ADA laws.

Summary of the Dissertation

The dissertation began with the Introduction and presented the background of the problem which was the employment gap experienced by young adults with disabilities. The purpose of this research was to gain the perceptions of employment from young adults with autism and their parents. This research was significant to educational leadership in order to better inform educators on how to improve transition services to students with autism.

The four topics which emerged from the study are the impact of autism on employment, social skills training, disclosure of disability to employer, and participants' expectations of teachers and school districts. It is recommended that California restructure its state grants so all secondary students are supported by WorkAbility. It is also recommended that teachers receive training in the following areas: understanding of IDEA regulations regarding transition, the part social skills contributes to future employment and disability rights for adults.

In the future, when young adults with disabilities are asked how they define themselves, it is the responsibility of the education community to have prepared their former students to provide a confident answer.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD PROPOSAL

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

[redacted]

APPLICANT INFORMATION		
Principal Investigator: **Kathleen Purcell**	Phone:**760-231-6443** **949-680-8357**	Email:**krpurcellcasa@cox.net**
Position at CSUF (faculty/student): **Student** (if student, please indicate Faculty Advisor below)	Dept.: Educational Leadership Campus mail code (or other mailing address if needed):	
CSUF Faculty Advisor: **Dr. Janice Myck-Wayne**	Dept.: **Special Education**	Email: **jmyck-wayne@fullerton.edu**

Co-Investigator(s) (if applicable):		
	Dept.:	Email:
	Dept.:	Email:

Project Type: ☐ Research ☐ Thesis Publication ☐ Teaching ☐ Class Project (for publication) ☒ **Dissertation** ☐ Other (specify):

Project Period: From: **September 2013** To: **September 2014**

Location of Research: **Orange County, CA**

Project Title: **Help Wanted: Perceptions of Employment from the Autism Community**

FUNDING INFORMATION:

Project is: **unfunded** ☒ funded ☐ *(if funded, please complete the following):*
☐ to be funded (pending)

Funding Agency Name: 1. *2.*

Sponsor program name:
Contract/Grant No. (If applicable):

stitutions involved in this research? (If yes, please identify):	Yes ☐
er IRB reviewed and approved this protocol? (If yes, please identify):	Yes ☐

FOR EVALUATION PURPOSES, PLEASE CHECK ANY OF THE FOLLOWING THAT APPLY TO YOUR PROTOCOL.

☐	**Questionnaires or Survey(s) to be Administered**	☒	**Filming, Video or Audio Recording of Subjects**
☒	**Review of Data Banks, Archives or Medical Records**	☒	**Interviews or Observations (including Oral History)**
☐	Participants Major Language is not English	☐	CSUF Students as Participants
☐	Participants to be Studied at CSUF	☐	Participants to be Studied at Non-CSUF Location(s)
☐	**Exclusion of Women or Children Subjects (must explanation reason for exclusion)**		Employees as Participants (CSUF or otherwise)

APPLICATIONS WHICH TYPICALLY REQUIRE FULL COMMITTEE REVIEW ARE INDICATED BELOW.
If you check one or more of the below-listed categories, please submit an **original plus 15 copies** of this application.

☒	**Participants with Disabilities**	☐	Protocol is of a Sensitive or Controversial Nature
☐	Children or Minor Participants (under 18 yrs. Old) – Assent Form Required	☐	Exposes Participants to Possibility of Physical or Mental Injury/Harm
☐	Prisoners, Parolees or Incarcerated Participants	☐	Alcohol, Smoking or Drug Related Participation

☐	Suicidal Questionnaires and/or Evaluations	☐	Involves Attachment of Any Apparatus to the Subjects
☐	Pregnant Participants	☐	Physical Exercise Studies
☐	Fetal, Placental or Surgical Pathology Tissue(s)	☐	Involves Collection of Blood Samples (fingerpricks/venipuncture)
☐	Involves Deception or Manipulation of Participants Behavior or Response	☐	Therapist/Client Relationship

