Exploring the Diagnostic Disclosure Experiences of Autistic Individuals in Workplace Settings

Anna Melissa Romualdez

UCL Institute of Education

Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Psychology and Human Development

in August 2021

Abstract

Autistic adults are currently facing a crisis of unemployment, malemployment, and underemployment in the UK. Autistic people may face barriers to employment that prevent them from finding or maintaining a job, and autism researchers have sought to understand both what these barriers are and how to eradicate them. While research on autism and employment has become a priority in recent years, studies focussing specifically on autism diagnosis disclosure in workplace settings are scarce. Researchers have largely focussed on measurable employment outcomes for autistic people, such as average number of hours worked per week, average pay, and rates of success in recruitment. Much less common are studies highlighting the employment experiences of autistic people. Moreover, the existing literature contains few studies that explore the potential role of disclosure in improving employment outcomes. In this thesis, I first sought to explore the disclosure experiences of UK-based autistic adults when seeking or maintaining employment. In Chapter 2, my first doctoral study examined the disclosure experiences of a large group of autistic employees and job seekers in an effort to identify the commonalities among their experiences. In the study outlined in Chapter 3, I explored autistic people's disclosure experiences through more in-depth qualitative methods, identifying common themes and sub-themes found within one-to-one interview transcripts. From these interviews, I also determined the factors associated with the outcomes of disclosure based on the experiences of autistic employees and job seekers in the UK. My last study, outlined in Chapter 4, aimed to examine potential employers' perspectives on hiring autistic candidates who disclosed on the application materials. This study also compared employers' perspectives on hiring autistic vs. dyslexic or physically impaired candidates. Finally, in Chapter 5 of this thesis, I discussed how my research findings contribute to the extant literature on the subject of autism disclosure in the workplace. I also outlined how these findings may be translated into best practice for

employers and colleagues in workplaces. To conclude, I made three recommendations that may improve disclosure and employment outcomes for autistic individuals, specifically: 1) Interventions or training programmes should be targeted toward other people in the workplace rather than autistic individuals; 2) Inclusive organisational cultures must be shaped by organisation leaders; and 3) Disclosure policies and protocols should clearly welcome but not necessitate disclosure.

Impact Statement

The work presented in this thesis has the potential to generate impact in three ways. First, my work may precipitate further studies contributing to our understanding of autism disclosure in workplaces. I made several recommendations for further research in Chapter 5, bringing attention to the areas that merit exploration within this topic. I also highlighted the importance of bringing autistic people's employment experiences to the forefront throughout this thesis and in the publications generated from my doctoral research. Through my published research, I hope to have encouraged other researchers to continue amplifying the voices of autistic people in their work.

Second, this work may influence best practice in UK workplaces, especially for employers who seek to hire autistic people but who may need guidance on how to create more inclusive organisational cultures. My research may also contribute to a better understanding of autism and autism disclosure, especially for organisational leaders, managers, and colleagues. By highlighting the importance of other people to successful disclosure and employment outcomes, I hope to have shifted the responsibility away from autistic people and toward their employers and colleagues.

Third, and perhaps most critically, my research may lead to a better understanding of the decision to disclose and its possible outcomes for autistic individuals. While many autistic job seekers and employees may still struggle with the decision to disclose, it is my hope that this work will lessen some of the uncertainty surrounding disclosure. For far too long, autistic people have faced misunderstandings in the workplace, obstacles in recruitment, and barriers to success in employment. This research may contribute to highlighting some of these difficulties and exploring ways in which to mitigate them.

Declaration

I, Anna Melissa Romualdez, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. I confirm that I have indicated in this thesis where information has been derived from other sources. I developed the questions on disclosure used to collect data for the study outlined in Chapter 2, the interview scheduled used for the study in Chapter 3, and the survey used for the study in Chapter 4. The Employability Rating Scale was developed from the work of Allen Huffcut, while the Autism Awareness Scale was developed by Kristen Gillespie-Lynch and colleagues. Colleagues from Ernst & Young included Michael Carratt and a second colleague who has asked to remain anonymous; they acted as consultants in developing the job description and CVs used in my third study. Dr. Brett Heasman developed the general employment and demographic questions used in the wider Diverse Minds Survey and extracted the data from Qualtrics for the first study outlined in this thesis.

Word count (without references): 40,873

Signature:

Anna Melissa Romualdez

Date: 27 August 2021

Acknowledgments

First, I need to thank the autistic individuals who contributed to this research. Without their openness and willingness to share their experiences with me, none of the work in this thesis would have been possible. I would also like to thank the participants who dedicated their time and effort to my third study. My research was funded by Autistica and the Discover Autism Research and Employment (DARE) project. The research activities conducted at the Centre for Research in Autism and Education (CRAE) are generously supported by the Pears Foundation.

I would like to thank my brilliant PhD supervisor Dr. Anna Remington for her constant support, encouragement, and mentorship. I will forever be grateful to her for taking me on as her student and giving me countless opportunities to grow and succeed. Thank you to Dr. Zachary Walker, my wonderful secondary supervisor, who got me through some of the most difficult times of my PhD and was always willing to act not just as professional but also emotional support. His guidance has been invaluable throughout this journey.

Thank you to Dr. Laura Crane for all of her help, and my past and present CRAE colleagues, who have made our research lab a home for me throughout the last three years. Despite not seeing each other for almost 18 months during the pandemic, we have managed to stay connected, and I am so grateful for that. I would especially like to thank Kana, Jana, and Ellie. I will always treasure the hours we spent together in the PhD office, sometimes talking and sometimes just silently propping each other up as we worked side by side.

So much gratitude goes to my friends and family. Thank you to my parents, Jose Manuel and Lourdes, and my sisters, Cristina, Patricia, and Victoria, for being sources of joy and comfort whenever work got too stressful--but also throughout my entire life. And lastly, thank you to my partner, Latif, who is always the first person to take pride in my accomplishments, encourage me when I need it most, and support me in anything I do. I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family and to him.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

ADHD - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

APA – American Psychiatric Association

AQ – Autism-Spectrum Quotient

A/AS-level - Advanced Level Qualification

ASC – Autism Spectrum Conditions

ASD – Autism Spectrum Disorders

BTEC - Business and Technology Education Council Qualification

CRAE – Centre for Research in Autism and Education

CSI – Concealable Stigmatised Identity

DARE – Discover Autism Research and Employment

DEP – Double Empathy Problem

DPM – Disclosure Processes Model

DSM-**5** – Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition

GCSE - General Certificate of Secondary Education

HFA – High-Functioning Autism

NAS – National Autistic Society

OCD - Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

ONS – Office of National Statistics

PTSD - Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

QoL – Quality of Life

RRBs – Restrictive Repetitive Behaviours

SDR – Stigma Disclosure Recipient

SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

UCL – University College London

UPIAS – Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation

WHO – World Health Organization

Chapter 1
General Introduction

Autistic adults in the United Kingdom currently face an employment crisis. While many autistic adults desire employment, they often face barriers to obtaining or maintaining a job. This may be because of certain features of autism, such as social communication differences, that are misunderstood and discriminated against in work environments. These misunderstandings may also be due to the lack of knowledge that others have about autism, including a lack of awareness that a colleague is autistic, leading to negative interactions.

This thesis explores the role that the disclosure of a diagnosis may play in helping to mitigate the challenges that autistic individuals face in the workplace. While disclosure might lead to better understanding from colleagues, legal protections, and appropriate adjustments, it may also result in discrimination in the workplace and increased negative perceptions from others. Through my doctoral research, I sought to hear from autistic individuals in the UK about their experiences of disclosure, including what led them to disclose, the factors they considered before disclosing, and the outcomes of this decision. I also aimed to explore the possible biases that employers might have toward hiring autistic individuals, specifically when autism disclosure is included on the job application materials. Furthering our understanding of disclosure for autistic adults and the potential biases of employers is important if research is to progress toward improving the disclosure experiences of the autistic community in the UK.

Autism

Autistic people make up just under 1% of the population in the United Kingdom (Ambitious-About-Autism, 2020). Autism is a developmental condition that is often characterised by social communication differences, narrow interests, and stereotyped,

repetitive behaviours (APA, 2013); autistic people may also experience sensory symptoms, such as over or under-sensitivity to environmental features including light, noise, touch, and visual stimulation (Belek, 2019; Bontempo, 2009; Sapey-Triomphe, Leiros Costa, & Wagemans, 2019; Simmons, 2019). This condition is also lifelong. While symptoms may appear gradually from birth, autism persists into adulthood and individuals remain autistic throughout their lifespan (Matson, Cervantes, & Peters, 2016). As autism is a spectrum of conditions, meaning that there is variability in how autism presents across individuals, it is also known as *autism spectrum condition* (ASC) or *autism spectrum disorder* (ASD); for the purposes of this thesis, I will use the term *autism* only. I will also use identity-first language (e.g., autistic individual rather than individual with autism) throughout, reflecting the preferences of the majority of autistic people and self-advocates, their families, and other community stakeholders in the UK (Kenny et al., 2016; Milton, 2012).

Autistic individuals can vary greatly in their support needs. While the terms "low-functioning" and "high-functioning" autism have been used in the past, it is now clear that these terms are both inappropriate and misleading. An autistic individual who might have been classified as having "high-functioning autism (HFA)", for example, may have average or above average communication skills but struggle with reading social cues. It is more appropriate, as well as more accurate, to refer to autistic individuals as having strengths in some areas and needing more support in others. It is estimated that 71.3% of autistic individuals may also have a co-occurring intellectual impairment or learning condition, ranging from mild to severe (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). While autism is indeed a spectrum, there are certain symptoms that are common to many in the autistic population (Billstedt, Carina Gillberg, & Gillberg, 2007; Eapen, Whitehouse, Claudianos, Crncec, & Frontiers Research Foundation, 2015).

Common Autistic Symptoms

Autism is sometimes referred to as an "invisible condition", as there are no recognisable physical characteristics associated with, or specific to, this condition. However, members of the autistic community have recently begun to voice their objection to this term. Calling autism "invisible" implies that the onus is on autistic people to stop "hiding" their autism and somehow make their disability known. It is more accurate to say that many non-autistic people simply do not recognise autistic traits and are not aware of how autism may present in different people. Some autistic symptoms are more social in nature, while other symptoms describe how autistic people experience or interact with their environment.

Among the behavioural characteristics of autism, the DSM-5 (APA, 2013) lists restricted, repetitive, stereotyped behaviours and interests (RRBs) as common. While these may vary in occurrence or frequency in autistic individuals, they include behaviours such as: insistence on sameness in routines and the environment; repetitive manipulation and movement of object parts or body parts; ritualized or compulsive behaviours; circumscribed interests; and sometimes, self-injurious behaviours (Bodfish, Symons, Parker, & Lewis, 2000; Lewis & Bodfish, 1998). In addition, increasing evidence points to autistic people as having sensory sensitivities to certain features of their environment (Belek, 2019; Sapey-Triomphe et al., 2019; Simmons, 2019). While not included in the official diagnostic criteria set out by the American Psychiatric Association (2013), this may include hypersensitivity to light, noise, touch, or visual stimulation, or decreased sensitivity to any of these environmental features. It is estimated that over 90% of autistic people experience sensory processing differences (Crane, Goddard, & Pring, 2009; Leekam, Nieto, Libby, Wing, & Gould, 2007).

Many autistic people also experience differences in social communication. This characteristic may manifest as difficulties in understanding both verbal communication and non-verbal cues, especially in social contexts. Social communication differences may also make it difficult for autistic people themselves to communicate with others or establish social relationships. This can be particularly challenging for autistic people when interacting with non-autistic people (Heasman & Gillespie, 2019b). These social features of autism may also appear in the wider population of individuals who may have similar characteristics but do not meet the criteria for an autism diagnosis. This is referred to in the literature as the broader autistic phenotype.

The Broader Autistic Phenotype

While individuals diagnosed as autistic may have skills and abilities that surpass those of neurotypical people, more research has emerged identifying the link between autistic traits and certain strengths, even in those who do not meet the criteria for a diagnosis. Researchers have found that those with enhanced visuospatial analysis abilities also rate themselves highly as having autistic-like traits (Cribb, Olaithe, Di Lorenzo, Dunlop, & Maybery, 2016; Grinter, Van Beek, Maybery, & Badcock, 2009), as measured by the Autism-Spectrum Quotient (AQ) (Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, Skinner, Martin, & Clubley, 2001). There is also evidence to suggest that greater perceptual capacity is linked to higher scores on the AQ in neurotypical individuals (Bayliss & Kritikos, 2011), with the implication that this autistic "cognitive style" may be present in the general population. The presence of these autistic traits in non-autistic individuals is referred to as the broader autistic phenotype.

The broader autistic phenotype can be seen in individuals who may score high on measures of autism but fall below the cut-off for an autism diagnosis. This has led to the understanding that autism may not be a "discrete" condition; traits typically regarded as being

exclusive to those with a diagnosis may also be found in non-autistic people, especially those with autistic family members (Constantino & Todd, 2003; Wheelwright, Auyeung, Allison, & Baron-Cohen, 2010). Along with certain strengths and abilities, non-autistic people may also display certain autistic traits related to social responsiveness (Constantino & Todd, 2003), as measured by the Social Responsiveness Scale (Bruni, Constantino, & Gruber, 2014). These social behaviour differences, which were mentioned earlier in this chapter, may include behaviours that fall within the domains of social awareness, social cognition, social communication, social motivation, and restricted interests and repetitive behaviour (Bruni et al., 2014). While the SRS-2 is largely focused on the social deficits found in autism, these characteristics can be viewed more accurately as differences in social behaviours that are simply part of the autistic identity. Unfortunately, these differences, such as atypical verbal and non-verbal communication behaviours, can often be perceived negatively by others, particularly in social situations (Sasson et al., 2017; Sasson & Morrison, 2019). Autistic traits are still largely misunderstood and individuals who display these traits—both autistic and non-autistic—may be discriminated against or face stigma from other people. In fact, there is evidence that autistic behaviours have more stigma attached to them than the diagnostic label of autism itself (Butler & Gillis, 2011; Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2021). For autistic individuals, having a diagnosis may contribute to a better understanding of these traits and themselves, but it may also have the added benefit of mitigating discrimination from others through disclosure of this diagnosis.

Both autistic individuals and those that fall within the broader autistic phenotype may experience social communication differences, and often the discrimination from others that follows. However, research has shown that misunderstandings and difficulties with social interaction are not simply due to differences inherent in these individuals. Rather, they are the

result of a mismatch of perspectives and expectations between autistic and non-autistic

people, often referred to as the Double Empathy Problem (DEP) (Milton, 2012).

The Double Empathy Problem

The DEP is founded on the idea that both people, the autistic and non-autistic person,

are involved in an interaction and therefore both experience the mismatch and difficulty in

interacting socially; the problem is not solely in the mind of the autistic person (Milton,

2012). This experience can be uncomfortable and confusing for both, but especially novel for

non-autistic people for whom this breakdown in social interaction is not an everyday reality

as it is for autistic individuals. In real-life social situations, the DEP means that both autistic

and non-autistic people may find it difficult to understand one another, respond in ways

expected by the other, or interpret each other's mental states (Sheppard, Pillai, Wong, Ropar,

& Mitchell, 2016). In a study where non-autistic participants were asked to watch videos of

autistic people's facial expressions and correctly identify what situation they were reacting to,

the participants guessed inaccurately in nearly all situations (Sheppard et al., 2016). The

results suggest that this may be one reason why social interaction for autistic people is so

difficult. While much of our past understanding of autism has focused on the difficulties that

autistic people have, this study demonstrated that non-autistic people similarly struggle to

understand and socially interact with autistic people.

Conversely, recent research has shown that autistic individuals do not struggle to

interact with other autistic individuals in the same way that they do with non-autistic people.

Autistic people are highly effective at communicating information to other autistic people

(Crompton, Ropar, Evans-Williams, Flynn, & Fletcher-Watson, 2020) and creating a shared

understanding in social situations with their autistic peers (Heasman & Gillespie, 2019a).

This has implications for how we view the perceived social communication "deficits" in

autism, and indicates that these differences are in fact a result of mismatches in communication styles (Davis & Crompton, 2021). Emerging support for the DEP, and its subsequent impact on how autism is understood as a social communication disability, may improve interactions between autistic and non-autistic people in the future. However, at present, there is no widespread understanding of autism within this framework and autistic people continue to be misinterpreted—and discriminated against—by a predominantly neurotypical society.

As autism is still largely misunderstood, differences in social interaction experienced by autistic individuals can have devastating consequences—especially when these differences are attributed to negative characteristics of the individuals themselves. Misunderstandings arising from different social communication styles can lead to social isolation, bullying, and discrimination. Autistic people are often blamed for these misunderstandings. Their social communication differences are often viewed as inherent personality flaws simply because they deviate from what is expected or considered "typical" in society. When autism is regarded as a disorder or deficit rather than a difference, this forms the roots of discrimination and stigma against autistic people in society.

The Medical Model versus Social Model of Disability

The two opposing perspectives on how we may choose to frame autism, or indeed any condition that deviates from what is considered typical, are reflected in the debate on the *medical model* versus *social model* of disability. The traditional understanding of disabilities such as autism dictates that these conditions must be "treated", and that disabled individuals must somehow be forced into what society's idea of successful life outcomes are. The objective, according to the medical model, is for the disabled person to more closely achieve outcomes that mirror those of a typical person (Fisher & Goodley, 2007). For this reason, the

medical model is also sometimes referred to as the linear medical model, where actions conducted in the present are evaluated based on later outcomes (Fisher & Goodley, 2007). This model tends to focus on interventions and medicine (Fisher & Goodley, 2007), rather than acceptance of autism as an identity that does not need to be changed. This perspective precludes the idea of autism as a difference that should be both recognised and accepted— and prevents autistic individuals from embracing their autistic identity in the present. The medical model implies that to be autistic is to be lacking, and that autistic individuals should strive as much as possible to "overcome" their autism to be successful.

In contrast, the social model of disability rejects outright the notion that autism is a deficit. The roots of this model were first laid down in 1975 during a discussion held by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation and the Disability Alliance (UPIAS & Disability-Alliance, 1976). Later writings on the social model of disability (Oliver, 1990) emphasised disability as a social construct and rejected the individualisation and medicalisation of disability, which had benefited capitalist societies for decades. Oliver (1990) was also one of the first to advocate for the disability movement as a social movement.

The social model maintains that disabled individuals are not inherently disabled; they are prevented from achieving success and gaining acceptance within society by structures that systematically disable and oppress them (Fatoye, Betts, Odeyemi, Fatoye, & Odeyemi, 2018). Within this model, it is understood that the impairment itself is not the disability. Society disables the individual by placing limitations on the extent to which they can participate in community life on an equal footing with others (Burchardt, 2004). One example is the standard educational system which has been in place for decades and has only recently begun to evolve significantly to include disabled learners. Standardised tests and other written measures of achievement, for example, disadvantage dyslexic learners and students with other learning conditions. These students may not fare well on written exams but can demonstrate their

mastery through other, more practical assessments. Despite the fact that it has been nearly fifty years since the introduction of the social model in writings about disability, the general public still clings to the medical model as the more widely held perspective on autism (Fatoye et al., 2018). The autistic community in the UK, along with their families, other stakeholders, and researchers, have contributed to the efforts to change this way of thinking. However, the public perception of autism must evolve further, and stigma and discrimination toward autistic people still persist. The social model of disability urges us to think of autism, and other conditions that divert from what is typical, as differences that should be accepted—not as deficits or disorders that frame individuals as "less than." Autistic individuals are set up to fail in a society that views them this way, and the consequences can be devastating. It is not only autistic people who suffer these consequences. Neurotypical people are also disadvantaged by the lack of inclusion of autistic people, who often bring skills, abilities, and different perspectives that can benefit society as a whole.

Autism as a Strength

Stemming from the social model of disability, that views conditions like autism as differences and identities to be embraced, autism research has slowly extended its reach toward recognising the strengths of the autistic mind. Many of the earlier studies on autistic strengths proposed that autistic people have enhanced spatial perception compared to non-autistic people, especially as tested through the Embedded Figures task (Jolliffe & Baron-Cohen, 1997; Shah & Frith, 1983). These studies found that autistic individuals were able to spot hidden figures within a complex shape more quickly than non-autistic individuals. In the mid-2000s, further studies supported the idea that autistic people do in fact perform better on the Embedded Figures task than matched non-autistic peers (Edgin & Pennington, 2005; Mottron, Dawson, Soulières, Hubert, & Burack, 2006). Autistic people may also display hyper-attention to detail as a consequence of hypersensitivity, suggesting that ability in autism stems from its common

sensory characteristics (Baron-Cohen, Ashwin, Ashwin, Tavassoli, & Chakrabarti, 2009). Notably, sensory sensitivities have often been painted as deficits for autistic people, since being sensitive to elements of the sensory environment (e.g., light, noise, smells) can often trigger discomfort. Linking sensory characteristics of autism to actual skills that surpass those of neurotypical people is one step forward in the push toward society's acceptance of autism as a strength.

More recent research has further established the link between sensory hypersensitivity in autism and *increased perceptual capacity* (Brinkert & Remington, 2020), which refers to the ability to process more information at any given time. Autistic individuals have shown both increased auditory perceptual capacity and increased visual perceptual capacity, including superior search abilities (Remington, Swettenham, Campbell, & Coleman, 2009). Research has also identified further autistic cognitive strengths, such as superior abstract spatial reasoning (Stevenson & Gernsbacher, 2013).

While impressive on their own, these clearly identified strengths and abilities of autistic people become even more important when understood in the context of school and workplace environments. One study found that autistic learners process and recall more irrelevant background information in addition to the central information in a story compared to their non-autistic peers (Remington, Hanley, O'Brien, Riby, & Swettenham, 2019). When the background information was relevant to the story, the autistic and non-autistic learners performed equally well on the recall task. This has implications for teachers being able to capitalise on the increased perceptual capacity of autistic children and include only task-relevant information when teaching (Remington et al., 2019), perhaps in even greater amounts than when teaching non-autistic pupils.

In the workplace, autistic employees may bring their unique strengths and abilities to perform better at certain jobs than their non-autistic colleagues, which will be discussed more fully later in this thesis. In a naturalistic luggage-screening task, autistic participants were able to eliminate luggage that did not contain the target objects from their visual searches faster than non-autistic participants (Gonzalez, Martin, Minshew, & Behrmann, 2013). Autistic individuals are increasingly being recognised for their abilities, including but not limited to pattern recognition, memory, and mathematical abilities (Austin & Pisano, 2017). Employees diagnosed with neurodivergent conditions such as autism in workplaces have even been called a "competitive advantage" (Austin & Pisano, 2017; Ortiz, 2020). While some workplaces have already embraced this notion, the vast majority of employers in the UK have yet to recognise that hiring autistic people benefits them as much as it benefits the autistic community. As more pockets of society begin to acknowledge autistic individuals as having strengths and abilities, not just challenges, the public perception of autism may move away from the medical model toward the social model of disability. Autistic traits may one day be considered more widely as gifts, and society may recognise the value in removing the barriers that limit autistic individuals' full participation in community life. At present, however, autistic individuals are still widely discriminated against, leading many to struggle with achieving desirable life outcomes—particularly in employment.

Employment Outcomes for Autistic Adults

Beyond research on social interaction and experiences within the Criminal Justice System, evidence has shown that outcomes are generally poorer for autistic adults compared to non-autistic adults (Henninger & Taylor, 2013; Howlin & Moss, 2012). Longitudinal research on outcomes for autistic individuals diagnosed in childhood demonstrated that scores on work, friendship, and independence were poor for nearly half (46%) of participants involved (Eaves & Ho, 2008). Parents in this study also commonly reported unmet social needs for their

autistic children. A recent systematic review of studies on autistic adults' outcomes found that lack of social inclusion, limited employment prospects, and high rates of mental health conditions were common in this population (Howlin & Magiati, 2017). It has been suggested that measures of outcomes for autistic individuals have lacked consistency and accuracy in past research, and that the person-to-environment fit may be a better framework for assessing autistic adults' levels of happiness and life satisfaction. Even so, the findings on adult outcomes are cause for some alarm; there is little doubt that society has failed to support autistic individuals adequately. One of the biggest failings in the UK has been within the domain of employment for autistic adults.

Studies on employment outcomes for autistic individuals paint a bleak picture. This is particularly concerning considering that employment is a highly desirable achievement for both autistic and non-autistic adults and has several recognised benefits. Employment gives individuals financial independence, social and professional networks, and opportunities to participate in society (Chiang et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2015). It also increases cognitive performance, reduces social isolation, and contributes to feelings of personal dignity (Burgess & Gutstein, 2007; Jacob et al., 2015). Being employed is also closely tied to Quality of Life (Barneveld, Swaab, Fagel, van Engeland, & de Sonneville, 2014), which is a measure of an individual's perception of their life situation according to their goals, expectations, concerns, and standards (World-Health-Organization, 1993).

While many autistic adults want to work (Baldwin, Costley, & Warren, 2014; Bennett & Dukes, 2013; Roux et al., 2013; Wilczynski, Trammell, & Clarke, 2013), this population is still the least employed disability group in the UK. In 2016, the employment rate for autistic adults in any sort of paid work was 32%, lower than that of other disability groups and far below the employment rate for the general population, which was estimated at 81% (National-Autistic-Society, 2016a). Alarmingly, recent figures show that this figure has only

decreased in the past four years. The Office of National Statistics recently reported that, as of 2020, only 22% of autistic adults in the UK were engaged in paid employment (Office-of-National-Statistics, 2021). Researchers have also found that autistic individuals without an intellectual impairment are more likely to experience malemployment (i.e., employed in a position that was not matched to their skills and abilities) or underemployment (i.e., employed in a position below their qualifications) (Baldwin et al., 2014). The question of why autistic people—who have expressed a desire to work and who would clearly benefit from being employed—are still facing a crisis of unemployment has yet to be given a definitive answer.

Certain common features of autism, which many workplaces fail to adapt to, may offer some explanation as to why autistic individuals struggle to find and maintain employment. The sensory sensitivities that many autistic people experience, outlined earlier in this chapter, may make it difficult for autistic employees to focus in the average workplace environment (Beardon & Edmonds, 2009; Bontempo, 2009; Hillier, Fish, Cloppert, & Beversdorf, 2007). These sensitivities may even cause autistic people to experience pain or fatigue after extended periods of exposure (Bontempo, 2009). It is important to stress here that the failure is not of the autistic employee to adapt, but of employers who do not adapt their workplaces to be more inclusive of the diverse needs of their workforce. One example is the type of fluorescent lighting found in many work environments, which can cause headaches, extreme fatigue, and painful physical symptoms for autistic employees. Changing this lighting is a simple adaptation to make, but workplaces continue to use fluorescent bulbs and their autistic employees continue to experience sensory difficulties because of this.

