

## **CANVAS Meeting Minutes, 5-7-2024**

### Participants in Attendance:

- AJ Richard
- Ariel Cascio (Michigan State University)
- Brad Cox (Michigan State University | College Autism Network)
- Brett Ranon Nachman (University of Arkansas | College Autism Network)
- Chloe Marbell Davidson (City of Irvine Disability Services)
- Chris Whelpley (Virginia Commonwealth University)
- Cindi May (College of Charleston)
- Clarissa Barnes (Defiance College)
- Danielle Flores (Triton College)
- Deborah Munoz-Maniscalco
- Gary McManus (Rochester Institute for Technology)
- Gina Hoagland (University of Maryland-Baltimore County)
- Hilary Meyer (Triton College)
- Jan Smith (The Cottage School)
- Jill Underhill (Marshall University)
- Kathryn Szechy (University of Windsor)
- Katie McDermott
- Kendra Miller (Anoka-Ramsey Community College)
- Mark Tapia
- Mary Baker-Ericzen (San Diego State University)
- Michael Canale (University of Maryland-Baltimore County)
- Rachel Adams (University of Massachusetts, Amherst)
- Sara Frederick (Vanderbilt University)
- Sara Sanders Gardner (Bellevue College)
- Sreeja Sreelatha (Kirkwood Community College)
- Summer West (Universität Kassel)
- Syndee Knight (Indiana University)
- TC Waisman (Autism Training Academy)
- Tim Vogus (Vanderbilt University)
- Val Erwin (Bowling Green State University)

### **Meeting Plan**

#### **I. CANVAS Updates**

- Join our CANVAS list-serv - Our primary means of connecting, sharing info
  - Click [here to join](#)
  - Send email to the list  
<https://groups.google.com/a/collegeautismnetwork.org/forum/#!forum/can-canvas/join> by emailing [can-canvas@collegeautismnetwork.org](mailto:can-canvas@collegeautismnetwork.org)
  - [CAN Membership Details](#) We appreciate the support your membership provides to help us offer CANVAS and other opportunities.

- College Autism Summit (call for proposals is open):  
[https://collegeautismnetwork.joyconference.com/v2/!](https://collegeautismnetwork.joyconference.com/v2/)

### **Presentation Details**

**Presenters:** Dr. Cindi May (Professor of Psychology, College of Charleston) and Dr. Christopher E. Whelpley (Assistant Professor of Management, Virginia Commonwealth University)

**Presentation Title:** Biases in the Hiring Process for Job Candidates with Autism...and Solutions That Might Help Level the Playing Field

### **Presentation Notes:**

- This work stems from an entire team of individuals, including undergraduate research associates.
- Unemployment rates for disabled people are often twice as high as their non-disabled counterparts. Underemployment is also high. This all exists in light of the fact that there are many capable autistic individuals but do not have the right opportunities.
- Only about 58% of autistic individuals in their early 20s worked beyond high school, according to the NLTS-2.
- Often job interviews focus on social interactions and other components that may put autistic candidates at a disadvantage, and thus less likely to be selected for the role. Neurotypical individuals often do not understand the mental state and behaviors of autistic people during these situations.
- The first study Cindi focused on involved recording participants in mock job interviews. Half of the 30 participants were autistic, half were neurotypical. These degree-seeking students were asked to think about their dream jobs, strengths, and qualifications. They were then asked to talk for five minutes about these roles. Interviews were transcribed verbatim.
- In one condition, college students – naïve raters, in that they did not know if any of the candidates had autism – were asked to rate the videos. 150 raters watched these videos. Meanwhile, 150 different raters (also naïve to the nature of the study being on autism) only read the interview transcripts. Participants rated the performance on a 7-point scale based on a variety of characteristics, as well as indicated if the candidate was qualified and how likely it was they would hire the candidate.
- The research team expected ratings to differ across the conditions, particular among autistic candidates, with them hypothesizing worse ratings in the video condition.
- Within the video condition, most of the ratings were significantly higher for neurotypical candidates – with the exception of “qualified”; on the other hand, in the transcript condition (where participants could not see or hear the candidates, only basing it on the content) ratings were higher for the autistic candidates.
- Also in the video condition, neurotypical candidates were frequently rated higher than ASD candidates on a number of characteristics, including trustworthiness, likeability, straightforwardness, and more. Yet both neurotypical and autistic individuals were considered similarly qualified.