FOR CSUF IRB USE ONLY: **DATE RECEIVED:** **IRB APPLICATION NO.:**

DATA COLLECTION **Please check category wherein research will be conducted in one or more of the following methods, only:**			
☐	Normal educational practices in commonly accepted educational settings		
☐	Educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement) – wherein subjects' responses are not manipulated		
☒	**Collection or study of existing data, documents, records or specimens**		
Survey, Interview or Observational Procedures (please answer the following):		**YES**	**NO**
	Data will be collected so that responses cannot be identified by persons other than the researcher (either directly or indirectly)	☒	☐
	Participants *responses if known outside of research could increase risk of civil/criminal liability or damage* participant's *financial standing or employability*	☐	☒
	Research involves collection of sensitive aspects of participant's *own behavior, such as illegal conduct, drug use, sexual behavior or use of alcohol*	☐	☒
MINIMAL RISK			
Does Research Involve More than Minimal Risk to Participants? If yes, please explain fully in Benefit & Risk section of this application		☐	☒
Minimal risk means that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. [45 CFR 46.102(i)]			
DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT			
Please provide complete answers to the following questions as they relate to your use of human subject participants. Avoid the use of jargon, abbreviations or scientific terms, unless those items are defined in your procedures. If applicable, you should include copies of any tests, surveys or questionnaires along with your completed application. Use Additional Sheets for answering, if needed.			

Purpose & Significance: Explain the purpose of your research. Include any scientific need or rational.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research in Orange County, California is to describe the perceptions of employment by young adults (ages 18-22) with high functioning autism and their parents. The study also seeks to understand the effect the Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) has on developing successful employment. This will be described by both young adults with autism and their parents through interviews and focus groups. Professionals are noting the higher identification of children with autism. As this population ages, the new concern is young adults with autism's ability to achieve independence. Self-sufficiency is often found through employment, which in turn, influences quality of life. The audience for this research is professionals who serve young adults via school districts, government agencies, and community service organizations. The ambition is to understand the employment experiences of this population, demarcate any occupational strengths and challenges, and fortify the transition services students receive in high school to assist in their future employment endeavors.

Significance of the Study

This research is important and will make a significant contribution to educational leadership because while it is implicit that young adults with disabilities struggle with employment, there is little research to delineate those barriers, especially for young adults with autism. The research has a significant impact on the educational community, social services, and the field of human resources. When young adults with disabilities terminate their mandated educational services, there is apprehension about accessing services as an adult. Subsequently, there is little research to evaluate how well young adults with disabilities, especially autism, claim those benefits in Orange County, California. While there are employment data, there is a lack of qualitative data that gives voice to this population and informs the field.

Participant Population & Recruitment: Please respond fully and completely to each of the following criteria:
a) Include the number of participants, gender and age(s).
b) Explain rational for any participant exclusion.
c) Describe how potential participants will be identified and recruited. (If applicable, submit copies of recruitment advertisements, flyers, newspaper ads, etc., along with completed application.)
d) If data will be collected by observation of behavior without explicit agreement of subjects, please explain how individual private behavior will be recorded to provide the assurance that individual codes or coding will be unrelated to individual under observation.

a) **Participants will be recruited from a convenience sample of young adults and their parents. This study seeks to recruit five to eight young adults diagnosed with autism between the ages of 18 and 22 living in Orange County, California for the primary focus group. In addition, the enquiry seeks up to five parents of the young adult participants for a secondary focus group. Participants will be English-only or fluent English speakers.**
b) **No one under 18 will participate. All young adult participants will be over 18, not conserved by parents in educational areas, have average to above-average cognitive functioning, as measured by psychological assessment, be high school graduates with a diploma, and interested in employment. Parent participants will have an adult child diagnosed with autism by a school or physician. Adult children will give permission for their parents to participate.**
c) **Potential participants will be recruited through the Grandparents Autism Network, OCAspergers.com, & OC Autism (partnered with Autism Speaks). The researcher will attend a monthly support meeting, explain the study and hand out informational flyers (Appendix E). The researcher will interview potential participants verifying their understanding of the process. Young adult participants will give permission for their parents to participate.**
d) **Not applicable**

Methods: This description should include instructions given to participants, activities in which subjects will be asked to participate or engage in, special incentives, and experimental procedures. If your research occurs off-campus, include written permission on organization letterhead allowing you to conduct research on their premises If your study involves interviews and/or surveys, include the questions to be asked as an attachment and include a translated copy of the instruments used if necessary.

This single case study will have two groups of participants:
5-10 young adults with high functioning autism age 18-22
3-5 parents of young adult participants

All participants will sign an informed consent (Appendix A & B)

Young adults with autism will participate in 1:1 interview (Appendix C)
Parents will participate in a focus group (Appendix D)

INTERVIEW & FOCUS GROUP

1:1 interviews and focus group will be held at a local library or CSU, Fullerton

DOCUMENTS & ARCHIVED RECORDS

Young adults will be asked for consent to review documents: transition services (IEPs, ITPs, summary of performance, Vocational Rehabilitation case notes) and employer data (evaluations, job accommodations).