Social communication differences commonly experienced by autistic people may also make workplace environments challenging. Autistic employees have identified social interaction as an area in which they tend to struggle at work (Remington & Pellicano, 2018).

These differences may make interacting with employers and colleagues challenging, such as when autistic people receive ambiguous instructions from supervisors; autistic employees may also struggle when given unclear directives, such as vague deadlines for completing a task. Worryingly, autistic people's differences in social communication may also lead to misunderstandings and even loss of employment at work (Sarrett, 2017).

Autistic individuals may experience these difficulties but still choose to conceal their diagnosis at work out of fear of discrimination from others, especially their employers. However, disclosing an autism diagnosis at work may in fact help to mitigate some of these challenges. It may be that when colleagues and employers learn of an individual's autism diagnosis, they show increased understanding and are more willing to adapt. While this is one possible, as well as positive, outcome of diagnostic disclosure, research looking at the disclosure of other stigmatised conditions demonstrates that the decision can have mixed outcomes. Across environments such as the workplace and social situations, choosing to disclose a condition can be fraught with uncertainty and a certain amount of risk, while also presenting the possibility of benefits to the individual.

Disclosure of Concealable Stigmatised Identities

Rather than an invisible condition, autism can more accurately be termed a concealable stigmatised identity (CSI). These are identities, such as physical and mental health conditions or past experiences such as the experience of abuse or having terminated a pregnancy, that may have stigma attached to them (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). Individuals may choose to actively conceal these identities in order to avoid judgment and discrimination from others. However, concealment may also take a toll on the mental health of these individuals, and they may choose to disclose for this reason or others, such as to gain support from the people around them.

Research on the disclosure of other concealable stigmatised identities supports the case for autism disclosure as a means of gaining support from and improving the understanding of others. There is evidence that disclosure of concealable health conditions may lead to better emotional support as well as improvements in physical and mental well-being (Greene et al., 2012). These studies may also offer some insight into how individuals make the decision to disclose, what the process for autism disclosure might involve, and what factors might predict the outcomes of disclosure.

The Disclosure Decision-Making Model (Greene, 2009) was originally created to explain how individuals with concealable health conditions, such as cancer, dementia or AIDS, might decide to disclose their diagnosis. This model emphasises the importance of information assessment in the decision to disclose; the person who is planning the disclosure assesses the decision based on five components, including stigma, preparation, prognosis, symptoms, and relevance to others (Greene, 2009). Assessing these components then leads to an anticipated response and outcome, and the person who wishes to disclose may assess their own confidence in the anticipated response; this is often influenced by the quality of their relationship with the recipient of the disclosure (Greene, 2009). Finally, the individual's disclosure efficacy, or confidence in their ability to disclose, influences the likelihood of disclosure along with the anticipated response.

Research evaluating the Disclosure Decision-Making Model has found that the reaction of the recipient of the disclosure is a predictor of disclosure outcomes—both successful and unsuccessful (Greene et al., 2012). In situations requiring the disclosure of a condition, a successful outcome might include increased emotional support, advice, and understanding from the recipient. Possible unsuccessful outcomes may be a negative attitude from the recipient, lack of support, or even active discrimination against the person who has disclosed. This model highlights that the recipient of the disclosure has a large role in successful

disclosure outcomes. Another model for understanding disclosure of concealable conditions, the Disclosure Processes Model (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010) also stresses that the success of disclosure is largely dependent on the recipient of the disclosure.

The Disclosure Processes Model (DPM) aims to answer the questions of *when* and *why* disclosure is beneficial to individuals. The DPM situates the antecedent goals of disclosure at the beginning of the disclosure process; these goals include both approach-focused goals (e.g., pursuing positive outcomes) and avoidance-focused goals (e.g., preventing negative outcomes such as social rejection and conflict). When an individual engages in the act of disclosure, also called the *disclosure event*, this involves both the content of the disclosure and the reaction of the confidant, which can be either supportive or unsupportive. According to the DPM, the long-term outcomes of disclosure are mediated by three processes: 1) alleviation of inhibition; 2) social support; and 3) changes in social information. In the alleviation of inhibition, the individual who discloses is able to express relevant information about themselves that has previously been concealed. Disclosure allows them to gain social support from others, but it may also lead to social rejection depending on the reaction of the recipient. The act of disclosure also adds new information about this previously concealed identity to the shared space between the individual and the recipient; it may then influence future social interactions. In the Disclosure Processes Model, the reaction of the recipient is not only one influence on the success of disclosure; it is essentially regarded as the only metric by which disclosure outcomes are evaluated (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). This model highlights that disclosure is an inherently social act, and its outcomes are determined somewhat by the quality of the relationship between the individual and the recipient—and the extent to which the recipient reacts favourably to this identity disclosure.

Both the Disclosure Decision-Making Model and the Disclosure Processes Model illustrate that disclosure of a concealable stigmatised identity can indeed have successful

outcomes, but these are determined by factors that may be out of the control of the individual. In the Disclosure Decision-Making Model, increased certainty about the outcome of disclosure is associated with the likelihood of disclosure (Greene, 2009). Uncertainty surrounding outcomes may therefore lead individuals to decide against disclosure, even when continued concealment of their stigmatised identity poses risks to their well-being. Disclosure can be beneficial for those who wish to gain support from others and alleviate the stress and anxiety of having to hide such an identity. However, it can also lead to increased stigma, discrimination, and social isolation. This may be especially true in the case of autism diagnosis disclosure, when the disclosed condition is misunderstood by the general public and may carry with it stigmatised social features (Botha, Dibb, & Frost, 2020; Dickter & Burk, 2021; Russell & Norwich, 2012). Autistic people who are facing the decision to disclose may therefore struggle with weighing the benefits of disclosure against its negative consequences.

Autism Disclosure Across Situations

Studies on autism disclosure across different situations have demonstrated that the possibility of mixed or uncertain outcomes can make the decision to disclose a difficult one for autistic individuals. A recent scoping review of studies looking at autism disclosure outcomes found this to be the case (Thompson-Hodgetts, Labonte, Mazumder, & Phelan, 2020). While autistic people often felt that neurotypical people unfairly reduced them to an autistic stereotype after they disclosed, the views of others were generally more positive toward the autistic person post-disclosure (Thompson-Hodgetts et al., 2020). However, the intention to socially interact with the autistic person after they disclosed their diagnosis was more variable across different studies (Thompson-Hodgetts et al., 2020). This scoping review demonstrated that while others may say they have more positive views of autistic people post-disclosure, their behaviour toward the autistic person was not always more socially inclusive.

Research on autism disclosure specifically in school settings has shown a similar disconnect between positive perceptions of autistic people and willingness to socially interact with them. In one study, adolescents were less likely to hold an autistic peer personally responsible for their own behaviour after the disclosure of their diagnosis (R. White et al., 2020). However, diagnostic disclosure did not make non-autistic peers more likely to want to socialise with the autistic student. Even after disclosure, the adolescents still wanted to maintain the same level of social and emotional distance from the autistic peer. Attitudes may change toward autistic students when their diagnosis is known, but whether this translates to more inclusive behaviour from peers in school settings is still uncertain.

Mixed outcomes are also possible in social situations when an autistic person discloses their diagnosis to a non-autistic person. Studies have shown that disclosure is more likely to have a positive effect on first impressions of autistic people when the recipient of the disclosure has more autism knowledge and a better understanding of autism (Sasson & Morrison, 2019). Disclosure may also improve behavioural intentions and attitudes toward autistic individuals when additional information about autism is provided to the recipients of the disclosure (Brosnan & Mills, 2016; Sasson & Morrison, 2019). Research has also demonstrated that ratings of autistic people on social aspects, such as intention to interact, were influenced more by characteristics of the neurotypical raters than the autistic people themselves (Morrison, DeBrabander, Faso, & Sasson, 2019). However, while ratings of autistic people generally improved with diagnostic disclosure, the effect was more negative when the recipients of the disclosure had high stigma toward autism (Morrison et al., 2019).

Clearly, the social experiences of autistic individuals are influenced by the attitudes of the non-autistic people with whom they interact. Disclosure outcomes are similarly determined by the individuals to whom autistic people choose to disclose. These findings are consistent with both the Disclosure Decision-Making and Disclosure Processes Models, which highlight

the importance of the reaction of the recipient (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Greene, 2009). In situations where lack of understanding of autism can lead to more serious consequences for autistic individuals, such as within the Criminal Justice System, it becomes even more crucial to highlight the role of the recipient in improving disclosure outcomes.

Police officers and others within the Criminal Justice System, such as barristers representing autistic defendants, are often unequipped to make the necessary adjustments for autistic individuals whom they encounter while performing their duties (Crane, Maras, Hawken, Mulcahy, & Memon, 2016; K. L. Maras et al., 2017). While they may have interacted with autistic individuals as either witnesses or defendants, the majority of whom have disclosed their diagnosis, these professionals often feel that they lack the necessary training and autism knowledge; many have expressed dissatisfaction with their interactions with autistic people for these reasons (Crane et al., 2016; K. L. Maras et al., 2017). The consequences of this lack of training can be severe for autistic people. Autistic offenders have reported negative experiences of their arrest, police interrogation, and subsequent trial and defence due to lack of understanding of autism from the professionals involved (Helverschou, Steindal, Nøttestad, & Howlin, 2018). In the United States, it is estimated that by the age of 21, approximately 20% of autistic young people have been stopped and questioned by police and close to 5% have faced arrest (Rava, Shattuck, Rast, & Roux, 2017). These devastating statistics reinforce the need for autism training and increased autism knowledge and acceptance across all aspects of social and community life. Unless this need is adequately addressed, discrimination and negative treatment of autistic people will endure and autistic individuals will continue to face poor outcomes throughout their lifespan.

Disclosure in the Workplace

Research on disclosure of a condition in the workplace has focused largely on mental health conditions (Brouwers, Joosen, van Zelst, & Van Weeghel, 2020; Dewa, van Weeghel, Joosen, & Brouwers, 2020; Dewa, van Weeghel, Joosen, Gronholm, & Brouwers, 2021), as well as stigmatised identities related to sexual orientation or past trauma (Clair, Beatty, & Maclean, 2005). Often, individuals choose to manage these social identities by constantly making the choice whether to pass as not having the identity or reveal it to others in the workplace (Clair et al., 2005). In the workplace, this decision must be constantly reviewed and the identity managed due to impression management concerns being heightened in a professional environment (K. P. Jones & King, 2014). Individuals may choose to disclose at work to receive legal protections or workplace adjustments, or to increase understanding and acceptance from colleagues. However, as with disclosure in other situations, they may also face stigma and discrimination from employers and co-workers. The risks associated with disclosure may be even higher in the workplace, where the reaction of the recipient (e.g., the employer) could affect an individual's ability to make a living or even lead to wrongful termination. For this reason, individuals living with concealable stigmatised identities may choose to disclose in certain life domains and not in others (Ragins, 2008). Often, it is within the workplace that an individual may continue to conceal their identity while having disclosed it to personal friends, family members, and other acquaintances outside of work (Ragins, 2008).

The Ragins (2008) model for disclosure decision-making includes some of the same elements as the Disclosure Decision-Making Model (Greene, 2009) but is unique in its focus on disclosure in work versus non-work life domains. As with Greene's model, the anticipated consequences of disclosure play a central role in the decision-making process (Ragins, 2008). The characteristics of the stigma associated with the identity also factor into the decision,

such as controllability and disruptiveness—essentially, the extent to which disclosure may alter the individual's current life situation. Ragins (2008) included internal psychological factors (e.g., how important the identity is to the individual's self-concept) and environmental factors (e.g., perceived supportiveness of others) in disclosure-decision making. The consequences of the disclosure decision in this model are split into two different dimensions: work and non-work, where disclosure may occur on a spectrum (i.e., all, some, or none). When an individual discloses their identity in some domains but not in others, which is often the case with employees who continue to conceal their identity at work, they experience "disclosure disconnects" (Ragins, 2008). The consequences of continued concealment may include emotional stress, psychological stress, and even physical illness brought on by stress (Major & Gramzow, 1999; Pachankis, 2007). Added to this is the internal conflict of being open about one's identity in certain domains and concealing it in others (Ragins, 2008).

Johnson and colleagues (2020) also sought to understand the consequences of disclosure in the workplace through their framework of disclosure events but focused heavily on the recipient of the disclosure—referred to as the "stigma disclosure recipient" (SDR). The researchers proposed that the SDR has a profound influence on the workplace experiences of the individual who discloses, and therefore recipients of disclosure must be the focus of any model outlining disclosure events (Johnson, Joshi, & Hogan, 2020). The most significant contribution of this framework to the disclosure literature is the concept of *identity threat*. After the disclosure event, the recipient of the disclosure weighs the required response to the disclosure against their personal resources for being able to respond appropriately. If they determine that they cannot respond appropriately, this threatens their identity and they may react negatively, such as being unsupportive or even discriminatory toward the individual who disclosed (Johnson et al., 2020). Conversely, SDRs who do respond positively to disclosure engage in supportive and appropriate behaviours, such as making accommodations

for the individual. The researchers emphasised that this response is crucial to the dismantling of stigma toward certain identities in the workplace. Further studies related to identity stigma in the workplace have highlighted the unique circumstances surrounding disclosure of developmental conditions, specifically autism.

Autism Disclosure in the Workplace

The stigma associated with autism is unique, in that autistic individuals must combat a plethora of misinformation and preconceptions surrounding their diagnosis related to their social skills and communication abilities. Autistic people are often the subject of negative stereotypes about their personal characteristics, such as that they are impolite, rude, or even dangerous (Johnson & Joshi, 2014). Earlier in this chapter, I outlined how autism stigma persists in social situations and other environments, such as schools. Research has demonstrated that autism stigma can be particularly problematic in the workplace because employers tend to be more sensitive to its social aspects. Work on the treatment of disabled employees within organisations suggests that employers value interpersonal style highly in their disabled employees (D. L. Stone & Colella, 1996). Researchers found that an outgoing and warm personality in disabled employees was associated with more positive perceptions from others. This translated to better performance reviews, higher expectations about their capabilities, and increased willingness of supervisors to mentor them (Stone & Colella, 1996). Autistic people tend to be judged more negatively than employees with other types of disabilities because they do not typically fit this model of employment for disabled people.

The act of disclosure itself can be particularly challenging for individuals because of certain features of autism. Research has suggested that autistic employees struggle with disclosure because it involves being able to navigate the individual preferences for information-sharing among their colleagues (Johnson & Joshi, 2014). Disclosure is also an

inherently social act and, as shown earlier in the disclosure decision-making models (Greene, 2009; Ragins, 2008), involves anticipating the social consequences of disclosing to a recipient. Autistic individuals may struggle with this and the impact of disclosure on further social interactions (Johnson & Joshi, 2014); therefore, the decision to disclose becomes even more complex and difficult.

Added to the social complexity of the act of disclosure is the confusion surrounding its many possible outcomes. Autism disclosure in workplaces has been shown to have mixed outcomes, similarly to autism disclosure in social situations, schools, and within the Criminal Justice System. One common reason to disclose for autistic individuals is to obtain workplace adjustments, such as more flexible work hours, changes to the physical work environment, and the use of alternative communication styles (Lindsay, Osten, Rezai, & Bui, 2019). However, a systematic review of studies on autism disclosure and subsequent workplace adjustments found that outcomes are highly varied and often unsatisfactory (Lindsay et al., 2019). Protocols for obtaining adjustments were found to be unnecessarily complicated and time-consuming, and adjustments were often judged to be inadequate or inappropriate by autistic employees. Furthermore, the review found that there was rarely any follow-up post-disclosure; as a consequence, some autistic employees who were forced to disclose saw nothing come of this difficult decision.

This systematic review highlighted the fact that diagnostic disclosure in the workplace remains an understudied topic in autism research (Lindsay et al., 2019). Only one of the 26 studies included in the review was conducted in the UK; this study was not focused specifically on autism disclosure, but looked at several factors contributing to the exclusion of autistic individuals from workplaces (Richards, 2012). The lack of research on this topic within the UK is a disservice to autistic individuals, who experience higher levels of unemployment than any other disability group in this country (Office-of-National-Statistics,

2021). Furthermore, research on the lived experiences of disclosure of autistic employees and job seekers, who bear the brunt of the consequences of their decision to disclose, is severely lacking.

This thesis aims to fill the gaps in the disclosure literature through UK-based studies on autistic individuals' experiences of disclosing their diagnosis while seeking or maintaining employment. The objective of my first study was to bring the voices of the autistic community to the forefront. This was precipitated by my belief that the stories, concerns, and priorities of autistic people should be the most important contributions to autism disclosure research. These should drive further research into diagnostic disclosure and its outcomes in workplaces, as well as the recommendations for how to improve these outcomes. Autism researchers must listen to the community we wish to serve if we are to pursue research that has any meaningful impact on the lives of autistic individuals. The second study in this thesis aimed to illuminate the decision-making behind autism disclosure through interviews with employed and previously employed autistic adults. A second objective of this study was to identify factors associated with the outcomes of disclosure. My third and last study aimed to identify possible biases that employers might have toward hiring autistic people when they disclose their diagnosis on job application materials.

It is my hope that this research contributes in some way to our understanding of autism disclosure for autistic employees and job seekers, and that concrete steps can be taken as a result to improve employment outcomes for this population.

Chapter 2

Diagnostic Disclosure Experiences of Autistic Individuals

in the Workplace

Disclaimer: The study that forms the basis for this chapter has previously been published in the journal Autism in Adulthood (Romualdez, Heasman, Davies, Walker, & Remington, 2021a) (see **Appendix A**). The information contained in the method and results sections has been rewritten from the original publication. The data tables, which appeared in the published work, have been reproduced here. The introduction and discussion have been adapted from the original paper and I have cited the published work accordingly.

Introduction

Adapted from Romualdez et al., 2021a

Research on disclosure of an autism diagnosis outside of workplaces, such as in social situations (Heasman & Gillespie, 2019b; Sasson & Morrison, 2019) and within the Criminal Justice System (Crane et al., 2016), has demonstrated that experiences of disclosure may vary in different contexts. Our understanding of disclosure within the workplace environment, however, is limited. Previous studies exploring autism disclosure at work have focussed on success in recruitment (Ameri et al., 2018; Flower, Dickens, & Hedley, 2021) or the process of disclosure as a means of obtaining workplace adjustments (Lindsay et al., 2019). Research involving diagnostic disclosure by autistic employees and job seekers has also largely been based in the United States (Johnson & Joshi, 2014, 2016; Johnson et al., 2020), with a particular focus on stigma and disclosure events. Few studies have been conducted with UK-based participants. A recent international systematic review of studies that looked at autism disclosure at work (Lindsay et al., 2019) included only one study from the UK (Richards, 2012). Several of the studies in this review, including the UK-based study, did not focus on the experiences of disclosure but rather on the general employment experiences of autistic people. A separate UK-based study by Flower and colleagues (2019) looked solely at

potential employers' hiring decisions and employability ratings that they assigned to a candidate after the candidate's disclosure of an autism diagnosis. Understanding the disclosure experiences of autistic people at work, particularly the extent of disclosure, timing of disclosure, and the impact of disclosure, is crucial to improving disclosure and employment outcomes for autistic individuals. The study outlined in this chapter aimed to address this gap in the disclosure literature. To my knowledge, it is the first large-scale study to focus on the diagnostic disclosure experiences of autistic individuals in UK workplaces. As discussed in the Chapter One, the wider literature on autism diagnosis disclosure has shown that outcomes can be unpredictable (Crane et al., 2016; Heasman & Gillespie, 2019b; K. L. Maras et al., 2017; Sasson & Morrison, 2019). This lack of predictability can make the decision to disclose even more difficult for autistic individuals. The question of what leads to certain outcomes of disclosure remains unanswered. Crucially, we do not yet have sufficient knowledge about diagnostic disclosure to assist autistic people in their decision-making, especially in work-related situations.

In order to facilitate participation in this study on a national scale, I chose to conduct an online survey that enabled people from all over the UK to take part in sharing their employment experiences. The use of an online questionnaire also allowed participants to share their experiences anonymously. I used a mixed-methods approach in this study to gather data on the extent and experience of disclosure, with both closed-ended and open-ended questions included in my survey. By using both quantitative and qualitative methods, I had a broad overview of the experiences of disclosure in the UK autistic community, but also provided space for participants to write about their unique experiences in detail. The quantitative data presented here shows which experiences are most and least common to autistic adults who have encountered the decision to disclose at work. The qualitative data reveals a more in-depth picture of disclosure, including reasons to disclose or not disclose,

and the various outcomes of disclosing an autism diagnosis at work. This research highlights the disclosure experiences of autistic individuals and adds to our collective knowledge about diagnostic disclosure in workplaces across the UK.

Method

Published in Romualdez et al., 2021a

Participants

The participants in this study were 238 adults, based in the UK, who self-reported a clinical diagnosis of autism and some prior employment experience. Participants did not give any other proof of diagnosis. While a small number of self-diagnosed autistic individuals (n = 12) completed the survey, I chose not to include them in the final analysis for two reasons. A formal diagnosis of autism is often obtained in order to seek legal protections and entitlements in the workplace; those without this formal diagnosis might have different experiences of disclosure, including reasons for disclosing and experienced outcomes. While a comparison between the experiences of clinically diagnosed and self-diagnosed participants would have been relevant, the group of self-diagnosed participants was too small for this to be possible. However, I acknowledge that the experiences of self-diagnosed participants are entirely valid and merit further exploration through research that I hope to conduct in the future (Romualdez et al., 2021a).

I recruited participants through research charity Autistica's Discover Network, a mailing list that connects researchers with autistic individuals and other stakeholders interested in participating in studies. I also recruited through the Centre for Research in Autism and Education's (CRAE) social media accounts. Lastly, Autistica's corporate partners were involved in recruitment, as their employees also participated in this research.

Measures

I developed a bespoke online questionnaire that I administered online (via Qualtrics, Provo, UT) as the disclosure section of a larger UK-wide survey on neurodiversity and employment entitled "The Diverse Minds Survey." The Diverse Minds Survey was part of a project run by Autistica's Discover Autism Research and Employment (DARE) initiative, with the goal of widening the evidence base for autism and employment in the UK (Romualdez et al., 2021a).

The Diverse Minds Survey contained a general section that all participants completed in order to supply their demographic and employment data. Participants in the current study also completed questions in a separate section about their disclosure experiences in the workplace. The term "disclosure" was defined as "telling people about one's autism diagnosis." Participants completed this section based on their most relevant disclosure experiences, either from past or current roles. I did not ask them to specify this. The disclosure survey had seven closed-ended items and three open-ended questions (see **Appendix B** for link to full survey).   An example of a closed-ended question was, "Have you ever disclosed to others in the workplace?" Four of the closed-ended questions on the survey asked participants to rate on a Likert Scale (i.e., 1 - extremely positive, 2 - somewhat positive, 3 – neither positive nor negative, 4 - somewhat negative, and 5 - extremely negative) the impact of disclosing to their supervisor, employer, or co-workers and the subsequent adjustments made for them. The three open-ended questions in the survey were: 1) "What factors did you consider before disclosing your diagnosis?", 2) "What external supports, if any, did you have when deciding whether to disclose your diagnosis?", and 3) "What were the outcomes of disclosing your diagnosis?"

Procedure

Once participants clicked on the link to the Diverse Minds Survey, they proceeded to the general information section to complete the questions on demographics and their employment status and history. They then had the choice of which sections of the survey to answer based on what topics were relevant to them (e.g., sections on workplace adjustments, recruitment experiences). The disclosure survey was one of these sections. At the beginning of the disclosure survey, participants who answered "no" to the question, "Have you ever disclosed to others in the workplace?" then skipped the questions that did not apply to them and proceed to the open-ended questions at the end of the survey. Participants completed the questionnaire in approximately 20 minutes.

The UCL Institute of Education granted ethics approval for this study. All participants completed and signed digital consent forms before taking part.

Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis. I used IBM SPSS Statistics 26 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL) to run descriptive statistics on the data obtained through the closed-ended questions of the online questionnaire.

Qualitative analysis. I used content analysis (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992) to categorize the data collected through the three open-ended questions in the survey. Content analysis is defined as, "a research method that provides systematic and objective means to make valid inferences from verbal, visual, or written data" (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p.314). I chose this method because of its successful use in analysing open-ended survey data, particularly in studies within the nursing and health sciences fields (Jacob, McKenna, & D'Amore, 2014; McKenna, Brooks, & Vanderheide, 2017). Content analysis is also typically used to show the focus of group attention and reflect the beliefs or patterns of a group of people (Downe-

Wamboldt, 1992). Since the aim of my qualitative analysis was to look at the experiences of disclosure among autistic individuals, which naturally included their beliefs and considerations surrounding disclosure, this method was appropriate.

I imported the text responses to these questions into NVivo, then conducted the initial analysis across questions using open coding. Open coding is a process by which researchers approach qualitative data without any pre-existing framework, developing this framework only as they proceed with analysing the data (Price, 2009). Complementary to this open coding approach, I analysed the text from a constructivist epistemological perspective. Constructivism, as it is used in social research, is defined by assigning meaning to existing data by interpreting it in context, essentially "constructing" a reality through analysis (Crotty, 1998). For example, if a participant wrote that their co-workers were discriminatory toward them after the disclosure of an autism diagnosis, I interpreted this as a negative outcome of disclosure and categorised it as such. Through reading and coding sections of the text, I developed a coding framework made up of categories and sub-categories, which was then used in the second round of coding. Two independent researchers, myself and a placement student who assisted with research at CRAE, coded the text responses into these categories: reasons to disclose, reasons not to disclose, external supports, positive outcomes, negative outcomes, and neutral outcomes. I then met with the second coder to discuss and refine the sub-categories. Finally, we created a frequency table that listed the different categories and sub-categories of responses.