- As for the question about hiring candidates, participants in the video condition were more likely to higher the neurotypical candidate over the autistic candidate, even though they were viewed as equally qualified. Here is where we see the influence of social preferences.
- Meanwhile, in the transcript condition, candidates who had autism were significantly more likely to be considered hireable and qualified.
- “It’s style rather than substance that’s driving the pattern that we observe in that traditional interview setting.”
- They adopted a Social Model of Disability approach for autism for their subsequent work, recognizing that many neurotypical people may not be understanding of or aware of autism. Cindi mentioned that many researchers focus on training autistic candidates that may involve masking. Yet they did not want to adopt that approach. As a result they were interested in developing a neurodiversity training for employers. They thanked drawing from Kristen Gillespie-Lynch’s and colleagues’ neurodiversity training – co-developed by autistic people – and adapted it for an employment context.
- Modules could take under 15 minutes to complete.
- Module 1 focused on an overview of autism, entailed discussing diagnosis criteria, and featured first-hand accounts of autistic adults. Participants needed to obtain a certain score on the quiz to proceed.
- Module 2 featured a video centered on a professor with autism, who addressed common misconceptions about autistic individuals and discussed recommendations for allies.
- Participants completed the neurodiversity training and took two quizzes to ensure understanding. Then they watched and evaluated the same job interview videos specifically on autism disclosure. For this study, though, these participants were not naïve, as they knew about the candidates’ autism diagnoses. This decision was based on research about the value of knowing about someone’s autism background.
- Participants watched and evaluated the job interview in one of three conditions: immediately after the training, two weeks after, or two months after.
- Participants who rated it right after training (college students) tended to rate autistic candidates more awkward and less likeable, though the overall rating and qualifications were similar across neurotypical and autistic candidates. Encouragingly, autistic people were rated to be hired as likely as their neurotypical counterparts.
- For participants who offered their ratings after two weeks (participants were adults recruited broadly across the United States, ages 25-65), the data was extremely similar to the “immediately after” condition. This shows that the neurodiversity training benefitted individuals beyond the initial group.
- For the participants in the condition taking the survey two months after, it was similar in how they viewed both neurotypical candidates’ and ASD candidates’ qualifications and potential of being hired.
- Neurodiversity training and diagnostic disclosure seem to help.

### Questions and Answers:

- Val: “I have found for myself I do much better on zoom then in person for interviews is there any research you are aware of any differences between video vs in person like if awkwardness is less likely to be viewed on video.”
  - It would be practical to see

- Mark: Is there a bias among the interview in whether or not the candidate discloses their autism?
  - Chris referred to some prior research. For the managers in that study, they expressed hopes for the candidate to disclose. It would help them.
  - Cindi ran a study about disclosure in employment (without a training component), but they did not “move the needle much.” The combination of the training and awareness can make all the difference.
- Sara: Was there any training on how to better communicate with an autistic candidate?
  - The second module features three parts. The final third focused on how to be an ally, including communicating effectively.
- AJ: “Would you advise job applicants to disclose in interviews?”
  - Chris sees there are mixed benefits based on the situation. Cindi said there’s often upsides.
- Mary: “Is it possible that social desirability of knowing the study was about being trained in understanding autism that reporters were showing desirability to hire an autistic candidate? Did you ask the participants why they would want to hire the candidates and gather any forms of qualitative information about their interests that may not be related to social desirability?”
  - If there was not a social desirability effect, there would likely not be the prominence of unfavorable ratings across hundreds of participants. It is possible they were more nuanced and clued into what was going on. Cindi does not think a social desirability effect was unfolding.
  - Chris said that many employers view autistic individuals as having a variety of positives.
- Jill: “I have been working with some autistic alums of my university who lost jobs because of social communication differences and misunderstandings. What do you think is the next step to ensuring that autistic people who are hired are more likely to be retained? Do you think it is the Ally training you just mentioned as I was typing this? :)”
  - Some of Chris’ research on allyship and mentorship illustrate the vitality of supporting autistic employees.
  - Cindi said systemic changes will make all the difference.
  - Some of Chris’ work shows that co-workers varied in which models of disability they followed; the individuals who embraced more of a social model of disability focused on relationship-oriented behaviors, which autistic people gravitated toward.
- Brett asked about disciplinary differences for how employers embrace autistic employees.
  - Chris said it will be helpful to coalesce ideas across many articles.
  - At the VCU Autism Center they look out of individuals coming out of Project SEARCH, as opposed to individuals who are living independently or other spaces.
  - Cindi mentioned that many college-aged raters were perhaps more open to neurodiversity because of the fields they were in (e.g. psychology).
- TC: “Do you recommend competency-based assessments for hiring that includes a short interview rather than being solely focused on an interview?”

- Chris has engaged in work where they looked at personality measures (for instance, aiming to individuals' job performance based on their responses). In their samples, autistic individuals were disadvantaged based on existent measures.
- Brett: What's next with your research?
  - Chris is further examining reduction of workplace barriers.
  - Cindi's top goal at the moment is to also submit papers to journals. Cindi wanted to know what topics interest the CANVAS community. Here's what people in our community mentioned!
    - Mark mentioned more awareness of neurodiversity training.
    - Rachel: "Bias/ barriers to disclosure- How can employers be more intentions about mitigating this"
    - Brad: "When and how to disclose"
    - Katie: "I'd love to see some resources at the town/city level so young adults can achieve employment at home before college/ career"
    - Tim: "How the observed differences you find in ratings translate into actual interactions in interviews as well as in the workplace. More generative interactions and building mutual understanding."
    - Val: What are reasonable accommodations that are not overwhelming to the search committee?
    - Kathy: "REALLY like that you took the environmental/contextual approach to autism supports in the workplace. I would say let's continue to work towards those kinds of approaches in many ways and continue to move away from asking autistic people to adopt non-autistic ways of being to fit in at work"
    - TC: "I work with a large Union implementing competency-based hiring practices. All hiring panelists, union members, union leaders receive autism & ND training that also includes biases & intersectionality awareness. They're finding a marked difference in the kinds of people they are hiring. Would love to see research with competency-based focus. Thank you both for a great presentation and research."
    - Clarissa: "The big question for me is - how do we create equitable interview/employment processes that don't require disclosure? In other words, how do we redesign systems that are based on the medical model and move toward a social model? In other words, adjust the workplace (processes, procedures, environment) rather than the person or making individual accommodations that are only available once you have "proved" you need them."

## **Future Meetings**

We will be taking our annual June break, returning with new meetings starting in July. Please stay tuned for details on future dates and presenters!