OBSERVATION

If any young adults are employed, they will be asked if the researcher has permission to observe them at work (Appendix A)

Benefit & Risk: Have the risks involved been minimized and are they reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits of research? If more than minimal risk is involved, please explain what additional measures will be taken to ensure participant safety. Explain importance of knowledge that may reasonably be expected regarding risk. Remember that all protocols involve some degree of risk. If you cannot identify any risks in the research, include the statement **"This protocol contains no foreseeable risks" on this application and the informed consent document(s).** If your protocol employs survey or interview techniques, clearly indicate that participants may choose to not answer any question that makes them feel uncomfortable.

This protocol contains no foreseeable risks. Participants may choose not to answer any questions that cause them discomfort.

Informed Consent or Assent: Attach a copy of the consent and/or assent form(s) you will use to obtain informed consent from participants. Assent is an additional requirement whenever minors are asked to participant as research subjects (i.e., in addition to gaining parental consent, a researcher is required to gain "assent" from participants who are under the age of 18 years old.) Please see the CSUF IRB webpage at www.fullerton.edu/research/research-compliance/irb/ for additional information regarding this requirement. A cover letter consent is typically used for survey research wherein researcher, in lieu of having potential participants sign a consent form, will use a cover letter which states the following "by completing the attached survey you are agreeing to participate in this research study." If you are including non-English speaking participants, you will need to provide native language forms and describe procedures for obtaining informed consent and answer the following questions:

a) Who will be obtaining informed consent?
b) When will subjects be asked to participate and sign the consent form (or given the opportunity to agree to consent)?
c) If applicable, how will minors assent be obtained?
d) If you are including an interpreter, please explain duties and qualifications of this person. If not, please explain how consent forms are sufficient without an interpreter (re non-English participants).
e) Are translated consent/assent forms an exact translation of English language forms? if no, please explain.

a) The researcher will be obtaining informed consent via verbal interview and signed form (Appendix A & B).
b) Subjects will be asked to participate after the researcher verifies their understanding of the study. Participants will then be asked to sign a consent form. A copy of the form will be given to them, with an explanation that consent may be waived at any time.
c) No minor participation allowed.
d) No use of interpreter as all participants will be English only or fluent English speakers.
e) No translation of forms. The researcher speaks English-only, and purposeful sample will be fluent in English.

Anonymity* & Confidentiality: Describe how either anonymity or confidentiality of participants will be maintained **(Note: if a subject signs a consent form and/or identifiers are obtained by researcher, anonymity cannot be promised. You must explicitly state on consent forms the following: "confidentiality will be provided to the extent allowed by law."** For studies involving internet surveys, researcher should clarify how email addresses will be disassociated from submitted responses in order to maintain confidentiality. It is important that you describe a method for protecting the identity of individual participants.

1:1 interviews will remain confidential, with pseudonyms being used. Participants understand that if they consent to this study, their identities will be known to other participants in the focus group. I will protect their confidentiality as stated in the consent form.

Data Storage, Protection and Destruction (including Audio/Video Taping/Consent/Assent forms): Describe where data will be stored **(e.g., a specific building location, a specific office number) and when data will be destroyed.** Individuals may keep data indefinitely, but clarify how the data will be used (i.e., future educational use, presentations, publications, etc.) and why it must be kept. Digital data must be stored on password protected computers. If your protocol includes collection of audio or video taping, **please explain how audio and/or video data will be destroyed.**

Research will be contained at Researcher's home in a locked cabinet. Research will also be contained in the researcher's locked office at Esperanza Special Education School. Both offices use password-protected computers.
Audio/Video tapes will be destroyed after transcription via magnetic erasers.
Paper copies of data will be kept for future educational use and publication for three years.

Compensation: If participants will be compensated for their participation, provide detailed information about the amount and the method/terms of payment. If non-monetary compensation (e.g., course credit, services) will be offered, explain how it will be provided. If no compensation will be provided, please state such.

No compensation will be provided to participants.

Subject Matter: Is the research controversial? Is there a possibility your research will generate public concern? If so, please explain.

The research is not controversial, and will not generate public concern.

Debriefing: If applicable to your protocol, please explain your method for debriefing participants at the end of your data collection. If you do not intend to provide a debriefing please explain.

Participants will be invited to a meeting following completion of the dissertation to discuss findings. Researcher may make referrals to public agencies, if appropriate.