Results

Published in Romualdez et al., 2021a

Sample Demographics

In total, 285 people answered the online questionnaire on disclosure. I excluded the non-autistic (n=5) and self-diagnosed autistic (n=12) participants who had completed the

disclosure section. Of the remaining 268 participants, 238 completed all questions on the

survey and were included in the final analysis. Demographic and employment data for these

participants is shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Participant Demographic and Employment Data

N=238

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Female (including trans women)	137	57.6%
	Male (including trans men)	78	32.8%
	Non-binary	17	7.1%
	Other (e.g., no sense of gender)	6	2.5%
Age	18-25	35	14.7%
	26-35	60	25.2%
	36-45	55	23.1%
	46-55	57	23.9%
	56-65	29	12.2%
	66-75	2	<1%
Ethnicity	White	226	95%
	Black	3	1.2%
	Hispanic	1	<1%
	Mixed	8	3.3%
Education	Bachelor's Degree	67	28.2%
	Master's Degree	60	25.2%
	Doctorate	18	7.6%
	A/AS-Level (qualification at 16-18 years)	24	10.1%
	GCSEs (qualification at 14-16 years)	11	4.6%

	BTEC (business and technology qualification)	13	5.5%
	Higher National Diploma	10	4.2%
	Foundation Degree	6	2.5%
	General National Vocational Qualification	2	<1%
	Postgraduate Certificate	11	4.6%
	Postgraduate Diploma	7	2.9%
	No formal qualifications	4	1.7%
	Other (e.g., diploma equivalent, fellowship of professional body)	5	2.1%
Employment Status	Employed full-time	92	38.7%
	Employed part-time	42	17.6%
	Self-employed	23	9.7%
	Volunteer	8	3.4%
	Student	15	6.3%
	Formerly employed looking for work	14	5.9%
	Formerly employed not looking for work	12	5%
	Retired	4	1.7%
	Other (e.g., apprenticeship, freelance)	28	11.8%
Most common employment sectors	Education	37	15.5%
	Healthcare	31	13%
	Public sector	22	9.2%
	Administration	14	5.9%
	Information Technology	13	5.5%
	Non-Profit Organization	9	3.8%
	Retail	8	3.4%
	Creative	8	3.4%
	Engineering	8	3.4%

Current or most recent level worked at	Intern or volunteer	20	8.4%
	Graduate employee	32	13.4%
	Mid-level employee	80	33.6%
	Senior level position	106	44.5%
Size of current or most recent organization (total number of employees)	0-5	17	7.1%
	6-20	21	8.8%
	21-50	18	7.6%
	51-100	20	8.4%
	101-500	27	11.3%
	501-1000	21	8.8%
	1001-10,000	46	19.3%
	Greater than 10,000	43	18.1%
	Not applicable (e.g., self-employed, freelance)	25	10.5%
Current or most recent income	Less than £10,000	53	22.3%
	£10,000-£19,999	57	23.9%
	£20,000-£29,999	53	22.3%
	£30,000-£39,999	23	9.7%
	£40,000-£49,999	15	6.3%
	£50,000-£59,999	9	3.8%
	£60,000-£79,999	6	2.5%
	£80,000-£99,999	2	<1%
	£100,000-£149,999	5	2.1%
	Prefer not to say	14	5.9%
Other diagnosed conditions[1]	Mental Health Condition	155	65.1%
	Physical Health Difficulty	61	25.6%

Dyspraxia	23	9.7%
ADHD	22	9.2%
Dyslexia	18	7.6%
Physical Impairment	18	7.6%
Mental Impairment	12	5%
PTSD	12	5%
OCD	10	4.2%
Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome	7	2.9%
Tourette's Syndrome	3	1.3%
Dyscalculia	2	<1%
Learning Condition	2	<1%
Panic Disorder	2	<1%
Prosopagnosia	2	<1%
Alexithymia	1	<.5%

[1] Participants who chose "Mental Health Conditions" were included in this category; only those who wrote in specific conditions on the survey were separated into the categories for specific mental health conditions.

Abbreviations: A/AS-level - Advanced Level Qualification; ADHD - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; BTEC - Business and Technology Education Council Qualification; GCSE - General Certificate of Secondary Education; OCD - Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder; PTSD - Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Quantitative Results

Most of the participants (n=131, 55%) disclosed selectively (i.e., only to some people) at work. However, over a third (n=83, 34.9%) chose to disclose to everyone. Only 10.1% (n=24) did not disclose to any of their colleagues.

In response to the question, "At what point in your employment journey have you disclosed to others in the workplace?", the most common response from participants was *after starting the job* (n=109, 45.8%), followed by *on the application materials* (n=56, 23.5%). A small minority of respondents disclosed during the interview, after securing the

job but before starting, after their organisation received autism training, or after a promotion (see Table 2).

When asked, "How would you rate the impact of disclosing to your supervisor?", 40.4% (n=96) of participants answered positively. This number was lower for the impact of disclosing to co-workers, where only 36.6% (n=87) answered positively. Views of the post-disclosure adjustments made by supervisors were rated positively by a third of respondents (n=80, 33.6%), but a combined 50% of respondents held neutral (n=65, 27.3%) or negative (n=54, 22.7%) opinions of these adjustments. Only a quarter of participants (n=60, 25.2%) felt that the adjustments made by co-workers were positive. More participants rated these as neutral, while a few rated them negatively (see Table 2 for the full breakdown of responses).

Table 2.

Participant Responses to Closed-ended Survey Questions

Variable	n	%
Have you ever disclosed to others in the workplace?		
Yes, I disclosed to everyone	83	34.9%
Yes, but only to some people at work	131	55%
No, I have not disclosed	24	10.1%
At what point in your employment journey have you disclosed to others in the workplace?		
On the application materials	56	23.5%
During the interview	15	6.3%
After securing the job but before starting	15	6.3%

After starting the job	109	45.8%
After my organization received training on autism	3	1.3%
After promotion	12	5%
None of these are applicable to me	28	11.8%

Impact of disclosure and subsequent adjustments made

How would you rate the impact of disclosing to your employer or supervisor?

Extremely positive	33	13.9%
Somewhat positive	63	26.5%
Neither positive nor negative	57	23.9%
Somewhat negative	34	14.3%
Extremely negative	17	7.1%
Not applicable (i.e., did not disclose to supervisor)	34	14.3%

How would you rate subsequent adjustments made by your supervisor or employer?

Extremely positive	25	10.5%
Somewhat positive	55	23.1%
Neither positive nor negative	65	27.3%
Somewhat negative	23	9.7%
Extremely negative	31	13%
Not applicable (i.e., did not disclose or no adjustments were made)	39	16.4%

How would you rate the impact of disclosing to your co-workers?

Extremely positive	24	10.1%
Somewhat positive	63	26.5%
Neither positive nor negative	76	31.9%
Somewhat negative	23	9.7%
Extremely negative	14	5.9%
Not applicable (i.e., did not disclose to co-workers)	38	16%

How would you rate subsequent adjustments made by your co-workers?

Extremely positive	15	6.3%
Somewhat positive	45	18.9%
Neither positive nor negative	99	41.6%
Somewhat negative	22	9.2%
Extremely negative	17	7.1%
Not applicable (i.e., did not disclose or no adjustments were made)	40	16.8%

Qualitative Results

Using content analysis, I classified the qualitative data from the open-ended questions into categories and sub-categories (see Table 3 for the full breakdown of responses and example quotations for each sub-category). The six categories were: reasons to disclose, reasons not to disclose, external support when deciding to disclose, positive outcomes, negative outcomes, and neutral/no outcomes.

Figure 1.

Categories under Disclosure Experiences
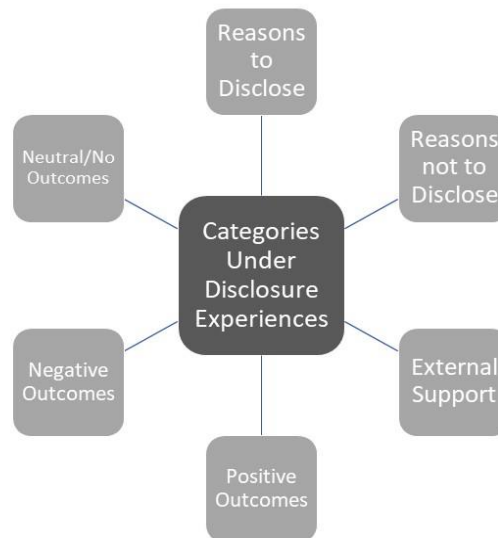
Under the category of ***reasons to disclose***, the most common reason that participants gave was in order to seek *increased understanding and acceptance*: "People might understand me better - be able to help me if I have difficulties. Protect me if I am in a difficult situation that others to whom I have not disclosed will not know is difficult for me. [P-70]". Other participants wrote about disclosure as a means of seeking *legal protections*: "I disclosed for the protection that the autism act gave me as a worker. [P-160]". Some participants wrote they disclosed in order to improve their *mental health and well-being*: "Managing my physical and mental health became more important to me than hiding. [P-137]" Others explained that they disclosed in order to obtain *workplace adjustments* and to *sustain employment*: "I *need* accommodations in order to keep a job for more than one to six months. Not disclosing isn't an option for me. If I don't disclose, I will either be forced to quit or be fired. [P-23]"

One aspect of disclosing at work that was common within participants' responses was the experience of retrospective disclosure, i.e., disclosing after a negative experience at work that compelled them to disclose. One example of this was a participant who described a meltdown at work and their subsequent disclosure: "I was finding things very difficult at work and after having a meltdown in my manager's office. I felt that the best option was to disclose my diagnosis. [P-9]" Another participant felt they needed to disclose after being bullied repeatedly in the workplace: "In the end it got to the point where I was being treated so badly by my team and it came down to if I have to tell them I'm autistic or things will get worse. [P-166]"

The data also contained more positive sentiments within the participants' reasons to disclose. Some felt that their autism diagnosis was an asset in the workplace and an *advantage for the job*, especially within the research and education fields: "I primarily work in the autism field, so disclosing my autism is positive because it shows I have a better insight. [P-80]" Other participants stated that disclosing their diagnosis during the application process was their means of gauging if the job was the *right fit* for them: "I used disclosing as a way of working out whether a job was for me. If potential employers reacted negatively to me disclosing my autism, how would they react to me asking for help with something or having a meltdown? [P-229]" One category that emerged through analysis of the qualitative data was disclosure due to a sense of autistic identity, and *responsibility to others* in the autistic community: "I feel that older autistic people owe it to younger ones to make employers aware of the fact that autistic people are employable. I told them in order to help combat stigma for other colleagues they might work with in the future. [P-29]"

Just as participants identified their reasons for disclosing an autism diagnosis at work, they also identified ***reasons not to disclose***. While the most common reason to disclose was to increase understanding and acceptance from others, the most common of the *reasons not to*

disclose also related to other people, specifically the fear of others' *negative perceptions*: "I worried whether people would see me as different - less capable or less dependable. [P-70]" Another reason not to disclose was the concern about bullying and purposeful discrimination: "I thought I would be bullied out of my job—I've been bullied in the workplace several times. [P-19]" A small fraction of participants also wrote that disclosure was not beneficial to them, which made it unnecessary.

Participants also outlined the types of **external support** that they received when deciding whether or not to disclose at work. Family members, particularly parents, were one source of support: "My parents are very supportive and did not want me to take a job without disclosing, because they knew it would end badly if I couldn't have accommodations. [P-23]" Other sources of support were significant others, friends, professionals, colleagues, online communities and support groups for autistic individuals: "The online autistic community was super helpful. [P-14]" Many participants, however, said they received *no support* when making the decision to disclose a diagnosis.

Responses fell into three categories within the outcomes of disclosure: positive, negative and neutral. The most common among the **positive outcomes** of disclosure was increased support, understanding, and acceptance from people at work: "The co-workers were very understanding, and they made me settle in better. [P-7]" Receiving *workplace adjustments* was another positive outcome: "My employer was supportive and open to all suggestions of reasonable adjustments. This was more positive than I expected. [P-9]" Other positive outcomes mentioned were *successful recruitment* and *gaining legal protections* from employers post-disclosure. A small number of participants spoke about their diagnostic disclosure resulting in *improved autism awareness* and increased acceptance within their organisations: "In one place, I used the disclosure of my diagnosis to improve the place for our autistic students and to provide autism training and support to other staff. [P-8]"

The ***negative outcomes*** of disclosure were a reversal of the positive outcomes

mentioned by participants and reflected an absence of those outcomes. Participants wrote

most often about the *lack of support, understanding, and acceptance* from others in the

workplace: "No one understood and no one even bothered to read up and teach themselves

anything about autism. [P-66]" Sadly, participants also mentioned *bullying and purposeful*

discrimination as another negative outcome of disclosure: "One [colleague] made things very

difficult for me and I eventually had to complain that her behaviour was bullying. It was a

really horrid time for how I made sense of my diagnosis and abilities, etc. [P-16]"

Some participants described feeling ***neutral*** about their disclosure as a result of mixed

outcomes: "The outcomes were a mix of positive and negative. [P-39]" Others felt that

disclosure had had no effect within their workplaces at all: "There has generally been no

change. [P-30]" The full breakdown of categories, sub-categories, and frequencies of

participant references, along with example quotes, is shown in Table 3.

Table 3.

Results of Content Analysis - Categories and Sub-Categories with Frequency of Participant References and Example Quotes

Categories	Sub-categories	No. of Participants	% of Participants	Example Quotes
Reasons to disclose	*Increased understanding from colleagues/employers*	59	24.7%	P-70: "People might understand me better - be able to help me if I have difficulties. Protect me if I am in a difficult situation that others to whom I have not disclosed will not know is difficult for me."
				P-94: "I wanted work colleagues and managers to understand my autistic behaviors."
	To gain workplace adjustments	36	15.1%	P-23: "I *need* accommodations in order to keep a job for more than 1-6 months. Not disclosing isn't an option for me. If I don't disclose, I will either be forced to quit or be fired."

			P-62: "I have only disclosed for necessary reasons such as gaining a needed accommodation."
Responsibility to one's self and to others	26	10.9%	P-29: "I feel that older autistic people owe it to younger ones to make employers aware of the fact that autistic people are employable.
			I told them in order to help combat stigma for other colleagues they might work with in the future."
			P-218: "I want to get involved more in giving autistic people a voice for employment. I can't be the only one who feels isolated, estranged, and not sure of options."
To manage and sustain employment	23	9.7%	P-35: "I disclosed because I was worried about losing my job."
			P-89: "I couldn't keep a job when I didn't disclose."

Mental health and well-being	14	5.9%	P-137: "Managing my physical and mental health became more important to me than hiding."
			P-131: "I'd been struggling with anxiety at work for a long time, so to try and solve that I had to disclose and see if it helped."
Legal/policy protection	8	3.4%	P-87: "If you've experienced discrimination on the basis of a condition you can always get the proof you've disclosed it so you have a bit of backup."
			P-160: "I disclosed for the protection that the autism act gave me as a worker."
Evaluate how worthwhile the job is	6	2.5%	P-229: "I used disclosing as a way of working out whether a job was for me. If employers reacted negatively to me disclosing my autism, how would they react to me asking for help with something or having a meltdown?"

				P-199: "Their reaction to this news tells me whether the potential new role is right for me or not."
	Being autistic brings an advantage to the job	3	1.3%	P-80: "I primarily work in the autism field (care, education and research) so disclosing my autism is positive because it shows I have a better insight."
				P-103: "They are an autism charity, and they encourage applications from autistic people."
Reasons not to disclose	*Fear of negative perceptions of others*	52	21.8%	P-70: "I worried whether people would see me as different - less capable or less dependable."
				P-11: "I am worried about what my colleagues will think about me."
	Fear of bullying and purposeful discrimination	26	10.9%	P-19: "Whether I would be bullied out of my job--I've been bullied in the workplace several times,

				employment tribunal suggested twice by legal."
				P-50: "Whether it will be used as an excuse not to promote me or give me a pay rise."
	Disclosure is not beneficial	12	5%	P-143: "Not having disclosed makes me feel like I'm hiding something but I don't feel that it would be beneficial to me."
				P-28: "I don't need to disclose as I don't feel I need any adjustments really."
External support when deciding to disclose	*No support*	95	39.9%	P-66: "I don't have any friends and my family don't acknowledge the fact that I'm autistic."
				P-1: "No support. I have not disclosed to family and friends and would never do so. It would be incredibly harmful."

Family	55	23.1%	P-23: "My parents are very supportive and did not want me to take a job without disclosing, because they knew it would end badly if I couldn't have accommodations."
			P-98: "Family have always encouraged me to disclose."
Friends	35	14.7%	P-236: "I had support from two friends with ASD, who have prior experience, to talk through the decision."
			P-87: "My best friend from school helped me with a few ways to disclose."
Romantic relationships	30	12.6%	P-231: "I was able to talk to my husband when deciding whether or not to disclose to employers post autism diagnosis."
			P-62: "My partner agrees with my decision not to disclose, but assists me in situations where I wish to

			disclose, such as for individual travel situations."
Other sources of support	20	8.4%	P-14: "The online autistic community was super helpful."
			P-185: "I participate in an intranet autism spectrum support group."
Professionals	17	7.1%	P-9: "I was very lucky to have the support of a Disability Advisor through my local authority who supported me throughout the whole process."
			P-162 "My employment search support worker helped."
Colleagues/ Employers	10	4.2%	P-39: "I spoke to some trusted colleagues as to how and when to share my diagnosis."
			P-15: "My immediate supervisor was a great help."

	General support	5	2.1%	P-116: "I have had quite accepting support, lots and from various people."
				P-148: "Have had plenty of support generally."
Positive outcomes	*Support, acceptance, and understanding from colleagues/ employers*	68	28.5%	P-7: "The co-workers were very understanding, and they made me settle in better."
				P-75: "Acceptance from colleagues when I disclosed."
	Workplace adjustments	35	14.7%	P-9: "My employer was supportive and open to all suggestions of reasonable adjustments. This was more positive than I expected."
				P-44: "Resulted in reasonable adjustments at work which were helpful."
	Success in recruitment	12	5%	P-4: "I was offered the job."

			P-2: "I assumed the employer would welcome neurodiversity into the creative educational setting. It enhanced their equality and diversity statistics and made for an adjusted employment scenario."
Gaining legal protection	5	2.1%	P-163: "I was able to keep my job, as the employers could see that they would be in a difficult position if they dismissed me due to behaviour that could be attributed to a disability."
			P-220: "My formal diagnosis and disclosure of this gave me the protection of English law, which I successfully used to gain redress."
Provide training to improve autism knowledge	2	<1%	P-8: "In one place, I used the disclosure of my diagnosis to improve the place for our autistic students and to provide autism training and support to other staff."

				P-23: "I became the resident autism expert. I provided training and advice to other staff."
Negative outcomes	*Lack of support, understanding & acceptance*	70	29.4%	P-66: "No one understood and no one even bothered to read up and teach themselves anything about autism."
				P-198: "I was expected to be this perfect example of an autistic person and put up with no one understanding me and having to repeat things many times."
	Bullying & purposeful discrimination	45	18.9%	P-16: "One [colleague] made things very difficult for me and I eventually had to complain that her behaviour was bullying. It was a really horrid time for how I made sense of my diagnosis and abilities etc."
				P-219: "I did suffer some discrimination."

	Lack of workplace adjustments	31	13%	P-15: "Reasonable adjustments were very difficult to get put in place due to my employer not understanding ASD."
				P-148: "They made no adjustments that I could perceive. The one adjustment I did ask for (to reliably answer my written questions) they flatly refused to make."
Neutral/no outcomes		37	15.5%	P-13: "No real effects on the situation."
				P-30: "There has generally been no change."

Discussion

Adapted from Romualdez et al., 2021a

The findings from this study show that disclosing an autism diagnosis at work is both complex and fraught with uncertainty about its outcomes. Participants most commonly disclosed only to a few people at work, but just over a third had told everyone in their workplace about their diagnosis; only 10% of participants in this study had not disclosed to anyone. The most common point in time for disclosure during the employment journey was after starting the job, while the second most common point was during the application process. Rarely, however, did disclosure occur during the job interview. The qualitative data revealed a number of reasons to disclose at work, but the most common given was to increase acceptance and understanding from colleagues. Participants gave other practical reasons for disclosing (e.g., obtaining workplace adjustments and gaining legal protections) alongside reasons like improving mental health and well-being, and feeling a sense of responsibility to represent the autistic community. Instances of retrospective disclosure, i.e., disclosing in response to a past negative event to mitigate or explain this event, emerged in many of the qualitative responses from participants. By far, the most common reason *not* to disclose an autism diagnosis at work was the fear of the negative perceptions of others; this concern outweighed fear of discrimination and bullying, as well as the feeling that disclosure was neither necessary nor beneficial. While 40% of participants rated the impact of disclosing to supervisors positively, only a third rated the impact of disclosing to co-workers positively. Even fewer participants rated the subsequent adjustments made by supervisors and co-workers as either extremely or somewhat positive.

The results of this study showed that the aims of autistic individuals who decided to disclose did bring about the desired outcomes in some instances. While the most common reason to disclose was to increase understanding from colleagues and employers, the most

common positive outcome was indeed support, acceptance, and understanding from others in the workplace. Unfortunately, many participants also cited lack of support, understanding, and acceptance as a negative outcome. As much as autistic people hoped that disclosing their diagnosis would increase acceptance from others, this study also demonstrated that the impact of disclosure can be extremely negative for many individuals. Participants shared several examples of how disclosure--rather than resulting in positive changes at work-- brought about negative reactions from others in the workplace. One participant stated that, "No one understood, and no one even bothered to read up and teach themselves anything about autism" while another said, "One [colleague] made things very difficult for me and I eventually had to complain that her behaviour was bullying. It was a really horrid time for how I made sense of my diagnosis and abilities." These positive and negative disclosure outcomes have been demonstrated in social situations as well; researchers have found that non-autistic people had more favourable first impressions of autistic people after they disclosed their diagnosis (Sasson &Morrison, 2017). However, this is often dependent on how knowledgeable the recipient of the disclosure is about autism (Sasson & Morrison, 2017) and whether they already have negative views of autism (Morrison, 2019). Research has demonstrated that people who hold stigmatised attitudes toward autistic people are more likely to react negatively to disclosure (Morrison, 2019). This may offer some clues as to what leads to positive or negative outcomes of disclosure in the workplace. In another study, researchers found that autism acceptance training decreased explicit biases toward autistic people (Jones, 2021). These studies and the results of the current study reinforce just how important other people are in determining disclosure outcomes--and how increasing autism knowledge in non-autistic people can help improve these outcomes.

The influence of other people in the workplace when it comes to determining successful disclosure outcomes cannot be ignored. Research on stigmatised identities in

general and disclosure in the workplace has previously established the importance of the recipient of the disclosure (Johnson et al., 2020). For autistic employees, social communication differences and the misconceptions of others related to autism may compound the threat of stigma and negative reactions to disclosure. The results of the current study showed that the reactions of colleagues and employers matter, both in how they treat the autistic employee after disclosure and how they make adjustments. In addition, this study demonstrated just how important the *perceptions* of others in the workplace are for autistic people when making the decision to disclose. In fact, this is often the main factor in their decision-making. Both the most common reasons to disclose (i.e., to increase understanding and acceptance) and not to disclose (i.e., fear of the negative perceptions of others) had to do with *other people*. These findings are in line with evidence from United States-based studies on disclosure in workplaces, which found that fear of discrimination is the primary reason that autistic people choose not to disclose (Morris, Begel, & Wiedermann, 2015; Sarrett, 2017). This is contradictory to the long-held and somewhat misguided notion that autistic people prefer to isolate socially and show minimal concern for what others think of them (Dodd, 2005) or that they lack the ability to empathise (Baron-Cohen, 2002; Frith, 2001; Schulte-Rüther et al. 2011). Empathy, which involves attributing feelings to others and understanding those feelings (Harmsen, 2019), must be involved when autistic people worry about how others in the workplace regard them. This finding also challenges previous work suggesting that autistic people lack the ability to see from the perspectives of others, an ability known as *Theory of Mind* (Baron-Cohen, 1997). Autistic individuals are certainly able to recognise and understand how they are perceived by others. This may drive them to disclose in order to improve other people's perceptions—or prevent them from disclosing for fear of being perceived negatively. Not only do autistic people care what others in the workplace think of them, but this also takes precedence over other concerns such as

maintaining their jobs and obtaining adjustments. If this is the case, then efforts to improve disclosure outcomes should focus more on changing the perspectives of others in the workplace rather than changing autistic individuals.

Other common objectives for disclosing an autism diagnosis were to obtain workplace adjustments, to manage and sustain employment, and to gain legal protections. While the positive outcomes identified in this study did indeed map on to these aims, this study also showed that the lack of adjustments was a common negative outcome. It is clear from the results that disclosure does not always lead to positive adjustments made by colleagues and employers, as reflected in how participants rated the impact of disclosure and subsequent adjustments. This confirms previous work showing that the pathway from disclosure to workplace adjustments can be unpredictable and varied, and that autistic employees are often unsuccessful at obtaining these adjustments by disclosing (Lindsay, 2019). This is concerning, especially when autistic individuals are forced to make the difficult choice to disclose because they *need* adjustments to thrive in the workplace. If the outcome is unsatisfactory, then the act of disclosure becomes a risk that is both unnecessary and not beneficial to the autistic employee.

In exploring the workplace experiences of autistic individuals, I also uncovered that instances of retrospective disclosure (i.e., disclosing after a negative experience) were common. These incidents occurred after starting the job, which was another common point in time for disclosure for the participants in this study. This leads to the question of why some autistic employees chose to disclose at this point and not earlier. This may be related to disclosing only out of necessity, which several participants wrote about when answering the open-ended questions. These participants were forced to disclose their diagnosis because *not* disclosing was perpetuating a difficult workplace situation. It is worrying that a decision as personal as the disclosure of an autism diagnosis may not be entirely up to the individual.

Instead, disclosure was felt to be a consequence of having no other choice. When disclosure is a necessity, rather than a choice, this reflects a breakdown within the organisation and a failure of the workplace to adequately support its employees. This may also reflect a lack of trust from autistic employees toward their organisation if they wait until circumstances are dire to disclose their diagnosis rather than feeling they can be open about it.

Knowing *when* autistic employees are most likely to disclose is relevant for employers who want to support their employees, or potential employees, through the disclosure process. Along with disclosing after starting the job, results showed that autistic individuals also commonly disclosed on the application materials. This challenges what much of the literature on workplace disclosure has focused on, i.e., disclosure during job interviews (Dalgin & Bellini, 2008; Flower et al., 2021; McMahon, Henry, & Linthicum, 2020). The current study demonstrated that this is rarely the case. Future research should reflect real-life situations when examining how autistic employees choose to disclose, and how disclosure affects employers' hiring decisions. In Chapter 4, I will look at employers' perspectives on autism disclosure during the application process, specifically on CVs. This study and future studies on employers' perspectives on disclosure could lead to changes in how we address bias against hiring autistic job candidates or working with autistic employees.

Clearly, much of the responsibility for improving disclosure outcomes should fall on those who are in the position to enact policy changes and influence workplace culture. The experiences of the participants in this study, however, showed that many workplaces are far from inclusive, and organisations need to do more. Changes need to be implemented on both the individual and organisational levels. Based on the results of this study, I have specific recommendations for improving autistic individuals' disclosure experiences in the workplace. These recommendations are targeted toward changes in behaviour and attitudes for non-autistic colleagues, as well as changes in policy for organisations as a whole.

My first recommendation is to shift the onus from the autistic individuals to their non-autistic colleagues and supervisors. Providing autism training for non-autistic staff in workplaces can improve the disclosure experiences of autistic people. This practice is in line with research showing that increased autism knowledge is associated with more favourable impressions of autistic people who disclose (D. R. Jones, DeBrabander, & Sasson, 2021; Sasson & Morrison, 2019) and a reduction in stigma and explicit biases toward autistic individuals (D. R. Jones et al., 2021). Organisations need to focus on changing the behaviour and attitudes of non-autistic people rather than always expecting their autistic employees to adapt their behaviour, explain autism, and navigate uncomfortable situations. The results of this study show that autistic individuals have had to shoulder much of the responsibility for improving their own disclosure experiences. My recommendation is to lessen that responsibility and instead educate non-autistic employees and supervisors about autism. This is not only a way of improving autism knowledge for individuals, but it is also a crucial step in creating better, more inclusive workplace cultures.

Moreover, organisations need to take greater responsibility for creating workplace cultures where autistic employees feel safe to disclose. A second recommendation is therefore for organisations to develop evidence-based, proactive protocols for disclosure. Having protocols in place will signal to all employees that the organisation is inclusive, values diversity, and supports disclosure; it will also let employees know *how* they can disclose, ideally at a time of their choosing. It is important to note, however, that employees should never feel pressured to disclose—even if this is because disclosure is encouraged and celebrated within an organisation. A truly inclusive workplace, one where practices such as flexible working hours and alternative modes of communication are common, supports employees from all different backgrounds with a variety of needs. Organisations of this type may see less instances of disclosure because they may not necessitate disclosure at all.

To address the dissatisfaction with workplace adjustments that many autistic employees experience, I recommend that protocols for following up after disclosure and evaluating these adjustments regularly must exist within organisations. This study shows that obtaining adjustments is a common reason, and often the primary reason, for autistic individuals to disclose at work. If autistic employees go through the difficult process of disclosure only to have the subsequent adjustments be unsatisfactory, or even non-existent, this signals a breakdown within the organisation. Regular check-ins by supervisors are one way of ensuring that adjustments made are appropriate, consistent, and satisfactory. Autistic employees should also be able to evaluate these adjustments regularly and deliver feedback to their supervisors or HR departments without fear of negative consequences. Having protocols in place to do this will let autistic employees know that feedback on adjustments is encouraged and expected.

There are some limitations to this study that must be acknowledged. The issue of a non-representative sample is one that arises from survey research in general, particularly with females being overrepresented compared to men (Aerny-Perreten, Domínguez-Berjón, Esteban-Vasallo, & García-Riolobos, 2015) as was the case with the current study. This was true despite males being much more likely to receive a diagnosis of autism due to current screening tools and the under-diagnosis of females within the autistic population as a result (Elsabbagh et al., 2012). The sample of participants was also 95% White, even though this figure is higher than the percentage of White people in the entire UK population (UK-Government, 2018). Currently, there is also no conclusive evidence demonstrating a strong biological association between race/ethnicity and autism prevalence (Elsabbagh et al., 2012), so having one race or ethnicity represented more than others limits the current study's generalisability. The lack of diversity in autism research is an unfortunate issue that persists in our field, and I intend to address this in the future with more targeted participant

recruitment, e.g., by reaching out directly to representatives from minority ethnic communities. It is also necessary to acknowledge that one-third of our autistic participants had either Master's or doctoral degrees, which is far higher than that of the general population at less than 1% (Higher-Education-Statistics-Agency, 2017). Autistic individuals, who represent roughly 1% of the population (Ambitious-About-Autism, 2020), are also less likely to go on to higher education after graduating (National-Autistic-Society, 2016b); from this, it is possible to conclude that one-third of participants with higher degrees is not truly representative of the wider autistic population.

A further limitation of this study is that participants may have been skewed toward more positive disclosure experiences due to the use of one particular avenue of recruitment: Autistica's corporate partners. Organisations already working with an autism research charity like Autistica may have better inclusive practices, resulting in more positive experiences for their autistic employees. Their experiences may therefore not reflect the experiences of the wider autistic population, although they are of course still valuable and crucial to this research.

Despite these limitations, the current study has important implications for both research and practice related to disclosure of an autism diagnosis at work. By bringing the experiences of autistic individuals to the forefront, this research adds to our knowledge about disclosure. It also represents an important first step in improving disclosure outcomes. Shifting the focus from autistic individuals to non-autistic colleagues and employers should be a top priority. Clearly, it should not be solely the autistic person's responsibility to improve disclosure outcomes. Organisations need to take responsibility for creating more inclusive workplaces by educating their employees, and going a step further by putting inclusive practices into place: flexible work hours, better workplace environments that address the sensory needs of autistic individuals, alternative forms of recruitment, and

multiple modes of communication are a few examples. While an inclusive workplace environment is key, disclosure should also never be a foregone conclusion or the ultimate goal for autistic employees. Autistic employees should feel that disclosure is safe and always possible, but not absolutely necessary. What is more important is that they are never forced into making that decision, and that disclosure truly remains a personal choice for any autistic individual.

The decision to disclose is difficult for autistic individuals precisely because outcomes are so uncertain. Knowing that disclosure can have mixed outcomes makes it clear that we need to know more about what leads to specific outcomes. Research on the factors associated with the outcomes of disclosure will better equip autistic people in their decision-making---and help employers support their autistic employees through this process. This is the logical next step in improving disclosure outcomes, and ultimately employment outcomes, for autistic people. In Chapter 3, I will examine the factors associated with disclosure outcomes more closely through interviews with autistic adults about their experiences of disclosure in the workplace.

Chapter 3

Decision-Making and Factors Associated with the Outcomes of Disclosure

Disclaimer: The study that forms the basis for this chapter has previously been published in *Autism and Developmental Language Impairments* (Romualdez, Walker, & Remington, 2021) (see **Appendix C**). The information contained in the method and results sections has been reproduced from the original publication. The data table and figures, which appeared in the manuscript, have also been reproduced here. The introduction and discussion have been adapted from the original paper and I have cited the published work accordingly.

Introduction

Adapted from Romualdez et al., 2021b

In Chapter 2, I discussed how autism disclosure in the workplace can have mixed outcomes, and how the uncertainty surrounding disclosure makes this a difficult decision for many autistic employees. I established that there is a need for more research on the factors associated with the outcomes of disclosure. Identifying these factors will increase our understanding of what leads to certain outcomes and perhaps reduce the risk of negative disclosure outcomes for autistic individuals. This is of particular importance in the workplace, where diagnostic disclosure is heightened by the risk of discrimination from colleagues and employers—and even of the loss of livelihood.

Broader research on the disclosure of *concealable stigmatised identities* (CSIs) in the workplace has uncovered certain clues as to what leads to positive disclosure outcomes. Studies have focussed on the experiences of individuals who have had an abortion, who have been victims of abuse or assault, or who have been diagnosed with a mental or physical health condition. The *Disclosure Processes Model (DPM)* provides a framework for understanding the process of disclosure and the factors that mediate the effect of disclosure on individual and social outcomes (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). This model was originally

conceived as a way of understanding disclosure outcomes for employees with CSI.. The researchers identified three mediators for the outcomes of disclosure: 1) alleviation of inhibition; 2) social support; and 3) changes in social information. Alleviation of inhibition refers to the sharing of previously concealed information, while social support refers to the person with the CSI gaining the support of others (or suffering social rejection) by sharing such information (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). Changes in social information refers to the adding of new information about the stigmatised identity to the broader social context (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). In their model, Chaudoir and Fisher (2010) included the "reaction of the confidant" as part of the disclosure event itself, not as a predictor or mediator of outcomes.

Research influenced by Chaudoir and Fisher's DPM has added to our knowledge about the disclosure of stigmatised identities in the workplace. Johnson and Joshi (2020) focused more on the person being disclosed to, or the *stigma disclosure recipient (SDR)*, in their conceptual framework of disclosure events. They devised a model for disclosure in workplaces that considered the psychological underpinnings of recipients' responses to disclosure within organisations. Specifically, the researchers proposed that stigma disclosure recipients may feel unable to cope with the perceived social demands of interacting with a colleague or employee who discloses (Johnson & Joshi, 2020). This triggers an *identity threat*, and leads to unsupportive behaviours such as discrimination, microaggressions, or the withholding of resources from the individual (Johnson & Joshi, 2020). A lower perceived identity threat, in contrast, leads to supportive behaviours such as empathy and making accommodations for the individual (Johnson & Joshi, 2020). Within their framework, Johnson and Joshi (2020) also included certain *characteristics of the disclosure event* that influenced the level of identity threat experienced by recipients of disclosure: novelty, disruptiveness, and criticality. Novelty refers to the extent to which the disclosure is novel,

relative to previous interactions with the person disclosing (Johnson and Joshi, 2020). Disruptiveness is how much the disclosure event represents a departure from the norm for everyone involved, while criticality refers to how relevant the disclosure of a stigmatised identity is to future work routine and practices (Johnson & Joshi, 2020). This model is crucial for understanding the outcomes of disclosure. This is in keeping with my own findings that the recipients of disclosure are important to successful outcomes for autistic employees (see Chapter 2). Understanding what drives the reactions of others is important when we consider how to target colleagues and employers in the workplace and ensure positive disclosure outcomes.

While research on stigmatised identity disclosure is expansive, studies looking specifically at autism disclosure in the workplace are still relatively scarce. The autistic identity must be considered separately, specifically because of the stigma associated with social communication differences that are unique to autism (Johnson and Joshi, 2016). In a study on the experiences of autistic employees after receiving an autism diagnosis, Johnson and Joshi (2016) included "identity management", or the decision to disclose, in their thematic analysis of interview data. However, their study did not explore the various possible outcomes of disclosure or the factors associated with these outcomes. The study was also based in the United States and did not consider other social or cultural contexts for autism disclosure. Stigma and cultural attitudes toward autism may vary greatly from one place to another; therefore, research conducted in other countries is necessary to provide a more complete picture of disclosure outcomes for autistic people in workplaces.

The current study aimed to identify the factors associated with the various types of outcome of autism disclosure in UK workplaces. It is the first study conducted in the UK with this specific objective. I also aimed to explore the disclosure experiences of autistic individuals using a more in-depth method than in my previous study outlined in Chapter 2.

To meet this objective, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with autistic individuals and analyse the qualitative data using thematic analysis. This approach allowed me to amplify the voices of autistic people in my research and identify what they considered to be important when deciding to disclose. In doing so, I hoped to provide some clarity for autistic employees about what leads to successful disclosure outcomes. This information is not just important for autistic employees, but for employers and organisation leaders as well. Organisations that want to hire more autistic people and create more inclusive workplaces need to understand what to focus on in order to support disclosure in workplaces. The results of this study may lead to better workplace environments and better disclosure outcomes for autistic people, in addition to improving organisations as a whole.

Method

Published in Romualdez et al., 2021b

Participants

Participants in the current study were 24 clinically-diagnosed autistic adults with a mean age of 45.7 years (range = 26 – 66 years). The sample was predominantly White, evenly split between males and females, and were – or had previously been – employed across a variety of sectors (see Table 4 for full participant information). Participants were recruited via a database of those who had previously taken part in research at the UCL Institute of Educationvia social media, and through my own networks. For the present study, participation was limited to those who reported a formal diagnosis of autism, as their disclosure experiences were likely to be different from those who self-identified as autistic.

Table 4.

Participant Demographic and Employment Data

N = 24

Gender	13 females; 11 males
Ethnicity	22 White; 1 Black; 1 Mixed
Mean age (range)	45.7 years (26 – 66 years)
Mean age when diagnosed (range)	41.5 years (10 – 60 years)
Method of diagnosis	All clinically diagnosed
Employment status	22 employed; 2 formerly employed
Mean years at current job (range)	8.6 years (1 month – 25 years)
Employment sectors represented	Administration, Communications and Marketing, Creative and Performing Arts, Education, IT, Public Sector, Research, Retail, Self-Employed (Entrepreneur)
Current income level	Below £10,000: n = 2 £10,001-£20,000: n = 6 £20,001-£30,000: n = 10 £30,001-£40,000: n = 2 £40,001-£50,000: n = 1 Above £50,000: n = 1 Not known (did not answer): n = 2
Level of disclosure	9 disclosed selectively 15 disclosed to everyone
Self-reported co-occurring conditions	Mental health challenges: n = 19 ADHD: n = 4 Learning condition: n = 2 Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome: n = 1

Measures

The interview schedule consisted of questions about previous and current employment experiences, as well as questions specifically for individuals who were actively seeking employment. The questions were divided into three sections: personal background/demographic information, employment background, and diagnostic disclosure.

The schedule included main questions about employment and disclosure (e.g., "Are you currently working?") as well as probing questions (e.g., "Do you think you might have had a different experience if you had chosen to/not to disclose?") (see **Appendix D** for the full interview schedule.

Procedure

Interviews were conducted in-person, over the phone, or via video call, online chat, or email, depending on participant preference. These options were given in order to make the study as inclusive as possible. In-person, phone, video call, and online chat interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. For interviews conducted through email, I sent participants the interview questions in a Word document for them to complete in their own time and send back to me. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the UCL Institute of Education and all participants gave written informed consent to take part, and for their interviews to be recorded.

Data Analysis

All in-person, phone, and video call interviews were transcribed verbatim. These transcripts and the text from the online chat and email interviews were imported into the QSR NVivo 12 Pro (2018) qualitative data analysis programme for coding. I used reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify themes and sub-themes from the interview transcripts. To allow myself to be guided by the data rather than pre-assigning themes that I expected to find, I conducted the initial analysis using an open coding method. This involved categorising sections of text from the data without any existing framework. The coding framework was developed by creating themes from these sections of text, then further refining these themes into various sub-themes. My primary supervisor conducted secondary analysis by reviewing quotes and their relevant sub-themes. We then met several

times to further refine themes and sub-themes into a coding framework that represented the data as accurately as possible.

In the interest of confidentiality, participant names are pseudonymised in this study using assigned ID numbers attached to their quotes.

Results

Published in Romualdez et al., 2021b

Experiences of Disclosure

Through thematic analysis, I identified universal themes and sub-themes that fell under participants' experiences of disclosure (see Figure 2).

Figure 2.

Thematic Map of Participants' Experiences of Disclosure
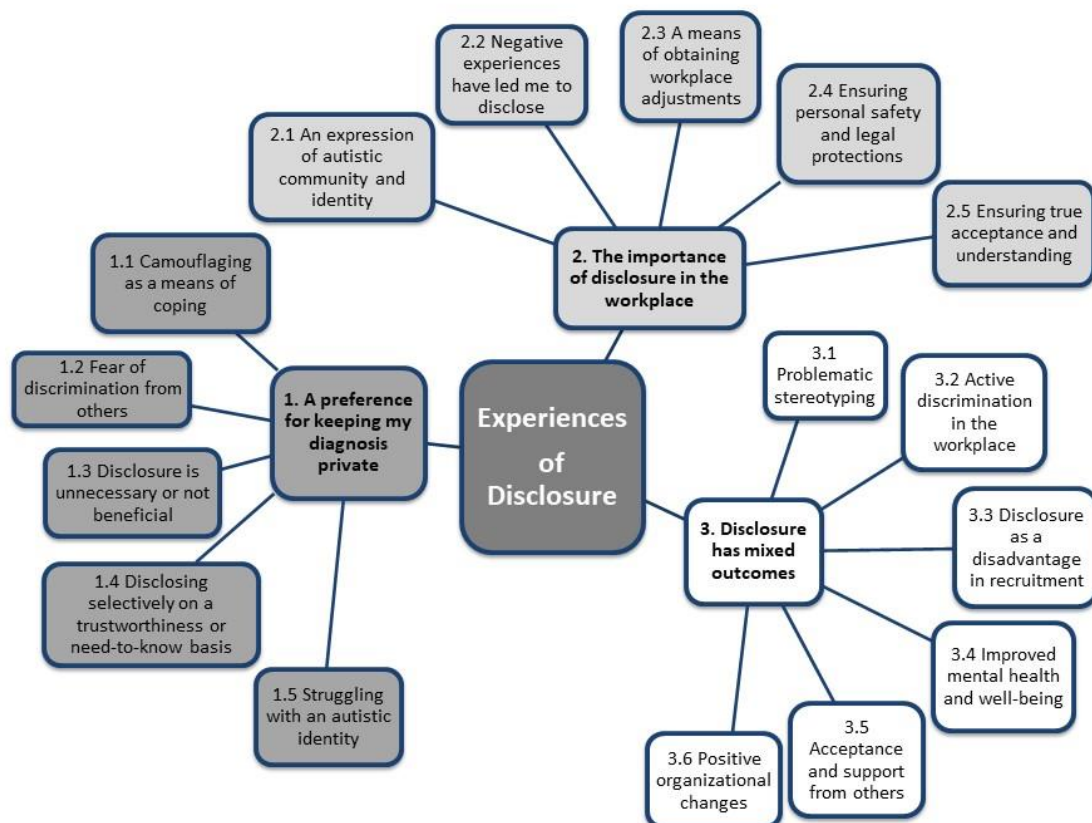
Illustrative quotes corresponding to these themes and sub-themes are shown in Table 5.

Table 5.

Table of Themes, Sub-themes, and Example Quotes

Themes	Sub-themes	Example Quotes
1. A preference for keeping my diagnosis private	*1.1 Camouflaging as a means of coping*	"Successfully hiding who I really am in order to get a job." [P-23]
		"I do it automatically [at work], and I've done it since I was a child, because I realised quite early on that I was different to other children. And particularly, once I got to high school, I realised that if I didn't want to be bullied anymore, I had to pretend I was like other girls." [P-6]
	1.2 Fear of discrimination from others	"By not disclosing, I do not give people that weapon to use autism as a blanket reason against me—or a blanket excuse if they are trying to be kind or protect me." [P-24]
		"My shortcomings could be attributed to my autism and therefore this would be seen negatively; I feel as though asking for accommodations might be seen as looking for an easier way in, or that it might be perceived that I am using autism as an 'excuse' for my shortcomings." [P-19]
	1.3 Disclosure is unnecessary or not beneficial	"The places where I've worked particularly as a teacher would not be interested in making any adjustments anyway." [P-10]
		"With respect to the majority of my colleagues who were *not* special disclosure exceptions as described above: there's no long explanation here and there was no

decision-making process. It's none of their business and there is no reason to tell them." [P-24]

1.4 Disclosing selectively on a trustworthiness or need-to-know basis

"I haven't actually told any kind of line managers or anyone in that kind of formal way, it's just people who I've felt comfortable telling." [P-12]

"In one case the family had two profoundly autistic sons and I felt I had to disclose in case I saw them at an autism event locally." [P-17]

1.5 Struggling with an autistic identity

"My motivation to be normal was because I hadn't accepted my diagnosis. I definitely masked as much as I could and avoided impossible tasks, like using the till, for as long as I could." [P-13]

"The thing is I find it very difficult, but one of the biggest issues is lots of things are a lot easier to understand once you stop viewing yourself through the prism of autism." [P-1]

2. The importance of disclosure in the workplace

2.1 An expression of autistic community and identity

"I have spent most of my life under the impression that I am not a proper person and trying to hide it. There came a point when I thought this was not going to help younger autistic people. It needs to be understood that autistic children grow up/grow old and may continue to need some support to live fulfilling lives contributing to society." [P-14]

"I feel a big responsibility to the autistic community to be 'out.' If I am out, then I hope to change the public perception of what autism is." [P-22]

"In one way, it's been one of the best things that's ever happened to me, because I'm

absolutely passionate about it, and this is probably the first lot of research that I've taken part in, but, also, I've done a lot of stuff at work in promoting neurodiversity and explaining to people exactly what it is, and what it's like to be an autistic person, and what amazing qualities we have, and what we can bring to work." [P-6]

2.2 Negative experiences have led me to disclose	"I disclosed to my manager because I just wanted to ensure that nothing happened like in my previous job and so I thought it was best to bring it up as soon as I could." [P-11]
	"I got into a situation at work where I was being bullied and I didn't want it to be thrown at me, so I wanted it to be known that I had Asperger's so it wasn't just that I was antisocial or difficult." [P-2]
2.3 A means of obtaining workplace adjustments	"The decision was taken so as not to have any problems. Now no one asks me to go down the night before for meetings. They are organised to allow for early morning travel." [P-15]
	"So yes, it is good, it is working from home Monday through Thursday was something we came to after a bit of discussion." [P-3]
2.4 Ensuring personal safety and legal protections	"I feel safer because people have this knowledge about me." [P-19]
	"I think disclosure is important, because it has meant that I have the protections that go along with the Equalities Act. That is 100% absolutely crucial in my situation." [P-3]
2.5 Ensuring true acceptance and understanding	"There's no point going to work somewhere if they don't know in advance and are not accepting and welcoming of me right from the start. I'd just encounter more problems

and end up being fired probably. So at least it filters out the places that would be bad for me to work." [P-18]

"I expect it might have prevented some misunderstandings and resentment that otherwise might have arisen, e.g., if they felt I wasn't being sympathetic enough." [P-19]

3. Disclosure has mixed outcomes	*3.1 Problematic stereotyping*	"I think there is a lot of stereotyping that goes on, I think the terms 'on the spectrum' is being used increasingly in a derogatory sense, to imply that someone doesn't have acceptable behaviour or that they are antisocial, not quite right. I have encountered that both towards myself and to colleagues who I know have autism." [P-10]
		"Problems with unspoken assumptions, people assuming I'm good at everything because I am good at one thing, and people assuming I am terrible at everything because I am terrible at one thing. In other words, the assumption of a flat autistic profile is hugely problematic." [P-22]
	3.2 Active discrimination in the workplace	"The impact from disclosing was other members of staff talking and complaining about me behind my back. And me getting a warning from the store manager." [P-13]
		"[She] asked me to speak privately and told me, 'I didn't mean it that way, it's just that everyone else would have understood.' Really? Are you actually saying that you spoke to me disrespectfully because of my autistic traits? So that was direct discrimination." [P-21]
	3.3 Disclosure as a disadvantage in recruitment	"They had been very happy with my written tasks during the application process, but the feedback I got about the interview was that I didn't fit in there, and they were concerned I'd need adjustments to the training process.

Which are both thinly-veiled code for 'You're too autistic.'" [P-18]

"They were against employing autistic people. When I suggested they employ more, they said, 'That will *never* happen.'" [P-23]

3.4 Improved mental health and well-being

"I have become much more open about it because the response to disclosure has always been positive, so I feel able to mask a little less and live more authentically, which is good for the well-being." [P-19]

"It screws up my mental health when I'm continuing to mask, so I made the choice. My mental health comes first." [P-4]

3.5 Acceptance and support from others

"I've had some good experiences certainly as well and I feel a lot better in terms of people accepting me." [P-9]

"The managers were very interested in learning more about autism. The two managers supported me on the shop floor and at the tills." [P-13]

3.6 Positive organisational changes

"I would say that success is to finally disclose the way I did last week. And then, as a result of that, we've set up a neurodiverse staff network. So the thing I was looking for since I joined, we've ended up doing ourselves. So I feel that's quite a big achievement." [P-4]

"I don't regret disclosing in that organisation because I believe it did good even for the organisation. Now they have a proper procedure where, if someone needs a disability adjustment, it is dated, it is in black and white, it can be followed." [P-21]

A preference for keeping my diagnosis private. The first theme reflected a desire from participants to maintain privacy about their diagnosis when possible. Nine participants had chosen not to disclose in previous roles, or only disclosed selectively in their current roles. Participants spoke about using *camouflaging as a means of coping* with difficult situations: "I do it automatically [at work], and I've done it since I was a child, because I realised quite early on that I was different to other children. And particularly, once I got to high school, I realised that if I didn't want to be bullied anymore, I had to pretend I was like other girls." [P-6]

Many of the participants who actively hid their diagnosis also talked about the *fear of discrimination from others* as a reason behind their decision: "By not disclosing, I do not give people that weapon to use autism as a blanket reason against me—or a blanket excuse if they are trying to be kind or protect me." [P-24] Others simply saw no reason to disclose, saying that *disclosure is unnecessary or not beneficial*.

Several individuals spoke about keeping their diagnosis as private as possible by *disclosing selectively on a trustworthiness or need-to-know basis:* "I haven't actually told any kind of line managers or anyone in that kind of formal way, it's just people who I've felt comfortable telling." [P-12]

While some participants chose to keep their autism diagnosis private for the reasons mentioned above, some chose not to disclose due to their own difficulty accepting or understanding their diagnosis. These individuals spoke about *struggling with an autistic identity,* especially those who had received their diagnosis within the last few months or years. One participant stated that, "My motivation to be normal was because I hadn't

accepted my diagnosis. I definitely masked as much as I could and avoided impossible tasks." [P-13].

The importance of disclosure in the workplace. In contrast to the views outlined above, a number of participants highlighted how important it was for them to disclose at work. In particular, many participants felt that disclosure was not just for themselves but for other autistic people who might be also be dealing with difficulties in the workplace. These participants discussed disclosure as *an expression of autistic community and identity.* They spoke about how their autistic identity was important to them, and how they felt a sense of obligation to disclose in order to pave the way for other autistic people: "I have spent most of my life under the impression that I am not a proper person and trying to hide it. There came a point when I thought this was not going to help younger autistic people." [P-14] One participant spoke about their passion for advocacy, saying, "In one way, it's been one of the best things that's ever happened to me, because I'm absolutely passionate about it …I've done a lot of stuff at work in promoting neurodiversity and explaining to people exactly what it is, and what it's like to be an autistic person, and what amazing qualities we have, and what we can bring to work." [P-6]

While some felt that it was their responsibility to disclose, other participants felt that they had to disclose due to certain situations that they found themselves in. These participants explained how *negative experiences have led me to disclose.* In some cases, this referred to previous situations where choosing not to disclose had resulted in negative outcomes; this prompted participants to make the decision to disclose so as to avoid the same outcomes. One participant said, "I disclosed to my manager because I just wanted to ensure that nothing happened like in my previous job and so I thought it was best to bring it up as soon as I could." [P-11] In other cases, the participant disclosed once they encountered issues at work (i.e., retrospective disclosure): "I got into a situation at work where I was being bullied and I

didn't want it to be thrown at me, so I wanted it to be known that I had Asperger's so it wasn't just that I was antisocial or difficult." [P-2]

For many, disclosure was seen as *a means of obtaining workplace adjustments* ("The decision was taken so as not to have any problems. Now no one asks me to go down the night before for meetings. They are organised to allow for early morning travel." [P-15]) or *ensuring personal safety and legal protections*: "I think disclosure is important, because it has meant that I have the protections that go along with the Equalities Act. That is 100% absolutely crucial in my situation." [P-3]

Lastly, participants spoke about disclosure as a means of *ensuring true acceptance and understanding:* "There's no point going to work somewhere if they don't know in advance and are not accepting and welcoming of me right from the start. I'd just encounter more problems and end up being fired probably. So at least it filters out the places that would be bad for me to work." [P-17]

Disclosure has mixed outcomes. Just as participants had mixed views on whether to disclose, I also identified mixed outcomes of disclosure, sometimes even within the same situation.