By signing below I certify that I am knowledgeable and agree to comply with all regulations and policies governing research with human subjects. I have completed the required CSUF IRB Tutorial (and attached a copy of the certification of completion for same to this application.) I acknowledge that I am responsible for requesting any proposed modifications to this protocol for review and approval by the CSUF IRB prior to implementation. **I further agree to report any adverse events immediately to the CSUF IRB and to comply with all requests to report on the status of a study if so requested. (Faculty Advisors hereby also agree to have read and be responsible for guidance and assuring ethical standards during collection of data regarding this protocol).**

I certify that I have not yet collected any data for the study described above and will not collect data until I receive the CSUF IRB approval notice and stamped, approved consent forms (if applicable).

Principal Investigator (Faculty Researcher or Graduate Student):	Date:
Faculty Advisor (if applicable):	Date:
Co-Investigator (if applicable):	Date:
Co-Investigator (if applicable):	Date:
Co-Investigator (if applicable):	Date:

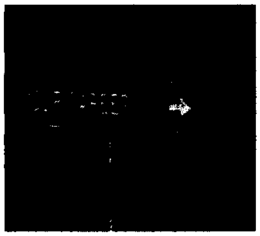
NOTE: DO NOT START DATA COLLECTION UNTIL YOU HAVE RECEIVED APPROVAL AND/OR STAMPED/APPROVED CONSENT FORMS (FOR USE IN YOUR STUDY) FROM THE CSUF IRB. IF REVISIONS OR OTHER INFORMATION ARE NEEDED IN ORDER TO APPROVE YOUR PROTOCOL, YOU WILL BE ADVISED AND GIVEN AN OPPORTUNITY TO SUBMIT ANY REQUESTED ITEMS FOR FURTHER REVIEW TOWARDS APPROVAL. **APPROVAL IS NOT OFFICIAL UNTIL YOU ARE IN RECEIPT OF THE CSUF IRB APPROVAL NOTICE, AND APPROVED CONSENT FORMS (IF APPLICABLE) FOR YOUR STUDY.**

APPENDIX B

STUDY FLYER

MY NAME IS KATHY PURCELL, AND I'M CURRENTLY A DOCTORAL STUDENT IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AT CSU, FULLERTON.

I AM RECRUITING YOUNG ADULTS WITH AUTISM WHO ARE INTERESTED IN BEING INTERVIEWED TO FIND OUT THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF EMPLOYMENT AND HOW THEIR IEP/ITP SUPPORTED THEM IN THE EMPLOYMENT PROCESS.



QUALITATIVE STUDY

- PARTICIPANTS: YOUNG ADULTS WITH AUTISM AGED 18-24 AND THEIR PARENTS
- 1:1 INTERVIEWS

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

- AIM: TO PROVIDE A VOICE TO THE AUTISM COMMUNITY
- AS CHILDREN WITH AUTISM AGE, WE HAVE THE DESIRE TO ENSURE A GOOD QUALITY OF LIFE
  - SELF-SUFFICIENCY
  - INDEPENDENCE
  - EMPLOYMENT
- THE AUDIENCE FOR THIS RESEARCH IS:
  - EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONALS
  - HUMAN SERVICE AGENCY PROFESSIONALS
  - COMMUNITY SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

PARTICIPANTS

- YOUNG ADULTS AGES 18 – 24
- HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE WITH A DIPLOMA
- PARTICIPATING PARENT

TIME COMMITMENT

- **YOUNG ADULT**: ONE MEETING LASTING UP TO 45 MINUTES
- **PARENT**: ONE MEETING LASTING UP TO 60 MINUTES

IF INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN THIS IMPORTANT RESEARCH, PLEASE CONTACT:

KATHY PURCELL

DOCTORAL STUDENT
CSU, FULLERTON

949.680.8357
KRPURCELLCASA@COX.NET

STUDY TO BE COMPLETED BY MARCH 30, 2014

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT—YOUNG ADULT PARTICIPANTS

Perceptions of Employment Study Consent Form – Young Adult

Introduction: My name is Kathy Purcell, and I'm a doctoral student at California State University, Fullerton. I am researching young adults with autism and their journey to self-sufficiency through employment. I am asking you to take part because you have expressed an interest in finding independent employment. I hope to learn your views about this subject so I can inform others on how to better serve high school students with autism. Your participation may make a difference in another youth's employment journey.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to describe the perceptions of employment by young adults with autism and their parents. You must be between the ages of 18 and 22, be a high school graduate, and have a medical or educational diagnosis of Autism to participate. You must be employed or interested in employment to take part in this study.