For some, disclosure resulted in *problematic stereotyping*: "…unspoken assumptions, people assuming I'm good at everything because I am good at one thing, and people assuming I am terrible at everything because I am terrible at one thing. In other words, the assumption of a flat autistic profile is hugely problematic." [P-22] Sometimes, the negative impact of disclosure went as far as *active discrimination in the workplace,* with one participant describing this situation: "[She] asked me to speak privately and told me, 'I didn't mean it that way, it's just that everyone else would have understood.' Really? Are you

actually saying that you spoke to me disrespectfully because of my autistic traits? So that was direct discrimination." [P-21]

Some participants also viewed disclosure as having a negative impact on hiring practices, referring to *disclosure as a disadvantage in recruitment*. One participant talked about a situation where disclosure led to not getting the job: "They had been very happy with my written tasks during the application process, but the feedback I got about the interview was that I didn't fit in there, and they were concerned I'd need adjustments to the training process. Which are both thinly-veiled code for 'You're too autistic.'" [P-18]

While these negative outcomes were common in the data, positive outcomes were also frequently discussed. Participants spoke about having *improved mental health and well-being* after disclosing their autism diagnosis: "I have become much more open about it because the response to disclosure has always been positive, so I feel able to mask a little less and live more authentically, which is good for the well-being." [P-19] They also gained *acceptance and support from others*, with one participant expressing that, "I've had some good experiences certainly as well and I feel a lot better in terms of people accepting me." [P-9] This acceptance and support led to managers' increased willingness to help their autistic employees: "The managers were very interested in learning more about autism. The two managers supported me on the shop floor and at the tills." [P-13]

Disclosure sometimes had a wider impact; not only impacting the individual but also leading to *positive organisational changes*. One participant, despite being made redundant, still spoke about a welcome effect of disclosing an autism diagnosis: "I don't regret disclosing in that organisation because I believe it did good even for the organisation. Now they have a proper procedure where, if someone needs a disability adjustment, it is dated, it is in black and white, it can be followed." [P-21]

Factors Associated with the Outcomes of Disclosure

I identified three factors associated with the outcomes of disclosure that were common to the experiences of the participants. These factors appeared to be linked to whether disclosure had positive or negative outcomes (see Figure 3).

Figure 3.

Factors Associated with the Outcomes of Disclosure
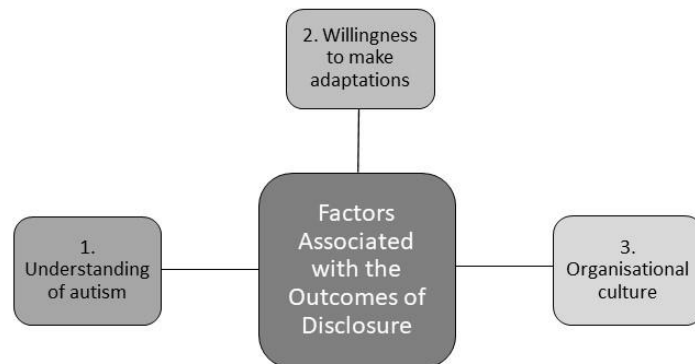
Example quotes related to the factors associated with the outcomes of disclosure are shown in Table 6.

Table 6.

Example Quotes for Factors Associated with the Outcomes of Disclosure

		Example Quotes
Factors associated with the outcomes of disclosure	*1. Understanding of autism*	"And my manager, actually, she volunteers for an organisation [that does] therapy with children with autism and other difficulties. So, as soon as I mentioned it to her, she said, "Yes, I've always thought you were" – and she had been my manager for about three years at that point. So, she was absolutely brilliant.[P-6]
		"A colleague I was working quite closely with said, 'I understand, my son has autism' so that was really encouraging, that was a positive experience." [P-7]
		"The third job didn't show any understanding at all. They were busy and short-staffed and the manager was only temporary. There was a high staff turn around there. So, the disclosure had no effect at all." [P-13]
		"I had a period of about six months where things were really difficult because the people that were managing me really didn't understand. And one of them just didn't want to understand. He didn't care. So, I think it's a very personal decision." [P-6]
	2. Willingness to make adaptations	"Some adaptations have been made without me asking. Employer is tolerant of my bad memory, which I really appreciate and need. She reminds me of some things." [P-22]
		"Initially I was asked where I needed support and they listened. Offered for me to see a counsellor and occupational health." [P-20]

	"On their part they told me that they didn't know and then when I did disclose it in an HR meeting, I said that I would like some special agreed adjustments to be put in place but they refused." [P-11]
	"They were mainly private organisations, independent sector, and following a business model and they were not interested in making any kind of adjustment." [P-10]
3. Organisational culture	"Because I am a disabled, I now get to work on our disabled resources! So, when the people in the office or the advisors come across someone that has additional needs, they will redirect them to me." [P-3]
	"The university that I worked for had an autism centre so I felt that the culture was accepting, I think much more than perhaps in a different workplace, so that was positive." [P-2]
	"I think unfortunately there are certain negative attitudes towards people with disabilities and it's depending on the culture of where you work. You might make your own employment position less secure by disclosing so I would advise people to consider whether or not it is a good idea according to the culture of the organisation in which they work." [P-9]
	"I'm aware that those members of staff aren't particularly open-minded, don't have a particularly positive view of autism." [P-1]

Understanding of autism. Colleagues' and employers' *understanding of autism*

appeared to be associated with whether the disclosure of an autism diagnosis had a positive or

negative outcome for the autistic individual. Where colleagues had prior knowledge and understanding of autism, disclosure experiences were often positive: "A colleague I was working quite closely with said, 'I understand, my son has autism' so that was really encouraging, that was a positive experience." [P-7] However, a lack of understanding was typically associated with more negative outcomes: "The third job didn't show any understanding at all. They were busy and short-staffed and the manager was only temporary. There was a high staff turn around there. So, the disclosure had no effect at all." [P-13]

Willingness to make adaptations. I also identified a second factor related to disclosure outcomes: the *willingness to make adaptations* demonstrated by colleagues and employers. In situations where appropriate adjustments were made, participants often had positive experiences: "Some adaptations have been made without me asking. Employer is tolerant of my bad memory, which I really appreciate and need. She reminds me of some things." [P-22] Participants spoke about negative outcomes when employers were unwilling to make these adjustments: "On their part they told me that they didn't know and then when I did disclose it in an HR meeting, I said that I would like some special agreed adjustments to be put in place but they refused." [P-11]

Organisational culture. Acceptance and understanding from colleagues, as well as the willingness to make adaptations, were often reflective of the wider *organisational culture*. Some participants spoke about their workplaces as being more inclusive and understanding of disability, which was linked to positive outcomes of disclosure: "Because I am a disabled, I now get to work on our disabled resources! So, when the people in the office or the advisors come across someone that has additional needs, they will redirect them to me." [P-3] Others spoke about some organisations having a negative view of disability, which could lead to negative outcomes: "I think unfortunately there are certain negative attitudes towards people with disabilities and it's depending on the culture of where you work. You might make your

own employment position less secure by disclosing so I would advise people to consider whether or not it is a good idea according to the culture of the organisation." [P-9]

Discussion

Adapted from Romualdez et al., 2021b

The results of this study confirmed past findings that disclosure has mixed outcomes, and that autistic individuals make the decision to disclose for a variety of reasons. Participants who chose not to disclose, or who disclosed selectively, often did so based on trust or necessity. Two reasons cited for choosing not to disclose to everyone—fear of discrimination from others and disclosure is unnecessary or not beneficial—confirmed the findings from the previous study outlined in Chapter 2. Some participants who did disclose at work felt that they had to in order to successfully do their jobs. This was in keeping with the results of the previous study, which demonstrated that disclosure was often a necessity rather than a choice and at times a consequence of negative experiences (i.e., retrospective disclosure).

Participants who disclosed their diagnosis at work also gave practical reasons--such as to obtain legal protections and workplace adjustments—which were in line with the previous study. As with previous findings, the desire for increased understanding and acceptance was also one of the reasons to disclose cited by participants. The current study also identified a novel reason to disclose that was related to autistic identity. Some participants spoke about embracing their autistic identity and feeling a responsibility to the autistic community. They disclosed in order to advocate for themselves and future autistic employees within their organisations. Disclosure for these participants was an expression of their identity and an act of solidarity with other autistic individuals. This link between disclosure and identity has emerged in recent research, which found that a stronger sense of autistic identity led to more disclosure (Cage & Troxell-Whitman, 2020b). The findings in the current study reaffirmed

this relationship and specifically identified this as a reason to disclose at work for autistic individuals.

Conversely, those who struggled with their autistic identity cited this as a reason not to disclose. The participants in the current study talked about feeling disconnected from their autism diagnosis and therefore not feeling the need or desire to disclose it. Some also used camouflaging as a coping mechanism at work when they felt that being open about their diagnosis would be harmful. Camouflaging, or hiding one's autistic traits, is also known as "masking" or "passing" in social situations (Cage & Troxell-Whitman, 2020a). Because of the stigma surrounding autism, camouflaging is employed by many autistic individuals in order to "fit in" or increase connections with other non-autistic people (Hull et al., 2017). The relationship among autistic identity, disclosure, and camouflaging was also identified in research looking at various social situations (Cage & Troxell-Whitman, 2020b), with individuals who had a weaker sense of autistic identity less likely to disclose and more likely to camouflage. In workplace environments, which can involve incredibly high-pressure social situations, it is unsurprising that individuals who struggle with their autistic identity would actively engage in camouflaging. The wider literature on concealable stigmatised identities confirms this; concerns about impression management are more salient in the workplace (Jones & King, 2014), so individuals are forced to manage their stigmatised identities much more than in other social situations, such as those involving close friends or family members.

Participants who chose to camouflage and not disclose their diagnosis often did so out of a fear of negative outcomes. Some participants who did choose to disclose, however, experienced positive outcomes. One such outcome, understanding and support from others, confirms similar findings from the previous study. Participants referred to improved mental health and well-being as a second desirable outcome of disclosure. A third positive outcome, which was newly identified in the current study, was positive organisational changes, such as

the implementation of protocols for keeping records of employee disclosure and subsequent actions taken. This is highly significant because it goes beyond positive outcomes on the individual and interpersonal levels, extending to larger shifts in organisational policy. For example, one participant said that, "I would say that success is to finally disclose the way I did last week. And then, as a result of that, we've set up a neurodiverse staff network. So the thing I was looking for since I joined, we've ended up doing ourselves. So I feel that's quite a big achievement." This sub-theme represents the positive effect that disclosure can have on entire organisations, not just on autistic employees.

Unfortunately, participants in the current study also experienced negative outcomes of disclosure. I identified problematic stereotyping as one of these negative outcomes. This not only referred to the negative stereotypes associated with autism but included positive stereotypes as well. These stereotypes demonstrated a lack of understanding of autistic people as individuals. Other negative outcomes included discrimination, which was a common negative outcome cited by participants in the previous study, and disadvantages in recruitment. Some individuals who disclosed felt that this was the reason they were unsuccessful in recruitment, while others felt they were directly discriminated against and forced out of their organisations.

The main research objective of this study was to identify the factors associated with the outcomes of disclosure. The first factor I identified was *understanding of autism.* This refers to the level of knowledge about autism that colleagues and employers who are recipients of disclosure already have. It may also include previous experience interacting with autistic people that contributed to greater understanding and more inclusive attitudes in a non-autistic individual. The importance of autism knowledge displayed by others in the workplace extends previous findings from studies on autism disclosure in social situations, particularly when non-autistic people form first impressions of autistic people. Sasson and

Morrison (2017) found that recipients with more autism knowledge had more favourable first impressions of autistic people post-disclosure. Research has also found that the characteristics of the non-autistic rater influenced first impression ratings of autistic people more than the characteristics of the autistic people themselves (Morrison, 2019). Non-autistic people with higher stigma toward autism generally had worse first impressions of autistic people after disclosure, while those with more autism knowledge had improved first impressions. My findings also extend previous research on disclosure of other concealable stigmatised identities in the workplace, which emphasised the importance of the recipient of the disclosure to successful outcomes (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Johnson & Joshi, 2016; Johnson & Joshi, 2020). Colleagues and employers who understood more about autism contributed to the positive experience of disclosure for the autistic participants in the current study. These results highlight that it is not entirely up to autistic people to manage the outcomes of their own disclosure. If outcomes depend so heavily on the recipients of disclosure, then we must improve their understanding of autism to improve disclosure outcomes for autistic people.

The second factor associated with disclosure outcomes is the *willingness to make adaptations.* Adaptations can mean adjustments in the workplace, or changes to the workplace environment that benefit autistic employees. While appropriate adjustments themselves might be considered a positive outcome of disclosure, the current study found that the attitudes of others toward making workplace adjustments is crucial to successful outcomes. I have already identified, in this study as well as in my previous study, that many autistic people disclose primarily to obtain workplace adjustments. A willingness to make and follow through on these adjustments is directly related to positive outcomes of disclosure for autistic people. When others in the workplace are unwilling to make adjustments, this can lead to a hostile work environment, discrimination, and even termination for autistic employees. Some participants in the current study spoke about going through an extended

process to obtain adjustments, not receiving the right adjustments, or encountering resistance from employers toward making these adjustments. For these individuals, the lack of willingness to make adjustments within their organisations was related to negative outcomes of disclosure. The key takeaway is that disclosure must be followed by immediate adaptations that truly help the autistic employee. This will not only benefit the employee, but the workplace as well. The right adjustments for disabled employees have been shown to improve productivity and work participation, in addition to supporting good mental health and well-being (Baanders et al., 2001; Charmaz, 2010).

While understanding autism and being willing to make adaptations are important factors to consider for individual colleagues and employers, the third factor associated with disclosure outcomes has to do with the wider *organisational culture.* In the current study, autistic employees who described their workplaces as more accepting of diversity also experienced positive disclosure outcomes. The results demonstrated that an inclusive organisational culture often meant a better understanding of autism among employers and colleagues, and a general attitude of inclusiveness toward disabled employees. Some participants who viewed their workplaces as inclusive also spoke about their colleagues and employers being more willing to make adjustments. This is consistent with research on disabled employees more generally, which highlights characteristics of the organisation, managers, and employees that pose barriers to employment for disabled individuals (Stone & Colella, 1996). According to their research, organisational leadership and human resource personnel are the two main influences on whether disabled individuals thrive in a workplace environment. Schein (2017) also highlighted the importance of organisational leaders in shaping organisational cultures and bringing about change within their workplaces. While all employees should adopt inclusive practices, it is leaders such as CEOs and managers who have the power to influence the attitudes of their employees toward accepting diversity.

These leaders need to recognise this responsibility and take charge of creating inclusive workplace cultures that will ultimately benefit employees of all different backgrounds.

In addition to the role of leadership in influencing organisational culture, the importance of human resource personnel in supporting disabled employees must also be stressed. Bruyere and colleagues (2003) identified the attitudes of HR representatives toward disability as a major factor in the ability of disabled employees to maintain their jobs. Human resource departments not only represent their organisation's culture, but they are also directly responsible for an organisation's efforts toward supporting and protecting employees. Oftentimes, autistic employees must deal directly with HR personnel in order to disclose, obtain adjustments, or gain legal protections. Any truly inclusive organisation must show an interest in supporting all of its employees and creating an environment that accommodates diverse needs and abilities. HR departments must reflect these values and do their part to ensure workplaces are accepting of diversity. In fact, this type of workplace may not even necessitate disclosure by its autistic employees if inclusive organisational practices, such as flexible working hours and quiet spaces, already exist for all employees to benefit. In truly inclusive workplaces, disclosure is entirely the choice of the autistic employee and may not even be a necessity.

Overall, these results have led me to recommend three specific practices that will facilitate the development of a better understanding of autism for colleagues and employers, meaningful workplace adjustments, and more inclusive organisational cultures. First, while organisations must work to increase the understanding of autism within their workplaces, general autism training may run the risk of promoting problematic stereotypes that harm autistic employees. Instead, individualised autism training would be more effective, ideally involving the autistic employees themselves. This will ensure that the understanding of autism is tailored to the employee's own experiences and abilities. However, as effective as

this may be, it also puts the burden on the autistic employee once again to manage other people's reactions to their disclosure. If this is something that the autistic employee prefers not to do, the onus must fall on those in leadership positions to promote understanding and acceptance of their employee, and train other employees in best practices.

Increased understanding of autism and knowledge about the autistic employee may also lead to an increased willingness to make adaptations for that employee. However, while disclosure can lead to workplace adjustments, these adjustments are not always timely--nor are they always appropriate. My second recommendation is therefore that employers have the right infrastructure in place to support disclosure and ensure that autistic employees are satisfied with the adjustments made. Having a clear process for disclosure is merely the first step; employers need to make sure that there is follow-through, with supports put in place so that disclosure has tangible, lasting effects. Autistic employees must also be encouraged to regularly evaluate adjustments and provide feedback when adjustments are not working. It is the duty of organisations to create a pathway for these evaluations that makes them fair, safe for the employee, and effective.

The above recommendations are targeted toward employers, who must take more of an initiative in improving the disclosure experiences of their autistic employees. I identified positive organisational changes as one outcome of disclosure in this study, but these changes were often initiated by the autistic individuals themselves. The organisations in these situations were forced to define their protocols for workplace disclosure and subsequent adjustments because their autistic employees either took legal action or demanded change. While making these changes is a step in the right direction, I recommend that organisations take a more proactive approach to implementing inclusive practices, rather than relying on their disabled employees to show them what is needed. Proactive solutions could involve diversity training, clear guidelines on legal protections for disabled employees, and hiring

practices that do not unfairly disadvantage autistic people (e.g., practical evaluations rather than face-to-face interviews). The input of autistic individuals is crucial in determining these practices, and I highly encourage organisations to listen to the autistic community and pay autistic consultants to help them make meaningful changes.

While this study adds to our understanding of autism disclosure in the workplace and the factors associated with its outcomes, there are certain limitations to this research. I employed qualitative methods in this study, which limited my ability to establish that these factors were indeed predictors of disclosure outcomes. Though this may be the case, future studies may use quantitative methods with a larger sample of participants in order to establish these causal relationships. A second limitation was that the sample of autistic people who took part in this research was fairly small (N=24) and predominantly White (n=22, 91.6 %). As such, this sample may not represent the wider autistic population in the UK, which also makes it difficult to generalise the results.

Despite these limitations, the findings from this study bridge the gap between the act of disclosure and its possible consequences by identifying the factors associated with these outcomes. It is my hope that employers will use the recommendations outlined in this chapter to establish disclosure and adjustment protocols, improve their practices, and ultimately create more inclusive organisational cultures.

Chapter 2 of this thesis demonstrated that one of the most common time points for disclosure of an autism diagnosis is on the application materials. In this chapter, I further established the importance of the reaction of the recipient in influencing disclosure outcomes. In Chapter 4, I outline my third study, which aimed to make use of this information through research that reflected real-life disclosure situations for autistic individuals. The study shifted the focus from the autistic employees to others in the workplace by examining bias against

hiring autistic job candidates from the point of view of hiring managers, recruiters, and HR

personnel.

Chapter 4

Exploring the Attitudes of Potential Employers toward Hiring Job Candidates after Disclosure of an Autism Diagnosis

Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I outlined studies that were aimed at exploring diagnostic disclosure from the perspectives of autistic individuals. The study that forms the basis for this chapter was conducted with the goal of exploring autism disclosure from the perspectives of potential employers--specifically their attitudes toward hiring autistic candidates.

The results of my first doctoral study showed that while research has focused on autism disclosure during the job interview, autistic adults rarely choose to disclose at this point. Instead, the most common points in time for disclosure are after starting the job, and on the application materials during the recruitment process. I chose to focus my third and last doctoral study on autism disclosure on the application materials as a direct response to the findings from my first study, and a direct challenge to the existing literature on disclosure during interviews that may not reflect real life situations.

Among the studies conducted on disclosure during job interviews, earlier research has looked at concealable stigmatised identities other than autism, specifically psychiatric conditions. Studies that compared disclosure of a mental health condition to disclosure of a physical condition showed that employers were more likely to hire the candidate who was physically impaired (Brohan et al., 2012; Dalgin & Bellini, 2008). In a study comparing neurotypical participants' perspectives on video interview vignettes of autistic versus non-autistic candidates, the autistic candidates were less likely to be hired than the non-autistic candidates, even without disclosure (Flower, Dickens, & Hedley, 2019; Flower et al., 2021).

Research has also found that potential employers who have autism knowledge are most likely to hire candidates who disclose autism but do not display any autistic traits (McMahon et al., 2020). This may be related to autistic candidates' social interaction differences, which include atypical verbal and non-verbal behaviours that make face-to-face job interviews particularly challenging (Bublitz, Fitzgerald, Alarcon, D'Onofrio, & Gillespie-Lynch, 2017; Morgan, Leatzow, Clark, & Siller, 2014; Smith et al., 2014). It is unsurprising then that, given the challenges already present during a job interview, autistic adults rarely choose to add to the difficulty of the situation by disclosing.

The wider literature on disability and employment has shown that employers are more likely to hire candidates who do not disclose any disability during recruitment over those who disclose any condition (Krefting & Brief, 1976; Unger, 2002). While it is clear that biases exist against hiring disabled candidates more generally, it is important that research looks at whether certain disability groups experience more discrimination than others and whether this has any impact on their success in recruitment. As addressed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, there is evidence to support that autistic job candidates are more likely to encounter discrimination than other disabled candidates; this is due to the social nature of their disability and existing stigma toward autism-related behaviours (Butler & Gillis, 2011; Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2015).To my knowledge, only one study has explored employer biases toward candidates who disclose autism or a physical impairment on the application materials. Ameri and colleagues (2018) examined responses to candidates who disclosed either of these conditions on cover letters sent to recruiters hiring for a real position advertised online. They compared these to responses to candidates who disclosed no condition in their cover letters. The researchers found that the disabled candidates were 26% less likely to be contacted by recruiters than candidates who did not disclose any condition. Notably, there were no significant differences between the two disability disclosure conditions (Ameri et al., 2018).

While the aforementioned study looked at employer biases toward hiring candidates who disclose autism or a physical impairment in a cover letter (Ameri et al., 2018), the current study looked at disclosure on CVs. The reason for this decision is explained more fully in the method section of this chapter, and is based on the ecological validity of CVs as the main source of information about a candidate for hiring managers or recruiters. I chose to include autism, dyslexia, and a physical impairment as the disclosure conditions in this study. There is some precedent for comparing autism disclosure to dyslexia disclosure when non-autistic participants are the recipient of the disclosure (Heasman & Gillespie, 2019b). Though dyslexia does not generally have a social component, it is also classified as a neurodiverse condition like autism and is therefore appropriate for comparison. Physical impairment was also included as a disclosure condition due to previous studies that demonstrated employer preferences for physically impaired candidates over candidates with concealable conditions, such as a mental health condition (Brohan et al., 2012; Dalgin & Bellini, 2008). In this study, I wanted to test if the participants would also show a clear preference for the physically disabled candidates over those who disclosed neurodivergent conditions.

The main objective of this study was to identify if potential employers assigned lower employability ratings to autistic candidates, relative to non-autistic candidates, when they disclosed their diagnosis on their CV. I also wanted to compare these ratings with those assigned to dyslexic and physically disabled candidates. Lastly, I aimed to explore if greater autism awareness in non-autistic participants was associated with higher employability ratings for autistic job candidates.

Identifying possible employer biases toward autistic candidates when they disclose will help autistic people assess the risk of disclosing on the application materials. While many autistic people still choose to keep their diagnosis private until after securing the job, my research has shown that this is often not the case. Acknowledging that these biases exist

during recruitment is also the first step toward targeted interventions for improving the recruitment and disclosure experiences of autistic people.

Method

Pilot Study and Development of Study Materials

This study required participants to review a job description for a financial analyst position along with a set of nine CVs, then rate each CV on a rating scale. I consulted two professionals working in finance at a large UK-based organisation, who helped create the job description (see **Appendix E**) and CVs. On the advice of these consultants, I determined that a CV would be more ecologically valid as the vehicle for disclosure in this study versus a cover letter. These professionals explained that, when recruiting for positions, they were less likely to read cover letters sent in with candidates' applications but were highly likely to read candidates' CVs thoroughly. I also tested the ecological validity of using CVs by applying to financial analyst positions online myself; for the majority of UK-based recruitment websites, CVs were the main component of the application, while it was not always possible to submit a cover letter.

The initial set of nine fabricated CVs contained no disclosure of any condition. Prior to running the main study, I conducted a pilot study with ten volunteers, who were asked to review the job description and rate each of the CVs on the Employability Rating Scale. I then analysed the data using the Friedman Test on SPSS (SPSS-Inc., 2019) to determine if the ratings for all CVs were statistically equal. Having determined that the CVs were equal in the pilot study, I then consulted with two members of the disabled communities that I aimed to represent in this study. My autistic consultant advised me on how to add a disclosure of autism to a CV, while my consultant who was both dyslexic and physically impaired advised on how to add these conditions to CVs. These consultations focused on which parts of the CV

would most likely contain disclosure, and the correct way in which to word the disclosure statements. I then added the disclosure statements to the CVs (see **Appendix F** for complete set of CVs with disclosure conditions), creating several sets of nine CVs where one candidate disclosed an autism diagnosis, one disclosed that they were dyslexic, one disclosed a physical impairment, and the other six CVs contained no disclosure. I created 18 different sets of CVs, where each CV was rotated through the disclosure conditions. Initially, I planned to recruit 36 participants in total, with each of the 18 CV sets assigned to two participants. Unfortunately, because only 22 participants took part in the study, only four of the CV sets were used twice. Consequently, not all CVs appeared an equal number of times in all of the disclosure conditions (see **Appendix G**). However, all nine of the CVs appeared in each of the disclosure conditions at least once in this study.

Participants

Participants were recruited through my personal contacts in the finance industry, the contacts of my doctoral supervisors, LinkedIn, an online Facebook group for women working in the UK finance sector, and the UCL Bentham Connect network, which is an online social network exclusively for UCL alumni. Care was taken to recruit second degree contacts who were unaware of my connection to the Centre for Research in Autism and Education and to autism research. The initial call for participants specifically asked for individuals with recruitment experience (i.e., who had reviewed CVs and/or made hiring decisions) who worked or had worked in finance or financial services in the UK. This advertisement also informed participants that they would be taking part in a study on hiring practices in the UK finance sector and did not include any mention of autism. After eight weeks, the call for participants was expanded to include human resources personnel and recruiters in order to increase the sample size. Those interested in taking part were asked to contact me directly; I then sent them the job description and a unique set of nine CVs, as well the link to the

Qualtrics (LLC, 2019) questionnaire. At this point, participants were also assigned a

participant ID through email, which they were asked to input when answering the

questionnaire.

Measures

The current study used an online questionnaire on Qualtrics (LLC, 2019) to gather

data from participants. The first section asked participants to fill out their

personal/demographic information and employment background. The second section

contained questions on employability ratings and rankings. Participants rated each of the nine

CVs using an Employability Rating Scale adapted from an empirical review of the literature

on recruitment (Huffcutt, 2011), which identified the constructs on which potential employers

base their ratings of candidates during interviews. Reliability analysis for the Employability

Rating Scale showed good internal consistency (α=.89). The scale contained nine questions

that required participants to rate each of the job candidates based on their CVs according to

personal attributes such as "How conscientious are they?" and "How likeable are they?" (See

Appendix H for full Employability Rating Scale questionnaire). For each question,

participants scored the candidates from 1-5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest.

The highest possible score on the Employability Rating Scale was 45. After rating each

candidate, participants were asked to explain their ratings in an open-ended format,

responding to the prompt, "Please explain why you assigned these ratings to Candidate ___".

This second section of the questionnaire also asked participants to rank the CVs from 1-9,

with 1 assigned to the candidate that they were most likely to hire and 9 assigned to the

candidate that they were least likely to hire. Participants were told that candidates ranked in

the top three were those shortlisted for interviews.

The last section of the questionnaire was the Autism Awareness Scale (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2015) (see **Appendix I**), which contained 12 items related to participants' autism knowledge and was adapted from the Autism Survey (W. Stone, 1987). The adapted version used in the current study had good internal consistency ($\alpha=.83$). This version was chosen over the original survey as its scoring reflected the most accurate responses to the autism knowledge questions based on our current understanding of autism (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2015). Participants were asked to read statements about autism (e.g., "Autism is more frequently diagnosed in males than females") and indicate how much they agreed with each statement on a Likert scale (-2 - strongly disagree, -1 – disagree, 0 – neither agree nor disagree, 1 – agree, 2 – strongly agree). Possible scores on the Autism Awareness Scale ranged from -26 to 26, with a higher score indicating a greater knowledge of autism.

Procedure

Participants received a link to the online questionnaire and a unique participant ID via email. The set of nine CVs and the job description for the financial analyst position were also attached to the email. The questionnaire took approximately 30 minutes for each participant to complete.

Ethics approval for this study was granted by the UCL Institute of Education. All participants gave written informed consent to take part, and for the data they supplied to be shared in a written report. I informed participants prior to their taking part in the study that all data would be pseudonymised for this report.

Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis. I imported the quantitative data from this study into SPSS (SPSS-Inc., 2019). To check for significant differences in employability ratings and rankings, I conducted pairwise t-tests on participants' average ratings of the CVs regardless of

disclosure condition. I then used the Friedman test to check for statistically significant differences in the average rankings of the CVs, also regardless of disclosure condition.

I analysed the total Employability Rating Scale scores for each disclosure condition (1 – autism; 2 – physical impairment; 3 – dyslexia; and 4 – no disclosure) using one-way ANOVA. I also conducted ANOVA tests on the scores for each individual item on the Employability Rating Scale (e.g., "How motivated are they?" "How conscientious are they?"). Lastly, I used Pearson's r to determine if there were correlational relationships among scores on the Autism Awareness Scale and ratings for the CVs in each of the disclosure conditions (i.e., autism, physical impairment, dyslexia, no disclosure).

Qualitative analysis. I organised participants' answers to the open-ended prompts, in which participants explained their ratings for each candidate, into the four disclosure conditions using Excel. I then imported the Excel file into NVivo (Provo-UT, 2018) and analysed participants' comments about disability disclosure on the CVs using content analysis (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992). Content analysis involved coding these comments into sub-categories, then determining the frequency of participant references that fell into each sub-category.

Results

Participants

In total, 22 participants took part in this study. Demographic and employment background information for these participants is shown in Table 7.

Table 7.

Participant Demographic and Employment Data (N=22)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Female (including trans women)	11	50%
	Male (including trans men)	11	50%
Age	18-24	1	4.5%
	25-34	12	54.5%
	35-44	5	22.7%
	45-54	4	18.2%
Ethnicity	White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	6	27.3%
	Irish	1	4.5%
	Other White Background	4	18.2%
	White and Asian	2	9.1%
	Indian	3	13.6%
	Chinese	3	13.6%
	Other Asian Background	2	9.1%
	African	1	4.5%
Education	Bachelor's Degree	9	40.9%
	Master's Degree	11	50.0%
	Professional Degree (i.e., certificate or other professional qualification)	2	9.1%
Other diagnosed conditions	No known condition	19	86.4%
	Anxiety	2	9.1%
	Depression	1	4.5%
Employment Status	Employed full-time	20	90.9%
	Self-employed	2	9.1%
Employment Sector	Finance or Banking	11	50.0%
	Other (e.g., Commercial Real Estate, Consultancy, Professional Services, Tourism & Hospitality)	6	27.3%
	Information Technology	2	9.1%
	Engineering	1	4.5%
	Public Sector	1	4.5%
	Service Industry	1	4.5%
Current or most recent level worked at	Entry-level position	3	13.6%
	Mid-level position	11	50.0%
	Senior level position	6	27.3%
	Self-employed/Entrepreneur	2	9.1%

Size of current or most recent organization (total number of employees)	6-20	4	18.2%
	51-100	1	4.5%
	101-500	3	13.6%
	501-1000	3	13.6%
	1001-10,000	1	4.5%
	Greater than 10,000	10	45.5%
Current or most recent income	£20,000-£30,000	2	9.1%
	£30,001-£40,000	5	22.7%
	£40,001-£50,000	1	4.5%
	£50,001-£60,000	3	13.6%
	£60,001-£70,000	1	4.5%
	£70,001-£80,000	1	4.5%
	£80,001-£90,000	2	9.1%
	Above £100,000	4	18.2%
	Prefer not to say	3	13.6%
Recruitment experience	Yes	17	77.3%
	No	5	22.7%
Number of hiring decisions participant has been involved in	0-5	4	18.2%
	6-10	1	4.5%
	More than 10	12	54.5%
	Not applicable	5	22.7%
Number of CVs/applications participant has reviewed	Fewer than 10	2	9.1%
	11-50	3	13.6%
	51-100	4	18.2%
	101-150	5	22.7%
	More than 200	5	22.7%
	Not applicable	3	13.6%

Quantitative Results

Pairwise t-tests conducted on the average CV ratings, analysed regardless of

disclosure condition, showed a statistically significant difference between CVs 4 and 9 after

use of the Bonferroni-Holm method to adjust for multiple comparisons ($p<.001$, $\alpha=.05$).

However, CVs 4 and 9 were not significantly different from the other CVs in terms of average employability ratings. Furthermore, a non-parametric Friedman test of differences among average rankings of the nine CVs showed no main effect of disclosure condition, rendering a Chi-square value of 4.41 (p=.07, α=.05).

A one-way ANOVA of the total Employability Rating Scale ratings indicated that there was no main effect of disclosure condition (F= 0.95, p=.42). A one-way ANOVA of scores for individual items on the Employability Rating Scale indicated no main effects of disclosure condition after adjusting for multiple comparisons using the Bonferroni-Holm method (see Table 8).

Table 8.

Results of One-Way ANOVA on Individual Question Ratings on the Employability Rating Scale

Employability Rating Scale Attribute	Autistic M (SD)	Physically impaired M (SD)	Dyslexic M (SD)	No disclosure M (SD)	p-value (α=.05)
Confident	4.00 (.82)	4.00 (7.56)	3.95 (.79)	3.77 (.89)	.41
Motivated	4.23 (.75)	4.00 (.92)	4.09 (.92)	3.76 (.86)	.049
Knowledgeable	4.00 (.76)	3.95 (.90)	3.91 (.81)	3.85 (.89)	.85
Conscientious	3.91 (.81)	3.73 (.83)	3.82 (.91)	3.63 (.79)	.40
Competent	3.91 (.81)	3.86 (.89)	3.68 (.84)	3.73 (.92)	.74
Intelligent	3.91 (.61)	3.73 (.70)	3.86 (.83)	3.72 (.76)	.66
Good at communicating	4.05 (.84)	3.91 (.75)	3.68 (1.04)	3.49 (1.00)	.04
Likeable	3.59 (.73)	3.86 (.89)	3.68 (.99)	3.33 (.68)	.01
Easy to work with	3.59 (.73)	3.68 (.84)	3.59 (.67)	3.39 (.68)	.17

Analysis of candidate rankings conducted using the Friedman test also showed no main effect of disclosure condition, with a Chi-square value of 5.01 (*P*=.17, α=.05). Participants' average total score on the Autism Awareness Scale was 9.32 out of a possible 26, demonstrating an average knowledge of autism for this group. The score was higher than the baseline average Autism Awareness Scale score of 7.67 (*SE*=.30) for the participants in the Gillespie-Lynch study (2015), but lower than that of the participants in the study after they had received autism training (*M*=10.15, *SE*=.35). Pearson's r tests comparing Autism Awareness Scale scores to participants' employability ratings in each of the four disclosure conditions also showed no significant correlational relationships among these variables (see Table 9).

Table 9.

Results of Pearson's r Tests on Autism Awareness Scale Scores and Employability Ratings

Disclosure Condition	Mean (SD)	*R*	*p-value (α=.05)*
Autism Awareness Scale Score	9.32 (6.34)	N/A	N/A
Autism	34.59 (5.53)	-.014	.95
Physical Impairment	34.64 (5.57)	.36	.10
Dyslexia	34.23 (5.95)	.06	.78
No disclosure	32.77 (3.59)	.28	.21

Qualitative Results

Of the 22 participants who took part in this study, eight (36.4%) made references to autism and physical impairment disclosure and advocacy on the CVs. In reference to disclosure and advocacy related to dyslexia, five of the candidates (22.7%) mentioned this in the open-ended questions section.

Referring to the autistic candidates, the participants mentioned their work on neurodiversity and inclusion, "They are an advocate for neurodiversity and inclusion which shows something that they are passionate about which is good!" [P013]. Others explained that they rated the autistic candidate higher on certain traits because of their advocacy work: "Rated higher on conscientious because they participate in D&I initiatives and are more aware, assuming due to their background, which should add to their experience and expertise in getting companies to exceed" [P019].

The candidates who disclosed a physical impairment were referred to as being likeable by participants: ""Again, advocation of disability rights very admirable and makes

them very likeable through what they have achieved" [P021]. They were also praised for their self-advocacy, with participants linking this to positive qualities of the candidate by stating, "Nice to see involvement with the disability group. Shows initiative to self-advocate" [P006] and "Demonstrated their leadership and proactiveness with the extra-curricular work in disability equality" [P015].

Comments about the dyslexic candidates were similarly positive. One participant referred to the candidate having to overcome dyslexia, stating, "Given the candidate's ability to produce such a high-quality CV despite having dyslexia, I have scored their conscientiousness higher than other candidates as this showcased additional effort and rigour" [P007]. Disability disclosure was again linked to positive traits for the dyslexic candidates: "Hard working and motivated to overcome obstacles" [P006].

All of the comments made in reference to disability disclosure in this study were categorised as "positive." These comments overwhelmingly referred to candidates' work on disability equality or diversity and inclusion, attributing these to desirable personal characteristics of the candidates (see Table 10).

Table 10.

Results of Content Analysis – Categories, Sub-Categories, and Example Quotes with Frequency of Participant References

Categories	Sub-categories	No. of Participants	% of Participants	Example Quotes
Positive references to disability disclosure on CVs	*Comments about autistic candidates*	8	36.4%	"Developed inclusion training programmes and a member of the Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee suggesting someone who places a big emphasis on working well with others" [P003]
				"Good to see involvement in diversity committee" [P006]
				"Appreciated the D&I aspects of their role/experience" [P007]
				"Highlighting the experience in developing staff neurodiversity and inclusion training programmes attracts attention so in one way it compensates somehow." [P009]

"They are an advocate for neurodiversity and inclusion which shows something that they are passionate about which is good!" [P013]

"They also showed proactiveness in the CV by the self-advocating experience." [P015]

"Rated higher on conscientious because they participate in D&I initiatives and are more aware, assuming due to their background, which should add to their experience and expertise in getting companies to exceed" [P019]

"Work on neurodiversity again very commendable and desirable." [P021]

Comments about physically impaired candidates	8	36.4%	"Mentions being an advocate for disability rights and equality in workplaces which I believe demonstrates they would be likeable and easy to work with" [P003]
			"Nice to see involvement with the disability group. Shows initiative to self-advocate." [P006]
			"I particularly focused on the work they had done in the D&I space and was impressed by this alongside their finance qualifications." [P007]

"It's great they have some passion for disability rights and equality. And they have stated how they have put this into practice" [P013]

"Demonstrated their leadership and proactiveness with the extra-curricular work in disability equality" [P015]

"Involved in roles outside specific scope e.g. Disability Equality Steering Group, impressive" [P017]

"Lived experiences of disability and is an advocate, which is nice" [P019]

"Again, advocation of disability rights very admirable and makes them very likeable through what they have achieved." [P021]

Comments about dyslexic candidates	5	22.7%	"Hard working and motivated to overcome obstacles" [P006]

"Given the candidate's ability to produce such a high quality CV despite having dyslexia, I have scored their conscientiousness higher than other candidates as this showcased additional effort and rigour." [P007]

"Some good points about their passion for helping other

dyslexic individuals and an actual example of how they put this into practice in a working environment" [P013]

"Liked the involvement with advocacy groups" [P017]

"Advocacy for disabled groups and ability to overcome Dyslexia in the workplace is very commendable and makes them an attractive candidate as they can overcome adversity and are passionate about supporting others. Candidate did not do an internship or other qualifications, but having overcome the Dyslexia I think they are motivated." [P021]

Discussion

The results of this study showed that when candidates disclosed having a diagnosis of autism, a physical impairment, or dyslexia on a CV, they were not rated or ranked differently overall compared to candidates who included no disclosure of any condition on their CVs. Autistic, dyslexic, and physically impaired candidates were also not rated differently on individual characteristics on the Employability Rating Scale. The results of this study also demonstrated that there was no relationship between participants' autism knowledge and their assessment of the employability of autistic, physically impaired, or dyslexic candidates. Content analysis of participants' explanations for the employability ratings identified overwhelmingly positive comments related to disclosure of a disability and advocacy work related to disability. Participants' responses to disability disclosure on the CVs were highly encouraging; when job candidates demonstrated participation in initiatives related to disability advocacy, they were viewed as having positive personal attributes and rated accordingly. Participants' explanations of their ratings of the disabled candidates specifically mentioned self-advocacy and work related to disability and inclusion as being reflective of certain qualities, such as likeability, motivation, and conscientiousness.

The results of this study demonstrate that there may be no detriment to disclosing a disability on the application materials. While this is the second most common point in time for disclosure by autistic job seekers or employees (Romualdez et al., 2021a) individuals may also be hesitant to disclose on their CVs because they fear discrimination by potential employers. Individuals may even feel that including an autism diagnosis on the application materials may automatically disqualify them from a position due to employer biases again disabled candidates in general or autistic candidates in particular (Romualdez et al., 2021a). However, disclosure during recruitment may have added benefits to autistic people; they may use it as a way of gauging whether an organisation is supportive of autistic employees and

willing to make needed adjustments (Romualdez et al., 2021a). Contrary to past studies that have shown negative outcomes for job candidates who disclose a disability (Ameri et al., 2018), particularly autistic candidates (Flower et al., 2021), this study demonstrates that disclosure may not necessarily lead to discrimination at this stage of recruitment. Including autism disclosure on a CV may also not have a negative impact on candidates' chances of being shortlisted for interviews, as demonstrated by the rankings assigned by participants. These results could make the choice to disclose on the application materials easier for autistic job seekers if the benefits do indeed eclipse the potential negative outcomes.

It is worth considering, however, that while this study demonstrates no negative impact of disclosing on the application materials, autistic individuals may encounter barriers at other stages of recruitment. Autistic adults are still the disability group with the lowest employment rate in the UK (National-Autistic-Society, 2016a; Office-of-National-Statistics, 2021), with the latest figures showing that only 22% are in any sort of paid work. One possible explanation for this is that autistic job seekers may not apply when they do not meet all of the listed specifications in a job posting. They may see themselves as being unqualified or having no chance of success, when they might actually be considered for a role; essentially, it could be that autistic candidates interpret job postings too literally. While this merits further study concerning autistic people in particular, this trend has been observed in other groups. Research has shown that female job applicants will only apply to a job if they meet 100% of the qualifications necessary, while males will apply if they only meet 60% (Mohr, 2014). Similarly, autistic individuals may be applying to only a small subset of the positions for which they could be successful in recruitment.

The application process may also include forms of assessment that are difficult for autistic individuals to navigate. For example, autistic job seekers may struggle with psychometric tests (Cooper & Kennady, 2021) or teambuilding days when candidates are

required to work in groups to solve complex problems. In a recent UK-based study, only 7% of autistic people said that they were allowed adjustments during the selection process, while less than 10% said they were given the opportunity to demonstrate their skills (Cooper & Kennady, 2021). Another clear barrier to employment for autistic people could be the job interview, which is often one of the final stages of recruitment. While autistic individuals may be shortlisted based on their CVs, they may then encounter difficulties during standard job interviews (Müller, Schuler, Burton, & Yates, 2003) due to differences in social communication, which autistic people have flagged as an issue when seeking or maintaining employment (Lorenz, Frischling, Cuadros, & Heinitz, 2016; Remington & Pellicano, 2018). Autistic individuals have said that they feel disadvantaged during job interviews, especially when they are required to give a presentation to prospective employers (Cooper & Kennady, 2021). Autistic applicants may even experience discrimination without disclosing, as research has demonstrated that there is stigma associated with autistic traits and behaviours without the label of an autism diagnosis(Butler & Gillis, 2011). This stigma toward individuals who display autistic behaviours would certainly present obstacles for them during face-to-face interviews, much more so than during the earlier stages of recruitment involving written applications or CVs. Difficulty in making conversation, which many autistic people experience (Howlin, 2000), may also affect interview outcomes. Answering questions that are open-ended or easily misunderstood can make job interviews incredibly challenging for some autistic individuals (K. Maras et al., 2020). While interviews make up only one step in the recruitment process, they are still an obstacle to employment that many autistic people find nearly impossible to overcome. Consequently, companies that might otherwise recognise their talents and hire them on the basis of their abilities fail to benefit from what autistic employees can contribute. If organisations recognise that job interviews may not be the best

way to assess autistic candidates, they may be able to eradicate one of the biggest barriers to employment for this population.

While barriers to employment may exist throughout the recruitment process, the results from this study suggest that disclosing an autism diagnosis on the application materials might not have a negative impact on an applicant's chances. The qualitative findings from this study demonstrate, perhaps counterintuitively, that disclosure on the application may even work in favour of disabled candidates. The overwhelmingly positive comments related to candidates' disability disclosure, and their subsequent work advocating for themselves and others in the disabled community, reveal the perspectives of potential employers on autism disclosure. One participant wrote, "They are an advocate for neurodiversity and inclusion which shows something that they are passionate about which is good!" In reference to the autistic job candidate, another person stated, "Work on neurodiversity again very commendable and desirable." While the response to autism disclosure on CVs was extremely positive in this study, this may be because disability disclosure was always framed in terms of advocacy work and added accomplishments. This was done on the advice of consultants with lived experience of these disabilities, who advised me that they would only disclose in this context. It is unfortunate that in order to disclose a disability, individuals may feel that they can only include disclosure as a positive statement related to advocacy for disability rights and inclusion, rather than the neutral statement that it should be.

Although participants in this study expressed interest in and admiration for the candidates who disclosed a disability on their CVs, the average score of the participants on the Autism Awareness Scale did not indicate that they were particularly knowledgeable about autism. There was nothing to suggest that this group might be more open to hiring or inclusive of disabled job candidates based on their scores. While I did attempt to recruit

people with no connection to autism, the avenues I used for recruitment may have still led to

a sample that was more forward-thinking in terms of inclusion in the workplace. The

participants were highly educated and the majority of them worked in the finance or financial

services sectors. Many of the participants had had years of hiring experience, which had

perhaps put them into contact with diverse candidates and made them more open to hiring

neurodivergent or physically disabled employees.

Despite their positive comments about disability and inclusion, greater autism

knowledge for some participants was not linked to better employability ratings for the

autistic, physically impaired, or dyslexic candidates. While existing literature has established

a relationship between increased knowledge about autism and more positive views of autistic

people (Morrison et al., 2019; Sasson & Morrison, 2019), and even more success in

recruitment for autistic candidates (Flower et al., 2021), this was not the case in this study.

While the autistic candidates were seen as possessing certain positive traits, this did not affect

their overall employability ratings or the shortlisting decisions made by participants. I suggest

that more research is needed to explore the relationship between knowledge of autism and the

willingness of potential employers to hire autistic candidates. Based on the findings from this

study, I recommend that autistic people consider the benefits of disclosing their autism

diagnosis on the application materials; it may be a positive first step toward securing needed

workplace adjustments, and it could help the autistic applicant gauge whether an organisation

is a good fit for them. While disclosing may have these practical benefits, there is also the

potential for autism disclosure on a CV to be viewed positively on its own. However, much

more research needs to be done to determine if this is indeed a decision that will benefit

autistic people, with minimal risk.

One further recommendation is that organisations review their recruitment processes

and reflect on whether a "one size fits all" approach is truly congruent with the aims of their

organisation. Diversifying the workforce is an objective that companies are increasingly taking an interest in; it would be certainly benefit them to allow for more flexibility and individualisation in the recruitment process to accommodate for neurodivergent and disabled job candidates.

While these results might be a positive sign for autistic people who choose to disclose on the application materials, further research needs to look at the entire recruitment process to determine where the breakdown is most likely to occur for autistic job candidates. Studies exploring the perspectives of employers in response to autistic candidates' CVs and their behaviour during job interviews may help shed light on where in the recruitment process autistic job seekers may need the most support. This may also help us understand which parts of the standard recruitment procedure need to change to become more inclusive of neurodivergent candidates.

Certain limitations were present in this study that must be acknowledged. Every effort was made to create CVs that were statistically equal, specifically by enlisting the help of experts with experience in recruitment in the finance sector, and through conducting the pilot study. However, there was still a significant difference observed between CVs 4 and 9 through paired t-tests on the CV average Employability Rating Scale ratings. Despite this, these two CVs were not found to be statistically different from the others in the set; moreover, the difference was not systematic and did not affect the overall results of the study. Employability ratings for all CVs showed no main effects of disclosure condition, meaning all of the CVs were rated as statistically equal despite any initial observed differences between CVs 4 and 9. Rankings also did not vary significantly; neither CV 4 nor CV 9 was rated or ranked more highly than any of the other CVs in the study.

The relatively small sample size of this study is another of its limitations, as the study may have been underpowered in terms of the statistical tests used. I also used convenience sampling to recruit participants; recruiting primarily through LinkedIn and the UCL alumni network may have resulted in participants of a certain demographic and educational background. The participants may have been more progressive and open to inclusive workplace practices making it difficult to generalise the results to the wider population. Further studies with a more varied sample are needed to more accurately assess potential employers' attitudes toward autism disclosure on job application materials.

Despite these limitations, the results of this study are still encouraging for autistic individuals who may choose to disclose while seeking employment. These findings provide evidence that this choice could be favourable for autistic job seekers and give us some insight into how potential employers could react to disclosure on the application materials. By understanding the perspectives of employers, autistic people may find it easier to decide when and how to disclose, potentially leading to more successful disclosure and employment outcomes.

Chapter 5
General Discussion

In this thesis, I sought to explore the diagnostic disclosure experiences of autistic job seekers and employees in the United Kingdom. I wanted to know their reasons for disclosing or not disclosing their autism diagnosis, and the outcomes of their decision if they had disclosed in the workplace. I also wanted to know at what point in the employment journey autistic individuals were most likely to disclose, as well as their satisfaction with the reactions of co-workers and subsequent adjustments made. To answer these questions, I conducted a large-scale online survey that asked clinically diagnosed autistic adults to share their experiences of disclosure (Chapter 2). A second aim of this thesis was to better understand the factors associated with the outcomes of disclosure, outcomes which existing literature and my own work had demonstrated could be mixed and highly unpredictable. I also wanted to explore in-depth the disclosure experiences of autistic individuals in UK workplaces. To address these aims, I conducted one-to-one interviews with clinically diagnosed autistic adults and used thematic analysis to identify common themes and sub-themes from their experiences of disclosure (Chapter 3). In the same study, I also identified three factors associated with disclosure outcomes from these interviews. The final aim of my doctoral thesis was to seek out the perspectives of potential employers in response to autism disclosure by job candidates on the application materials. I also wanted to see if these perspectives differed according to the type of disability disclosed-- whether it was autism, a learning condition, or a physical impairment. Most importantly, I wanted to know if autistic candidates were less likely to be considered for a position when they disclosed. Chapter 4 of this thesis outlines the study aimed at answering these research questions. This study used mixed methods, in which participants rated job candidates on their employability and

explained these ratings through open-ended questions. Participants also ranked the candidates on their CVs; the four disclosure conditions in this study (i.e., autistic, physically impaired, dyslexic, and no disclosure) allowed me to compare ratings and rankings of candidates based on whether they disclosed a disability on their CVs.

In this general discussion chapter, I will begin by presenting the main findings from my three doctoral studies. I will simultaneously outline how these findings contribute to the literature on autism disclosure and autistic employment. I will then discuss the limitations of the research presented in this thesis. Finally, I will present my recommendations on how the results of these studies may be translated into better employment practices that will benefit autistic people. I will also make recommendations related to directions for future research on this highly relevant, but still comparatively understudied, topic.

Summary of Main Findings

Disclosure of an autism diagnosis is inherently tied to other people. In Chapter 2, I presented my findings from the online survey conducted with 238 clinically diagnosed autistic adults in the UK. All participants in this study had had experience seeking employment or working in the UK, and all had indicated on the questionnaire that they had confronted the decision of whether to disclose their autism diagnosis in the workplace. From their responses, I identified that the most common reason that autistic people disclose in the workplace is to increase acceptance and understanding from other people. The reverse is also true, in that the main reason for not disclosing has to do with other people---specifically the fear of discrimination and negative perceptions from others in response to autism disclosure. These findings were reinforced in my second study involving interviews with 24 clinically diagnosed autistic adults. They spoke about wanting their coworkers and employers to understand them better, hence their decision to disclose. However, the participants also spoke

to me about their fears of being stereotyped, discriminated against, or even bullied if other people in the workplace knew they were autistic. In this same study, the factors identified as being associated with the outcomes of disclosure were all related to other people. These were other people's understanding of autism, their willingness to make appropriate adjustments for the autistic employee, and the organisational culture—specifically, whether organisation leaders created and perpetuated a culture that was either inclusive toward autistic people, or not set up for autistic people to succeed.