What I will ask you to do: If you agree to be in this study, I will conduct an interview with you about transition services in high school and your job search. The interview will take less than 45 minutes to complete. I will then ask you to participate in a focus group composed of other young adults with Autism who are interested in employment. The focus group discussion will take less than 60 minutes. With your permission, I would like to video- and tape-record our discussions. I will ask your permission to access documents: IEPs, ITPs, summary of performance, 504 accommodations, job evaluations, DR case notes, job accommodations.
You do not need to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

Your answers will be confidential: Confidentiality will be provided to the extent allowed by law. Only I will know your identity. Focus group participants will know one another by first names only. Research data will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records. If I video- or tape-record the interview or focus group, I will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed, which will be within four months of its taping. Pseudonyms will be used in any report.

Taking part is voluntary: Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate at any time. You may choose not to answer any question you deem sensitive.

Risks and benefits: There is the risk that you may find some of the questions about Autism and your job search sensitive. This protocol contains no foreseeable risks. There are no monetary benefits to you. I hope to learn about your experiences so I can help future young adults with autism in their job search.

Compensation: There is no compensation for your participation.

If you have questions: Please contact me at 949-680-8357 or krpurcellcasa@cox.net or my faculty advisor, Dr. Janice Myck-Wayne at 657-278-4706 or jmyck-wayne@fullerton.edu.

Consent: I have carefully read and/or I have had the terms used in this consent form and their significance explained to me. By signing below, I agree that I am at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in this project.

Participant's Name: ____________________

Signature:____________________**Date:**____________

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT—PARENT PARTICIPANTS

Perceptions of Employment Study Consent Form - Parent

Introduction: My name is Kathy Purcell, and I'm a doctoral student at California State University, Fullerton. I am researching young adults with autism and their journey to self-sufficiency through employment. I am asking you to take part because you are a parent of an adult child who has expressed an interest in finding independent employment. I hope to learn your views about this subject so I can inform others on how to better serve high school students with autism. Your participation may make a difference in another youth's employment journey.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to describe the perceptions of employment by youth with autism and their parents. You must be the parent of a participating young adult who gave their permission for you to participate.

What I will ask you to do: If you agree to be in this study, I ask you to participate in a focus group composed of parents of other young adults with Autism who are interested in employment. With your permission, I would like to video- and tape-record the discussion. The focus group discussion will take less than 60 minutes. You do not need to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

Your answers will be confidential: Confidentiality will be provided to the extent allowed by law. Research data will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records. If I video- or tape-record the focus group, I will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed, which will be within four months of its taping. Pseudonyms will be used in any report. Your identity will be known to fellow participants when joining in the focus group.

Taking part is voluntary: Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate at any time. You may choose not to answer any question you deem sensitive.

Risks and benefits: There is the risk that you may find some of the questions about Autism and your child's job search sensitive. This protocol contains no foreseeable risks. There are no monetary benefits to you. I hope to learn about your experiences so I can help future young adults with autism in their job search. The more others understand the challenges of youth with autism seeking employment, the greater the potential for improvement in services.

Compensation: There is no compensation for your participation.

If you have questions: Please contact me at 949-680-8357 or krpurcellcasa@cox.net or my faculty advisor, Dr. Janice Myck-Wayne at 657-278-4706 or jmyck-wayne@fullerton.edu.

Consent: I have carefully read and/or I have had the terms used in this consent form and their significance explained to me. By signing below, I agree that I am at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in this project. My adult child has given permission for me to participate.

Parent Participant's Name: ______________________________

Signature:______________________________**Date:**______________

Consent: I give my parent permission to participate in this study.

Adult Participant's Name: ______________________________

Signature:______________________________**Date:**______________

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS—YOUNG ADULT PARTICIPANTS

1. **How do young adults with autism describe their experiences in seeking and maintaining employment?**
    - Describe your work history.
        - Have you ever held a job?
            - If yes, where? How long? How many hours per week? What is your rate of pay? Do you like your job?
                - If yes, what aspects do you like about work? What improvements could make it better?
                - If no, what aspects do you not like about work? What improvements could make it better?
            - Did you disclose your disability to your supervisor?
                - If yes, did your employer provide accommodations? Did your disability impact your job at all? Would you disclose to your next employer?
                - If no, did your disability impact your job at all? Would you disclose to your next employer?
            - If no, have you ever applied for a job?
                - If yes, where did you apply? Did you get an interview? Why do you think you didn't get the job?
                - If no, where do you think you'd like to work? What has kept you from applying for a job?
        - Have you had any unpaid work experiences/volunteer experiences when you were in high school? After high school?
            - If yes, where? How long? Did you like the experience?
                - If yes, you liked the experience, what aspects did you like? What improvements could make it better?
                - If no, you didn't like the experience, what aspects didn't you like? What improvements could make it better?
            - Did you disclose your disability to your supervisor?
                - If yes, did your employer provide accommodations? Did your disability impact your job at all? Would you disclose to your next employer?
                - If no, did your disability impact your job at all? Would you disclose to your next employer?
    - What does it look like when you search for a job?
    - How does your disability affect looking for a job or keeping a job?
    - Who was most helpful in your job search?
        - What did their help look like?