Disclosure models examining the management, concealment, and disclosure of stigmatised identities, such as mental health conditions and chronic illnesses, have demonstrated the importance of the recipient of the disclosure (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Johnson & Joshi, 2016; Johnson et al., 2020; Ragins, 2008) to an individual's decision to disclose and its subsequent outcomes. Existing literature on autism disclosure has examined how autism is comparable to, but also vastly different from, these other concealable stigmatised identities, both in everyday situations and workplace situations (Johnson & Joshi, 2014). While autism can indeed be classified as a concealable stigmatised identity, a diagnosis of autism has added layers that may set it apart from other conditions. These are tied to mischaracterisations of autistic people as being socially awkward, rude, unwilling to socialise, and lacking in communication skills (Hinshaw & Stier, 2008; Mak & Kwok, 2010). These stereotypes and the experiences of autistic people forced to confront these stereotypes within their specific culture or country may vary from one place to another. Thus, autism disclosure research situated in UK workplaces is both extremely relevant to employment outcomes and currently lacking in both its breadth and depth. The foundational research that specifically examined autism disclosure in workplaces was conducted primarily in the United States (Johnson & Joshi, 2014, 2016). Large UK-based studies have overlooked the lived experiences of autistic people, focussing instead on measurable success in recruitment (Ameri

et al., 2018; Flower et al., 2021) and the views of other people toward autistic job seekers. I sought to address this gap in the research through my doctoral work. My research not only explored the lived experiences of diagnostic disclosure of a large sample of autistic adults in UK workplaces, but also highlighted what their priorities were when deciding to disclose. This offered a unique look at the widely held perspectives of autistic adults, specifically how much importance they assign to other people when considering whether to disclose.

Workplace adjustments are an important part of disclosure but are often unsatisfactory for autistic employees. In Chapters 2 and 3, my research findings about workplace adjustments revealed that receiving adjustments is one of the main reasons that autistic people choose to disclose to their employers and supervisors. My first study, however, also asked participants to rate their satisfaction with the adjustments made by supervisors after they disclosed; only a third of the respondents rated these adjustments positively. Even fewer, at just over a quarter, were satisfied with how their co-workers made adjustments for them. Given that I also identified the willingness of co-workers and supervisors to make these adjustments as a factor associated with disclosure outcomes, my findings reflect just how often outcomes can be negative for autistic people. After making the difficult decision to disclose, perhaps because they need adjustments to be successful at their jobs, too many autistic individuals still struggle and receive little support in the workplace. This lack of follow-through on adjustments, and the prevalence of inadequate or inappropriate adjustments made in workplaces, constitute a serious issue for autistic employees.

These findings echoed those of a recent systematic review of the literature on autism disclosure and workplace adjustments, which found inconsistent disclosure outcomes and widespread dissatisfaction with adjustments across several international studies (Lindsay et al., 2019). My focus on the lived experiences and perspectives of autistic employees

themselves, however, provided more insight into the dissatisfaction experienced by autistic employees. This was especially true for my second study, in which I took a qualitative in-depth approach to examining autistic employees' experiences and satisfaction, or lack thereof, surrounding workplace adjustments. Moreover, while the systematic review included one UK-based study (Richards, 2012), this study was not focussed on autism disclosure and adjustments but instead looked more widely at the reasons autistic people are excluded from employment. As such, the focus of my thesis on the workplace experiences of autistic adults in the UK context is an important contribution to the literature on the topic of adjustments.

Autism disclosure on the application materials may benefit autistic individuals, but autistic candidates may still struggle with recruitment because of job interviews. One of my main findings in my first doctoral study was related to the likeliest points in time for disclosure for autistic job seekers or employees. While existing literature has predominantly focussed on disability disclosure during interviews (Dalgin & Bellini, 2008; Flower et al., 2021; McMahon et al., 2020), I discovered that this was highly unlikely for autistic job seekers in real-life situations. This new understanding of autism disclosure in workplaces led me to further explore one of the likeliest scenarios for disclosure--on the application materials--by looking at the views of potential employers on disclosure on a CV. The results outlined in Chapter 4 demonstrated that autism disclosure on CVs may not lead to candidates being viewed as less employable, nor would it make them less likely to be shortlisted. In fact, autism disclosure was viewed extremely positively by potential employers when accompanied by information about how the lived experience of disability was related to candidates' self-advocacy. Autistic candidates were rated highest on motivation because of this evidence of self-advocacy; they were also judged as being better at communicating. This was in contrast to previous findings demonstrating disabled (Ameri et al., 2018) and autistic (Flower et al., 2021) candidates' lack of success in recruitment after they disclosed.

While my results suggest that employers might have a positive view of autism disclosure on the application materials, the question remains about why autistic individuals are still the least likely to find and maintain employment of all disability groups in the UK (National-Autistic-Society, 2016a; Office-of-National-Statistics, 2021). This may be because of a mismatch between some autistic people's abilities and the expectations surrounding a standard job interview, in which employers are more likely to assess the "soft" interpersonal skills of a candidate. This could be particularly challenging for autistic people, who may struggle to meet the neurotypical concept of what is socially appropriate during interviews (Bublitz et al., 2017; Morgan et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2014). Research has shown that employers who possessed some autism knowledge were more likely to have a positive view of an autistic candidate who disclosed during the interview---but who also did not display any autistic traits (McMahon et al., 2020). Essentially, an autism diagnosis on paper could be viewed positively by potential employers, but a candidate who displays autistic traits during a one-to-one interview might still not get hired. A future study could look at potential employer biases through each stage of the recruitment process, from the written application to interviews and the final hiring decision.

The study outlined in Chapter 4 brought to light the apparent disconnect between employers' positive views of autism disclosure on CVs and their negative views of autistic people during interviews It is in keeping with what autistic individuals themselves have said in the past (Sarrett, 2017): that interviews are often not the best way to assess an autistic individual's ability to perform a job, and present an entirely unnecessary obstacle to employment that disadvantages both the autistic person and the employer. Perhaps most relevant to the literature on employment outcomes is the fact that an interview should not diminish a potential employer's positive views of an autistic person after reading their CV. Research has shown that interviews may present obstacles for autistic candidates, particularly

in the way interview questions are structured (K. Maras et al., 2020). While these questions tend to be open-ended and indirect (Janz, 1982; Levashina, Hartwell, Morgeson, & Campion, 2014), autistic individuals can struggle with understanding the intentions of others and making inferences about what is really being asked (Baron-Cohen, 1997; Kenworthy, Yerys, Anthony, & Wallace, 2008; S. J. White, 2013; S. J. White, Burgess, & Hill, 2009). Autistic candidates may also struggle with impression management (K. Maras et al., 2020) or knowing how other people perceive them (Sasson, Morrison, Pinkham, Faso, & Chmielewski, 2018), both skills that could be crucial for successful interview outcomes. Coupled with the social communication differences that autistic people experience more generally when interacting with non-autistic people, it is unsurprising that interviews present such a barrier to employment. Interview questions that are more structured and adapted for autistic people may help mitigate the challenges of the interview process (K. Maras et al., 2020), but moving away from interviews altogether may be another solution for companies that want to be more inclusive. Alternative means of assessment--such as demonstrating abilities relevant to a position--that do not depend on a person's social communication and impression management skills are necessary to level the playing field for autistic job candidates.

Limitations

The studies outlined in this thesis are not without their limitations. First and foremost, limitations related to the participant samples are common across the three studies. The autistic participants in the first two studies in this thesis were predominantly White, but there is no evidence to suggest that autism is more prevalent in any single ethnic group (Elsabbagh et al., 2012). Because of this, the sample did not represent the ethnic make-up of the wider UK autistic population. In all three studies, participants were highly educated, with a large percentage possessing postgraduate degrees, while the latest figures published by the UK

government estimate that less than 1% of the population have postgraduate degrees (Higher-Education-Statistics-Agency, 2017). This sample was therefore not representative of the general UK population. A more highly educated sample may have been due to the recruitment channels that I employed, such as the Autistica Discover Network, social media channels connected to the Centre for Research in Autism and Education, and the UCL Bentham Connect network. The studies also required participants to have internet access to take part, which excluded many people across the UK, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. Particularly in my third study, in which I sought professionals who worked in the finance or financial services sector, the participants may not have been representative of other potential employers in the UK; thus, it could be difficult to apply their views on autism disclosure more generally.

The sizes of the samples in the studies outlined in Chapters 3 and 4 were also small (N < 30), making it more difficult to generalise my findings. The autistic people who were interviewed in Chapter 3 had disclosure experiences that were common to many of them; however, these experiences may differ from those of the wider autistic population. In Chapter 4, the small sample size meant that the study may have been underpowered to detect any significant differences among the disclosure conditions. It is possible that a larger study would have detected these differences; further research is needed to determine if autism disclosure on the application materials does not in fact negatively impact a candidate's chances of being shortlisted.

The body of work presented in this thesis also lacks the perspectives of certain groups of autistic people whose views and experiences of disclosure would be invaluable to the literature on autism disclosure in workplaces. First, I chose not to include self-diagnosed autistic participants in my studies. While a small number of self-diagnosed individuals did participate in the survey described in Chapter 2, I ultimately decided to exclude them from

the final report of the research findings. As identified in this thesis, autistic people choose to disclose at work for a number of reasons, but many of these reasons require a clinical diagnosis---such as to gain legal protections or obtain workplace adjustments. I expected self-diagnosed people to have different reasons and therefore different experiences of disclosure in the workplace. However, comparing these to the reasons and experiences of clinically diagnosed individuals was outside the scope of my research. I fully recognise that self-diagnosis is valid and more self-diagnosed autistic individuals should be able to take part in autism research. Many individuals in the UK struggle to obtain a clinical diagnosis of autism, and there is a great disparity in access to diagnosticians and appointments across the country (Crane et al., 2018). This should not preclude the participation of self-diagnosed individuals in studies meant to benefit all autistic people. Their inclusion in research is vital to our understanding of the experiences of the wider autistic population.

Autistic individuals who had chosen not to disclose to anyone also lacked representation in my research. While I was able to find participants who had disclosed to very few people, or who had not disclosed at work in a previous role, I did not have any participants who had never disclosed at work. Theirs is a perspective that should be explored through subsequent research. Exploring the views of people who had never disclosed would also provide valuable insight into the decision to conceal an autistic identity in the workplace, along with the continued challenges and benefits of such a decision. While this lack of representation constitutes a limitation of my research, it is entirely expected that individuals who were reluctant to disclose to anyone would also be reluctant to share their experiences with a researcher. The risk of speaking about their diagnosis to a person such as myself, with whom they had no previous relationship and had not built any sort of trust, was likely a deterrent for any autistic individuals who chose to keep their diagnosis private.

Recommendations for Practice

The main objective of my PhD research was not simply to explore autistic people's experiences of diagnostic disclosure in the workplace; nor was it to elicit the views of potential employers on autism disclosure during recruitment. My ultimate goal has always been to improve employment outcomes for autistic people. The findings outlined here have strong implications for better workplace practices, and these practices should be implemented in workplaces across the UK. I believe that the main obstacle to improved employment outcomes for autistic adults—and to companies benefitting from employing autistic people-- is the willingness of organisations to consider the implications of my work and make the necessary changes. The following are my recommendations for workplaces seeking to employ autistic people, based on the results of my research:

Interventions or training programmes should be targeted toward other people in the workplace rather than autistic individuals. Programmes that help autistic people develop social skills or interview skills in preparation for employment already exist (Bennett & Dukes, 2013; Morgan et al., 2014); training may start as early as secondary school, and autistic people are taught how to "fit in" and display appropriate behaviour at work. This unrelenting pressure on autistic people to change their behaviour, however, may have serious negative consequences for them. Studies have shown that continuous masking, or camouflaging, of autistic traits can affect the mental health and well-being of autistic people, leading to stress, anxiety, and other serious mental health conditions (Cage & Troxell-Whitman, 2019; Hull et al., 2017; Perry, Mandy, Hull, & Cage, 2021). It is therefore imperative that we shift the burden of adaptation away from autistic people and on to other people in the workplace. The results outlined in this thesis demonstrate that other people in the workplace are crucial to successful or unsuccessful disclosure outcomes. Autistic individuals themselves are most concerned about the reactions of other people to disclosure;

and it is other people, specifically managers and supervisors, who decide whether an autistic employee receives appropriate workplace adjustments. These adjustments might be closely tied to an autistic individual's ability to perform their job. The perceptions, behaviours, and decisions of other people in response to disclosure by an autistic person are what matter. It is therefore only logical to target co-workers and employers when developing training to improve outcomes for autistic employees.

This recommendation also makes sense from the neurodiversity perspective. Autistic people should not be expected to change their ways of communicating, ignore their sensory sensitivities, or develop social skills that may not come naturally to them. By placing neurotypical expectations on neurodivergent individuals, organisations are preventing their autistic employees from succeeding and actively creating environments in which autistic people struggle. Rather than expecting autistic people to change, neurotypical co-workers, managers, supervisors, and employers should be educated about autism and more inclusive practices. Moreover, training should involve consultations with autistic people and be autism-specific, rather than including this in general diversity training. The more individualised the training is, the more likely it is that harmful stereotypes can be avoided.

Shape organisational culture through organisation leaders. In Chapter 1, I wrote about the social model of disability and its implications for more inclusive workplace practices. Autistic employees should be valued in the workplace, but environments that do not take into account their differences and abilities only set them up for failure. Organisations are microcosms of society, with their own unique beliefs and practices that make up their organisational culture (Schein, 2017). One company might value diversity and different ways of thinking, while another may expect its employees to conform to certain attitudes and practices. The drawback of expecting all employees to conform to neurotypical expectations is that companies lose the competitive advantage of having a diverse set of employees

(Austin & Pisano, 2017), who approach work in different but equally effective ways. For organisations to survive, embracing diversity is key—and organisation leaders, who have the power to shape organisational culture (Schein, 2017), must take more responsibility for this.

Many of the autistic individuals who participated in my research highlighted how their co-workers and supervisors did not understand autism and therefore discriminated against them, even after they disclosed. If companies educated their employees better and created inclusive environments where autism was not only understood but accepted, outcomes for autistic employees would vastly improve. The willingness to make adjustments, which I identified in Chapter 3 as a factor associated with disclosure outcomes, can also be influenced by organisation leaders. For example, if company policy enforced adjustments for disabled employees and regular evaluations of these adjustments, supervisors would have to make this a priority. This would make it far easier for autistic employees to receive the appropriate accommodations for them to work. The power of policy should not be underestimated, and it is organisation leaders who can write and enact that policy to ensure fair treatment of their autistic employees.

Disclosure policies and protocols should clearly welcome but not necessitate disclosure. At the start of my PhD, I approached the topic of autism disclosure with the mindset that it should be the end goal for all autistic employees. I believed that every autistic person needed to feel comfortable with telling their co-workers and employers about their diagnosis and embracing their autistic identity, becoming advocates for themselves and others in the process. However, throughout the course of my doctoral research, I experienced a shift in my way of thinking about disclosure: from seeing this as a goal to regarding it as a personal informed choice. The autistic participants who were open about their experiences with me brought about this shift. Some individuals saw no reason to tell most people at work about their autism diagnosis, viewing it as having little or no impact on their daily lives.

Others did not want to disclose at all but were forced to because of negative experiences at work, or because they needed adjustments. The goal of every inclusive organisation for its autistic employees should not be disclosure; it should be creating an environment where no autistic person will have to struggle with the difficult decision of whether to disclose. Organisational policy should make a company's welcoming stance toward disclosure absolutely clear and should include protocols that ensure predictable positive outcomes for employees—such as regular evaluations of adjustments following disclosure and support from immediate supervisors. A truly inclusive workplace, however, would mean that every employee regardless of needs and abilities has what they require to succeed at their jobs, rendering disclosure unnecessary. Flexible work hours, clear hierarchies of support, and physical work environments that take into account sensory sensitivities are just some examples of inclusive workplace practices. The cost of creating such an environment can be minimal, but the possible benefits of hiring employees of different abilities and backgrounds are immense.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this thesis offers important insights regarding autism disclosure in workplaces, there is potential for future research to add to the knowledge gained through my work. First, autism researchers should strive to find diverse participants who reflect the autistic and general populations of the UK more accurately. This can be done through targeted recruitment, such as approaching community leaders in order to reach neighbourhoods and ethnic communities that are often excluded from research. Future research should also include self-diagnosed autistic participants and focus on their perspectives and experiences of disclosure. This would enrich our understanding of autism disclosure and expand on the work outlined in this thesis. While clearly a difficult prospect, researchers should also find ways for

autistic people who choose to keep their diagnosis private to participate in research. This could be done through anonymous online data collection.

Quantitative studies with larger samples of autistic people are needed to identify predictors of disclosure outcomes using more robust statistical analysis (e.g., regression). Researchers should also further explore the relationship among age at diagnosis, autistic identity, and disclosure, which has emerged in recent years as a topic of interest within the area of autism and employment. Other demographic and employment-related factors, such as gender, employment sector, and organisation size, should be included in research looking at experiences of disclosure and disclosure outcomes. To better understand employer perspectives on disclosure, larger studies are also needed, with a wider range of participants from different employment sectors. Finally, there is room for future research from a cross-cultural perspective that takes into account the views and experiences of autistic people on an international scale.

Conclusion

The decision to disclose an autism diagnosis can be fraught with uncertainty for autistic individuals. When this decision is paired with the added risk of unemployment or discrimination in the workplace, disclosure is made even more difficult. A better understanding of the outcomes of disclosure and autistic people's reasons for making their diagnosis known provide the appropriate starting point for improving the experiences of autistic job seekers and employees. While it is ultimately up to the individual to disclose, organisations should make a concerted effort to create workplaces that are welcoming toward disclosure and supportive of autistic employees. Improving autism knowledge and acceptance for other people in the workplace is crucial to better disclosure outcomes, and ultimately better employment outcomes, for autistic people. When workplaces become more inclusive, it

is not only the autistic community that benefits; organisations, and the people within them,

benefit as well.

References

Aerny-Perreten, N., Domínguez-Berjón, M. F., Esteban-Vasallo, M. D., & García-Riolobos, C. (2015). Participation and factors associated with late or non-response to an online survey in primary care. *Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice, 21*(4), 688-693. doi:10.1111/jep.12367

Ambitious-About-Autism. (2020). *Information about Autism*. Retrieved from: https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/

Ameri, M., Schur, L., Adya, M., Bentley, F. S., McKay, P., & Kruse, D. (2018). The disability employment puzzle: A field experiment on employer hiring behavior. *Industrial & Labor Relations Review, 71*(2), 329-364. doi:10.1177/0019793917717474

American Psychiatric Association (2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5)*. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association.

Austin, R. D., & Pisano, G. P. (2017). Neurodiversity as a competitive advantage. *Harvard Business Review, 95*(3), 96-103.

Baldwin, S., Costley, D., & Warren, A. (2014). Employment activities and experiences of adults with High-Functioning Autism and Asperger's Disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 44*(10), 2440-2449. doi:10.1007/s10803-014-2112-z

Barneveld, P. S., Swaab, H., Fagel, S., van Engeland, H., & de Sonneville, L. M. J. (2014). Quality of life: A case-controlled long-term follow-up study, comparing young high-functioning adults with autism spectrum disorders with adults with other psychiatric disorders diagnosed in childhood. *Comprehensive Psychiatry, 55*(2), 302-310. doi:10.1016/j.comppsych.2013.08.001

Baron-Cohen, S. (1997). *Mindblindness: An essay on autism and theory of mind / Simon Baron-Cohen* (1st MIT Press paperback ed. ed.). Cambridge, Mass. London: Cambridge, Mass. : MIT Press.

Baron-Cohen, S., Ashwin, E., Ashwin, C., Tavassoli, T., & Chakrabarti, B. (2009). Talent in autism: Hyper-systemizing, hyper-attention to detail and sensory hypersensitivity. *Philosophical Transactions; Biological Sciences, 364*(1522), 1377-1383. doi:10.1098/rstb.2008.0337

Baron-Cohen, S., Wheelwright, S., Skinner, R., Martin, J., & Clubley, E. (2001). The Autism Spectrum Quotient (AQ): Evidence from Asperger Syndrome/High-Functioning Autism, males and females, scientists and mathematicians. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 31*(1), 5-17. doi:10.1023/A:1005653411471

Bayliss, A. P., & Kritikos, A. (2011). Brief Report: Perceptual load and the autism spectrum in typically developed individuals. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 41*(11), 1573-1578. doi:10.1007/s10803-010-1159-8

Beardon, L., & Edmonds, G. (2009). Asperger Syndrome & employment: Adults speak out about Asperger Syndrome. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 39*(9), 1366-1366. doi:10.1007/s10803-009-0768-6

Belek, B. (2019). Articulating sensory sensitivity: From bodies with autism to autistic bodies. *Medical Anthropology, 38*(1), 30-43. doi:10.1080/01459740.2018.1460750

Bennett, K. D., & Dukes, C. (2013). Employment instruction for secondary students with autism spectrum disorder: A systematic review of the literature. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities, 48*(1), 67-75.

Billstedt, E., Carina Gillberg, I., & Gillberg, C. (2007). Autism in adults: Symptom patterns and early childhood predictors. Use of the DISCO in a community sample followed

from childhood. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 48*(11), 1102-1110. doi:10.1111/j.1469-7610.2007.01774.x

Bodfish, J. W., Symons, F. J., Parker, D. E., & Lewis, M. H. (2000). Varieties of repetitive behavior in autism: Comparisons to mental retardation. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 30*(3), 237-243. doi:10.1023/A:1005596502855

Bontempo, T. (2009). Sensory processing patterns in high-ability adults with autism spectrum disorders in the workplace. In: ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Botha, M., Dibb, B., & Frost, D. M. (2020). "Autism is me": An investigation of how autistic individuals make sense of autism and stigma. *Disability & Society (2020) (In press).*

Brinkert, J., & Remington, A. (2020). Making sense of the perceptual capacities in autistic and non-autistic adults. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice, 24*(7), 1795-1804. doi:10.1177/1362361320922640

Brohan, E., Henderson, C., Wheat, K., Malcolm, E., Clement, S., Barley, E. A., . . . Thornicroft, G. (2012). Systematic review of beliefs, behaviours and influencing factors associated with disclosure of a mental health problem in the workplace. *BMC Psychiatry, 12*(1), 11-11. doi:10.1186/1471-244X-12-11

Brosnan, M., & Mills, E. (2016). The effect of diagnostic labels on the affective responses of college students towards peers with 'Asperger's Syndrome' and 'Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice, 20*(4), 388-394. doi:10.1177/1362361315586721

Brouwers, E. P. M., Joosen, M. C. W., van Zelst, C., & Van Weeghel, J. (2020). To disclose or not to disclose: A multi-stakeholder focus group study on mental health issues in the work environment. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation, 30*(1), 84-92. doi:10.1007/s10926-019-09848-z

Bruni, T. P., Constantino, J. N., & Gruber, C. P. (2014). *Social Responsiveness Scale-Second Edition (SRS-2)*, *32,* 365-369. Thousand Oaks, CA: Thousand Oaks Sage Publications Inc.

Bublitz, D. J., Fitzgerald, K., Alarcon, M., D'Onofrio, J., & Gillespie-Lynch, K. (2017). Verbal behaviors during employment interviews of college students with and without ASD. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 47*(1), 79-92. doi:10.3233/JVR-170884

Burchardt, T. (2004). Capabilities and disability: the capabilities framework and the social model of disability. *Disability and Society, 19*(7), 735-751. doi:10.1080/0968759042000284213

Butler, R. C., & Gillis, J. M. (2011). The impact of labels and behaviors on the stigmatization of adults with Asperger's Disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 41*(6), 741-749. doi:10.1007/s10803-010-1093-9

Cage, E., & Troxell-Whitman, Z. (2019). Understanding the reasons, contexts and costs of camouflaging for autistic adults. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 49*(5), 1899-1911. doi:10.1007/s10803-018-03878-x

Chaudoir, S. R., & Fisher, J. D. (2010). The disclosure processes model: Understanding disclosure decision-making and post-disclosure outcomes among people living with a concealable stigmatized identity. *Psychological Bulletin, 136*(2), 236-256. doi:10.1037/a0018193

Clair, J. A., Beatty, J. E., & Maclean, T. L. (2005). Out of sight but not out of mind: Managing invisible social identities in the workplace. *Academy of Management Review, 30*(1), 78-95. doi:10.5465/AMR.2005.15281431

Constantino, J. N., & Todd, R. D. (2003). Autistic traits in the general population: A twin study. *Archives of General Psychiatry, 60*(5), 524-530. doi:10.1001/archpsyc.60.5.524

Cooper, R., & Kennady, C. (2021). Autistic voices from the workplace. *Advances in Autism, 7*(1), 73-85. doi:10.1108/AIA-09-2019-0031

Crane, L., Batty, R., Adeyinka, H., Goddard, L., Henry, L. A., & Hill, E. L. (2018). Autism diagnosis in the United Kingdom: Perspectives of autistic adults, parents and professionals. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 48*(11), 3761-3772. doi:10.1007/s10803-018-3639-1

Crane, L., Goddard, L., & Pring, L. (2009). Sensory processing in adults with autism spectrum disorders. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice, 13*(3), 215-228. doi:10.1177/1362361309103794

Crane, L., Maras, K. L., Hawken, T., Mulcahy, S., & Memon, A. (2016). Experiences of autism spectrum disorder and policing in England and Wales: Surveying police and the autism community. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 46*(6), 2028-2041. doi:10.1007/s10803-016-2729-1

Cribb, S. J., Olaithe, M., Di Lorenzo, R., Dunlop, P. D., & Maybery, M. T. (2016). Embedded figures test performance in the broader autism phenotype: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 46*(9), 2924-2939. doi:10.1007/s10803-016-2832-3

Crompton, C. J., Ropar, D., Evans-Williams, C. V. M., Flynn, E. G., & Fletcher-Watson, S. (2020). Autistic peer-to-peer information transfer is highly effective. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice, 24*(7), 1704-1712. doi:10.1177/1362361320919286

Crotty, M. (1998). *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process.* Los Angeles: London: Sage.

Dalgin, R., & Bellini, J. (2008). Invisible disability disclosure in an employment interview: Impact on employers' hiring decisions and views of employability. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin, 52*(1), 6-15. doi:10.1177/0034355207311311

Davis, R., & Crompton, C. J. (2021). What do new findings about social interaction in autistic adults mean for neurodevelopmental research? *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 16*(3), 649-653. doi:10.1177/1745691620958010

Dewa, C. S., van Weeghel, J., Joosen, M. C. W., & Brouwers, E. (2020). What could influence workers' decisions to disclose a mental illness at work? *International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 11*(3), 119-127. doi:10.34172/ijoem.2020.1870

Dewa, C. S., van Weeghel, J., Joosen, M. C. W., Gronholm, P. C., & Brouwers, E. P. M. (2021). Workers' decisions to disclose a mental health issue to managers and the consequences. *Frontiers in Psychiatry, 12*, 631032-631032. doi:10.3389/fpsyt.2021.631032

Dickter, C. L., & Burk, J. A. (2021). The effects of contact and labeling on attitudes towards individuals with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. doi:10.1007/s10803-020-04840-6

Downe-Wamboldt, B. (1992). Content analysis: Method, applications, and issues. *Health Care for Women International, 13*(3), 313-321. doi:10.1080/07399339209516006

Eapen, V., Whitehouse, A. J., Claudianos, C., Crncec, R., & Frontiers Research Foundation, i. b. (Eds.) (2015). *Autism Spectrum Disorders from Genotypes to Phenotypes*. Lausanne, Switzerland : Frontiers Media SA.