2. **How do young adults with autism describe the influence of supports they received from their Individualized Transition Plan in high school and how it relates to their employment experience?**
    - What is your educational background?
        - Where did you go to high school?
        - What kind of classes did you take in high school?
        - Did you participate in any post-secondary education or training?
    - Did you have an IEP or 504 Plan in high school? Middle school? Elementary school?
        - If IEP, what was the purpose of the IEP? What did you like best about having an IEP? What did you dislike about having an IEP?
        - If 504, what was the purpose of the 504 Plan? What did you like best about having a 504? What did you dislike about having a 504 Plan?
    - How did you participate in your high school IEPs or 504 Plan meetings?
        - Before age 16? After age 16?
    - What was the purpose of the Individual Transition Plan (ITP)?
    - How did your case carrier involve you in the ITP process before the meeting?
        - Interview you? Did you take vocational assessments? Complete the Summary of Performance with you? Did the case carrier review your goals with you?
    - How did your case carrier prepare you for employment?
        - Help you complete job applications? Help you practice for interviews?
    - Did any of your high school teachers refer you to any agencies that would help you find a job?
        - If yes, which agency were you referred to? Did you apply for that agency? Did the agency provide you with job assistance?
        - If no, now that you're graduated, are you aware of any agencies that assist adults with disabilities find employment?
    - Now that you're graduated, what do you think your high school teachers should do to help prepare future students for employment?

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS—PARENT PARTICIPANTS

3. **How do parents perceive their child's journey towards independent employment?**
    - When did your child first talk about wanting a job?
        - Did they have realistic expectations about the kind of work they would be doing for their first job? The kind of pay they would be receiving for their first job?
        - If it was first discussed while in high school, have their expectations changed now that they've graduated high school?
    - Did your child express concerns about their disability in regards to employment?
        - If yes, were those concerns reasonable? Why?
        - If no, were you concerned about their disability in regards to employment? How?
    - Were you concerned that your child's disability would impact their job search?
        - Can you discuss those concerns?
    - Were you concerned that your child's disability would impact their first job?
        - Can you discuss those concerns?
    - If your child has been employed, have any of those concerns been realized?
    - Did you have a discussion with your child about disclosing their disability to their employer?
        - If yes, did they disclose? Did the employer provide accommodations? Do you think their disability impacted their job?
        - If no, do you think their disability will impact their job?
        - If you're child has yet to have a job, will you discuss? Why?
    - What does it look like when your child searches for a job?
        - If you assist, what does that look like?
    - What has been most helpful to your child's job search?
    - Do you think your child will earn enough to support himself/herself without financial assistance (from family or government programs) in 5 years? 10 years?
        - If yes, is this from current job or future training/job?
        - If no, is this because of economy or disability?

4. **How do parents describe the supports their child received from transition services in high school as it relates to their child's employment journey?**
    - In what district did your child attend high school?
        - What kind of program did they participate in?
        - As a parent, were you pleased with how your district served students with special needs?
            - If yes, why?
            - If no, why not?
    - When did your child first enter Special Education? Enter into a 504 Plan?
        - Did your child participate in their IEPs? The full meeting or part of the meeting?
        - Did you review the documents at home with your child after the meeting?
        - Did your child's participation change after they entered high school? After age 16?
    - At what age did your child's case carrier begin discussing the ITP at meetings?
        - Did they get your input prior to the meeting? Your child's input?
    - Did your case carrier review previous ITP goals and present draft ITP goals at subsequent meetings?
        - Were ITP goals treated with the same importance as IEP goals?
    - What did "transition" look like for your child age 16-18 in high school?
    - How did your case carrier prepare your child for employment?
    - Did any school staff refer you to any agencies that would help your child find a job?
    - Now that your child is graduated, what do you think high school teachers should do to help prepare future students for employment? What should school districts be doing?