Eaves, L. C., & Ho, H. H. (2008). Young adult outcomes of autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 38*(4), 739-747. doi:10.1007/s10803-007-0441-x

Edgin, J. O., & Pennington, B. F. (2005). Spatial cognition in autism spectrum disorders: Superior, impaired, or just intact? *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 35*(6), 729-745. doi:10.1007/s10803-005-0020-y

Elsabbagh, M., Divan, G., Koh, Y. J., Kim, Y. S., Kauchali, S., Marcín, C., . . . Fombonne, E. (2012). Global prevalence of autism and other pervasive developmental disorders. *Autism Research, 5*(3), 160-179. doi:10.1002/aur.239

Fatoye, C., Betts, A., Odeyemi, A., Fatoye, F., & Odeyemi, I. (2018). The perception of the public about disability and the medical and social model of disability: A literature review. *Value in Health, 21*, S175-S176. doi:10.1016/j.jval.2018.09.1045

Fisher, P., & Goodley, D. (2007). The linear medical model of disability: mothers of disabled babies resist with counter-narratives. *Sociology of Health & Illness, 29*(1), 66-81. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9566.2007.00518.x

Flower, R., Dickens, L., & Hedley, D. (2019). *Barriers to employment for individuals with autism spectrum disorder: Perceptions of autistic and non-autistic job candidates during a simulated job interview.* Paper presented at the Intellectual Disability Research Conference.

Flower, R., Dickens, L., & Hedley, D. (2021). Male autistic and non-autistic candidates during a simulated job interview and the impact of diagnostic disclosure. *Autism in Adulthood*. doi: https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0075

Gillespie-Lynch, K., Brooks, P. J., Someki, F., Obeid, R., Shane-Simpson, C., Kapp, S. K., . . . Smith, D. S. (2015). Changing college students' conceptions of autism: An online training to increase knowledge and decrease stigma. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 45*(8), 2553-2566. doi:10.1007/s10803-015-2422-9

Gillespie-Lynch, K., Daou, N., Obeid, R., Reardon, S., Khan, S., & Goldknopf, E. J. (2021). What contributes to stigma towards autistic university students and students with

other diagnoses? *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 51*(2), 459-475. doi:10.1007/s10803-020-04556-7

Gonzalez, C., Martin, J. M., Minshew, N. J., & Behrmann, M. (2013). Practice makes improvement: How adults with autism out-perform others in a naturalistic visual search task. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 43*(10), 2259-2268. doi:10.1007/s10803-013-1772-4

Greene, K. (2009). An integrated model of health disclosure decision-making. In T.D. Afifi & W.A. Afifi (Eds.), *Uncertainty, information management, and disclosure decisions* (pp. 242-269) Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge.

Greene, K., Magsamen-Conrad, K., Venetis, M. K., Checton, M. G., Bagdasarov, Z., & Banerjee, S. C. (2012). Assessing health diagnosis disclosure decisions in relationships: Testing the disclosure decision-making model. *Health Communication, 27*(4), 356-368. doi:10.1080/10410236.2011.586988

Grinter, E. J., Van Beek, P. L., Maybery, M. T., & Badcock, D. R. (2009). Brief report: Visuospatial analysis and self-rated autistic-like traits. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 39*(4), 670-677. doi:10.1007/s10803-008-0658-3

Heasman, B., & Gillespie, A. (2019a). Neurodivergent intersubjectivity: Distinctive features of how autistic people create shared understanding. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice, 23*(4), 910-921. doi:10.1177/1362361318785172

Heasman, B., & Gillespie, A. (2019b). Participants over-estimate how helpful they are in a two-player game scenario toward an artificial confederate that discloses a diagnosis of autism. *Frontiers in Psychology , 10*(39), 1220-1231.

Helverschou, S. B., Steindal, K., Nøttestad, J. A., & Howlin, P. (2018). Personal experiences of the Criminal Justice System by individuals with autism spectrum disorders. *Autism:*

The International Journal of Research and Practice, 22(4), 460-468. doi:10.1177/1362361316685554

Henninger, N. A., & Taylor, J. L. (2013). Outcomes in adults with autism spectrum disorders: a historical perspective. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice, 17*(1), 103-116. doi:10.1177/1362361312441266

Higher-Education-Statistics-Agency. (2017). *Higher education student enrolments and qualifications obtained at higher education providers in the United Kingdom 2015/16.* Retrieved from: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/12-01-2017/sfr242-student-enrolments-and-qualifications

Hillier, A., Fish, T., Cloppert, P., & Beversdorf, D. Q. (2007). Outcomes of a social and vocational skills support group for adolescents and young adults on the autism spectrum. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 22*(2), 107-115. doi:10.1177/10883576070220020201

Hinshaw, S. P., & Stier, A. (2008). Stigma as related to mental disorders. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 4*(1), 367-393. doi:10.1146/annurev.clinpsy.4.022007.141245

Howlin, P. (2000). Outcomes in adult life for more able individuals with autism or Asperger Syndrome. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice, 4*(1), 63-83. doi:10.1177/1362361300004001005

Howlin, P., & Magiati, I. (2017). Autism spectrum disorder: Outcomes in adulthood. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry, 30*(2), 69-76. doi:10.1097/YCO.0000000000000308

Howlin, P., & Moss, P. (2012). Adults with autism spectrum disorders: Autism in adults. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 57*(5), 275-283.

Huffcutt, A. I. (2011). An empirical review of the employment interview construct literature. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment, 19*(1), 62-81. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2389.2010.00535.x

Hull, L., Petrides, K. V., Allison, C., Smith, P., Baron-Cohen, S., Lai, M.-C., & Mandy, W. (2017). "Putting on my best normal": Social camouflaging in adults with autism spectrum conditions. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 47*(8), 2519-2534. doi:10.1007/s10803-017-3166-5

Jacob, E. R., McKenna, L., & D'Amore, A. (2014). Senior nurse role expectations of graduate registered and enrolled nurses in Australia: Content analysis of open-ended survey questions. *Contemporary Nurse: A Journal for the Australian Nursing Profession, 48*(2), 212-218. doi:10.1080/10376178.2014.11081943

Janz, T. (1982). Initial comparisons of patterned behavior description interviews versus unstructured interviews. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 67*(5), 577-580. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.67.5.577

Johnson, T. D., & Joshi, A. (2014). Disclosure on the spectrum: Understanding disclosure among employees on the autism spectrum. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 7*(2), 278-281. doi:10.1111/iops.12149

Johnson, T. D., & Joshi, A. (2016). Dark clouds or silver linings? A stigma threat perspective on the implications of an autism diagnosis for workplace well-being. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 101*(3), 430-449. doi:10.1037/apl0000058

Johnson, T. D., Joshi, A., & Hogan, T. (2020). On the front lines of disclosure: A conceptual framework of disclosure events. *Organizational Psychology Review, 10*(3-4), 201-222. doi:10.1177/2041386620919785

Jolliffe, T., & Baron-Cohen, S. (1997). Are people with autism and Asperger Syndrome faster than normal on the embedded figures test? *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 38*(5), 527-534. doi:10.1111/j.1469-7610.1997.tb01539.x

Jones, D. R., DeBrabander, K. M., & Sasson, N. J. (2021). Effects of autism acceptance training on explicit and implicit biases toward autism. *Autism: The International*

Journal of Research and Practice, 0(0), 1362361320984896.

doi:10.1177/1362361320984896

Jones, K. P., & King, E. B. (2014). Managing concealable stigmas at work: A review and

multilevel model. *Journal of Management, 40*(5), 1466-1494.

doi:10.1177/0149206313515518

Kenny, L., Hattersley, C., Molins, B., Buckley, C., Povey, C., & Pellicano, E. (2016). Which

terms should be used to describe autism? Perspectives from the UK autism

community. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice, 20*(4), 442-

462. doi:10.1177/1362361315588200

Kenworthy, L., Yerys, B. E., Anthony, L. G., & Wallace, G. L. (2008). Understanding

executive control in autism spectrum disorders in the lab and in the real world.

Neuropsychology Review, 18(4), 320-338. doi:10.1007/s11065-008-9077-7

Krefting, L. A., & Brief, A. P. (1976). The impact of applicant disability on evaluative

judgments in the selection process. *Academy of Management Journal, 19*(4), 675-680.

doi:10.2307/255802

Leekam, S. R., Nieto, C., Libby, S. J., Wing, L., & Gould, J. (2007). Describing the sensory

abnormalities of children and adults with autism. *Journal of Autism and

Developmental Disorders, 37*(5), 894-910. doi:10.1007/s10803-006-0218-7

Levashina, J., Hartwell, C. J., Morgeson, F. P., & Campion, M. A. (2014). The structured

employment interview: Narrative and quantitative review of the research literature.

Personnel Psychology, 67(1), 241-293. doi:10.1111/peps.12052

Lewis, M. H., & Bodfish, J. W. (1998). Repetitive behavior disorders in autism. *Mental

Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Review, 4*(2), 80-89.

doi:10.1002/(SICI)1098-2779(1998)4:2<80::AID-MRDD4>3.0.CO2-0

Lindsay, S., Osten, V., Rezai, M., & Bui, S. (2019). Disclosure and workplace accommodations for people with autism: A systematic review. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 1-14. doi:10.1080/09638288.2019.1635658

LLC, Q. (2019). Qualtrics Version 1.31.1 (Version 1.31.1). Provo, Utah.

Lorenz, T., Frischling, C., Cuadros, R., & Heinitz, K. (2016). Autism and overcoming job barriers: Comparing job-related barriers and possible solutions in and outside of autism-specific employment. *PLOS One, 11*(1), e0147040-e0147040. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0147040

Major, B., & Gramzow, R. H. (1999). Abortion as stigma: cognitive and emotional implications of concealment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77*(4), 735-745. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.77.4.735

Mak, W. W. S., & Kwok, Y. T. Y. (2010). Internalization of stigma for parents of children with autism spectrum disorder in Hong Kong. *Social Science & Medicine, 70*(12), 2045-2051. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2010.02.023

Maras, K., Norris, J., Nicholson, J., Heasman, B., Remington, A., & Crane, L. (2020). Ameliorating the disadvantage for autistic job seekers: An initial evaluation of adapted employment interview questions. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice* (in press).

Maras, K. L., Crane, L., Mulcahy, S., Hawken, T., Cooper, P., Wurtzel, D., & Memon, A. (2017). Brief report: Autism in the courtroom: Experiences of legal professionals and the autism community. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 47*(8), 2610-2620. doi:10.1007/s10803-017-3162-9

Matson, J. L., Cervantes, P. E., & Peters, W. J. (2016). Autism spectrum disorders: Management over the lifespan. *Expert Review of Neurotherapeutics, 16*(11), 1301-1310. doi:10.1080/14737175.2016.1203255

McKenna, L., Brooks, I., & Vanderheide, R. (2017). Graduate entry nurses' initial perspectives on nursing: Content analysis of open-ended survey questions. *Nurse Education Today, 49*, 22-26. doi:10.1016/j.nedt.2016.11.004

McMahon, C. M., Henry, S., & Linthicum, M. (2020). Employability in autism spectrum disorder (ASD): Job candidate's diagnostic disclosure and asd characteristics and employer's ASD knowledge and social desirability. *Journal of Experimental Psychology Applied*. doi:10.1037/xap0000282

Milton, D. (2012). On the ontological status of autism: The 'double empathy problem'. *Disability and Society, 27*(6), 883-887. doi:10.1080/09687599.2012.710008

Mohr, T. (2014). *Why women don't apply for jobs unless they're 100% qualified*. Harvard Business Review. Retrieved from: https://hbr.org/2014/08/why-women-dont-apply-for-jobs-unless-theyre-100-qualified

Morgan, L., Leatzow, A., Clark, S., & Siller, M. (2014). Interview skills for adults with autism spectrum disorder: A pilot randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 44*(9), 2290-2300. doi:10.1007/s10803-014-2100-3

Morris, M. R., Begel, A., & Wiedermann, B. (2015). *Understanding the challenges faced by neurodiverse software engineering employees: Towards a more inclusive and productive technical workforce*. Paper presented at the Proceedings of the 17th International ACM SIGACCESS Conference on Computers & Accessibility, Lisbon, Portugal. https://doi.org/10.1145/2700648.2809841

Morrison, K. E., DeBrabander, K. M., Faso, D. J., & Sasson, N. J. (2019). Variability in first impressions of autistic adults made by neurotypical raters is driven more by characteristics of the rater than by characteristics of autistic adults. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice, 23*(7), 1817-1829. doi:10.1177/1362361318824104

Mottron, L., Dawson, M., Soulières, I., Hubert, B., & Burack, J. (2006). Enhanced perceptual functioning in autism: An update, and eight principles of autistic perception. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 36*(1), 27-43. doi:10.1007/s10803-005-0040-7

Müller, E., Schuler, A., Burton, B. A., & Yates, G. B. (2003). Meeting the vocational support needs of individuals with Asperger Syndrome and other autism spectrum disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 18*(3), 163-175.

National-Autistic-Society. (2016a). *The employment gap*. Retrieved from: http://www.autism.org.uk/get-involved/media-centre/news/2016-10-27-employment-gap.aspx

National-Autistic-Society. (2016b). *Widening access to higher education for autistic students*. Retrieved from :https://network.autism.org.uk/good-practice/evidence-base/widening-access-higher-education-autistic-students

Office-of-National-Statistics. (2021). Outcomes for Disabled People in the UK: 2020. Retrieved from: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/articles/outcomesfordisabledpeopleintheuk/2020

Oliver, M. (1990). *The politics of disablement.* Basingstoke: London : Macmillan Education.

Ortiz, L. A. (2020). Reframing neurodiversity as competitive advantage: Opportunities, challenges, and resources for business and professional communication educators. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly, 83*(3), 261-284. doi:10.1177/2329490620944456

Pachankis, J. E. (2007). The psychological implications of concealing a stigma: A cognitive-affective-behavioral model. *Psychological Bulletin, 133*(2), 328-345. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.133.2.328

Perry, E., Mandy, W., Hull, L., & Cage, E. (2021). Understanding camouflaging as a response to autism-related stigma: A social identity theory approach. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. doi:10.1007/s10803-021-04987-w

Price, J. (2009). *Open coding*. In J. Price (Ed.) *Coding for Qualitative Analysis*, pp. 155-157.

Provo-UT. (2018). QSR NVivo 12 Pro Provo, UT.

Ragins, B. R. (2008). Disclosure disconnects: Antecedents and consequences of disclosing invisible stigmas across life domains. *The Academy of Management Review, 33*(1), 194-215. doi:10.5465/AMR.2008.27752724

Rava, J., Shattuck, P., Rast, J., & Roux, A. (2017). The prevalence and correlates of involvement in the Criminal Justice System among youth on the autism spectrum. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 47*(2), 340-346. doi:10.1007/s10803-016-2958-3

Remington, A., Hanley, M., O'Brien, S., Riby, D. M., & Swettenham, J. (2019). Implications of capacity in the classroom: Simplifying tasks for autistic children may not be the answer. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 85*, 197-204. doi:10.1016/j.ridd.2018.12.006

Remington, A., & Pellicano, E. (2018). Sometimes you just need someone to take a chance on you': An internship programme for autistic graduates at Deutsche Bank, UK. *Journal of Management and Organization , 25*(4), 516-534. doi:10.1017/jmo.2018.66

Remington, A., Swettenham, J., Campbell, R., & Coleman, M. (2009). Selective attention and perceptual load in autism spectrum disorder. *Psychological Science, 20*(11), 1388-1393. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.2009.02454.x

Richards, J. (2012). Examining the exclusion of employees with Asperger Syndrome from the workplace. *Personnel Review, 41*(5), 630-646. doi:10.1108/00483481211249148

Romualdez, A. M., Heasman, B., Davies, J., Walker, Z., & Remington, A. M. (2021a). "People might understand me better": Diagnostic disclosure experiences of autistic individuals in the workplace. *Autism in Adulthood 3*(2), 157-167. https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0063

Roux, A., Shattuck, P., Cooper, B., Anderson, K., Wagner, M., & Narendorf, S. (2013). Postsecondary employment experiences among young adults with an autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 52*(9), 931-939. doi:10.1016/j.jaac.2013.05.019

Russell, G., & Norwich, B. (2012). Dilemmas, diagnosis and de-stigmatization: Parental perspectives on the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 17*(2), 229-245. doi:10.1177/1359104510365203

Sapey-Triomphe, L.-A., Leiros Costa, T., & Wagemans, J. (2019). Sensory sensitivity in autism mostly depends on contextual predictions. *Cognitive Neuroscience, 10*(3), 162-164. doi:10.1080/17588928.2019.1593126

Sarrett, J. (2017). Interviews, disclosures, and misperceptions: Autistic adults' perspectives on employment related challenges. *Disability Studies Quarterly, 37*(2). doi:10.18061/dsq.v37i2.5524

Sasson, N. J., Faso, D. J., Nugent, J., Lovell, S., Kennedy, D. P., & Grossman, R. B. (2017). Neurotypical peers are less willing to interact with those with autism based on thin slice judgments. *Scientific Reports, 7*(1), 40700-40700. doi:10.1038/srep40700

Sasson, N. J., & Morrison, K. E. (2019). First impressions of adults with autism improve with diagnostic disclosure and increased autism knowledge of peers. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice, 23*(1), 50-59. doi:10.1177/1362361317729526

Sasson, N. J., Morrison, K. E., Pinkham, A. E., Faso, D. J., & Chmielewski, M. (2018). Brief report: Adults with autism are less accurate at predicting how their personality traits are evaluated by unfamiliar observers. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 48*(6), 2243-2248. doi:10.1007/s10803-018-3487-z

Schein, E. H. (2017). *Organizational culture and leadership / Edgar H. Schein with Peter Schein* (5th Edition): Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley.

Shah, A., & Frith, U. (1983). An islet of ability in autistic children: A research note. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 24*(4), 613-620. doi:10.1111/j.1469-7610.1983.tb00137.x

Sheppard, E., Pillai, D., Wong, G. T.-L., Ropar, D., & Mitchell, P. (2016). How easy is it to read the minds of people with autism spectrum disorder? *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 46*(4), 1247-1254. doi:10.1007/s10803-015-2662-8

Simmons, D. R. (2019). Some clarifications on neural noise and sensory sensitivities in Autism. *Cognitive Neuroscience, 10*(3), 169-171. doi:10.1080/17588928.2019.1598349

Smith, M. J., Ginger, E. J., Wright, K., Wright, M. A., Taylor, J. L., Humm, L. B., . . . Fleming, M. F. (2014). Virtual reality job interview training in adults with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 44*(10), 2450-2463. doi:10.1007/s10803-014-2113-y

SPSS-Inc. (2019). IBM SPSS Statistics 26 for Windows User's Guide (Version 26). Chicago, IL.

Stevenson, J. L., & Gernsbacher, M. A. (2013). Abstract spatial reasoning as an autistic strength. *PLOS One, 8*(3), e59329-e59329. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0059329

Stone, D. L., & Colella, A. (1996). A model of factors affecting the treatment of disabled

    individuals in organizations. *The Academy of Management review, 21*(2), 352-401.

    doi:10.2307/258666

Stone, W. (1987). Cross-disciplinary perspectives on autism. *Journal of Pediatric*

    Psychology, 12(4), 615-630. doi:10.1093/jpepsy/12.4.615

Thompson-Hodgetts, S., Labonte, C., Mazumder, R., & Phelan, S. (2020). Helpful or

    harmful? A scoping review of perceptions and outcomes of autism diagnostic

    disclosure to others. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, 77*(39), 101598.

    doi:10.1016/j.rasd.2020.101598

UK-Government. (2018). *UK Population by Ethnicity*. Retrieved from: https://doi-

    org.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/10.1111/jep.12367

Unger, D. D. (2002). Employers' attitudes toward persons with disabilities in the workforce:

    Myths or realities? *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 17*(1), 2-

    10. doi:10.1177/108835760201700101

UPIAS, & Disability-Alliance. (1976). *The Union of the Physically Impaired Against*

    Segregation and the Disability Alliance discuss fundamental principles of disability:

    Being a summary of the discussion held on 22nd November, 1975 and containing

    commentaries from each organisation. London: Union of the Physically Impaired

    Against Segregation. London: Disability Alliance.

Wheelwright, S., Auyeung, B., Allison, C., & Baron-Cohen, S. (2010). Defining the broader,

    medium and narrow autism phenotype among parents using the Autism Spectrum

    Quotient (AQ). *Molecular Autism, 1*(1), 10-10. doi:10.1186/2040-2392-1-10

White, R., Barreto, M., Harrington, J., Kapp, S. K., Hayes, J., & Russell, G. (2020). Is

    disclosing an autism spectrum disorder in school associated with reduced

stigmatization? *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice, 24*(3), 744-754. doi:10.1177/1362361319887625

White, S. J. (2013). The Triple I hypothesis: Taking another('s) perspective on executive dysfunction in autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 43*(1), 114-121. doi:10.1007/s10803-012-1550-8

White, S. J., Burgess, P. W., & Hill, E. L. (2009). Impairments on "open-ended" executive function tests in autism. *Autism Research, 2*(3), 138-147. doi:10.1002/aur.78

Wilczynski, S. M., Trammell, B., & Clarke, L. S. (2013). Improving employment outcomes among adolescents and adults on the autism spectrum. *Psychology in Schools, 50*(9), 876-887. doi:10.1002/pits.21718

World-Health-Organization. (1993). Study protocol for the World Health Organization project to develop a Quality of Life assessment instrument (WHOQOL). *Quality of Life Research, 2*(2), 153-159. doi:10.1007/BF00435734

Appendix A

Link to full article, "People might understand me better: Autistic adults' experiences of diagnostic disclosure in the workplace"

By Anna Melissa Romualdez, Brett Heasman, Zachary Walker, Jade Davies, and Anna Remington

https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/aut.2020.0063

Appendix B

Link to Qualtrics survey

https://uclioe.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9otCpihXyfU6klv

Appendix C

Link to full article, "Autistic adults' experiences of diagnostic disclosure in the workplace: Decision-making and factors associated with outcomes"

By Anna Melissa Romualdez, Zachary Walker, and Anna Remington

https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/23969415211022955

Appendix D

Interview schedule

Section	Questions	Probe questions
Personal Background/Demographic Information	Age:	
	Gender:	
	Age when diagnosed (if formally diagnosed):	
	What employment sector do you work in?	
	Are you a volunteer, part-time, full-time, or self-employed?	
	Do you have any other diagnosed conditions?	
	How many employers have you had?	
	Where are you from?	
	Where do you live?	
	With whom do you live?	
Employment Background	Are you currently looking for a job?	What is your motivation for looking for a job?
		What kinds of jobs have you been considering?
		What jobs have you applied for?
		How has the recruitment process been going for you?
	Are you currently working?	Where do you work?
		How long have you been working at your current job?
		What kinds of things do you do at your job?
		How did you find your current job?
		Can you tell me more about the recruitment process for this job?
Diagnostic Disclosure		
If currently seeking employment:	When applying to jobs, have you chosen to disclose your autism diagnosis?	Why did you decide to tell/not to tell potential employers that you are autistic?
		In your experience, has this had any impact on the recruitment process? In what way?

		What are some of the successes or challenges you've had during the recruitment process?
		Do you think you might have had a different experience if you had chosen to/not to disclose?
If currently/formerly employed:	Have you disclosed your autism diagnosis at work to your employers or colleagues?	Why did you decide to tell/not to tell your employers and colleagues that you are autistic?
		Has this had any impact on your experiences at work? In what way?
		What are some of the successes or challenges you've had at work?
		(For those who have disclosed) Have there been any adjustments made at work because of your disclosure?
		Do you think you might have had a different experience if you had chosen to/not to disclose your diagnosis?
		If given the choice again, would you choose to/not to disclose your diagnosis?
	Is there anything else you wish to share about your disclosure and employment experiences?	

Appendix E

Job description for Financial Analyst position

A&G   Financial Analyst – FULL-TIME/PERMANENT

Key responsibilities:

- Develop financial models to analyse and understand financial performance across the business
- Prepare monthly management accounts to meet reporting deadlines and provide useful feedback/explanations of financial performance to finance and non-finance-personnel
- Provide financial analysis and advice to colleagues and stakeholders at all levels including senior management, supplying them with financial data to assist in commercial decision making
- Liaise with department heads to assist with budget planning
- Assist in coming up with a long-term financial strategy for the business
- Other ad-hoc requirements as requested by the Senior Financial Analyst or other senior finance members

Candidate requirements:

- 3+ years of experience in a Financial Planning & Strategy or management accounting environment
- Advanced Excel skills
- CIMA, ACCA, or ACA qualification with exceptional numeric and analytical skills
- Good knowledge of SQL and Tableau (or similar BI tools) desirable
- Ability to solve problems and be comfortable working with large amounts of data
- Ability to work well under pressure, with accuracy and attention to detail
- Willingness to learn new skills
- Ability to be proactive and take initiative in handling projects
- A positive outlook!

Salary and Benefits:

- Competitive salary and discretionary bonus
- Salary Finance – a dedicated online portal offering lending and saving facilities, financial wellbeing and support services
- Health Cash Plan – claim money back towards essential healthcare, including a virtual GP service)
- 25 days' annual leave with an annual option to buy up to 5 additional days of annual leave
- Life Assurance (4 x salary)
- Access to health and wellbeing services
- Cycle to Work incentive programme (equipment up to £1000)

Appendix F

Set of nine CVs with disclosure conditions

A. COOKE

Highly motivated Senior Financial Analyst with a successful track record in quantitative analysis and forecasting. Possessing strong analytical skill and the ability to rapidly adapt to new technologies and processes.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Equition   **02/2015 – Present**
Senior Financial Analyst

- Worked closely with Financial Controller to reduce costs by over 12% over a two-year period.
- Prepared, analysed, and distributed financial reports from multiple departments, writing commentary on performance for senior management.
- Developed a new financial planning model, greatly reducing time required to produce new forecasts each quarter.
- Introduced the use of data visualisation and data automation tools into the financial analysis and month-end process, leading to better business decision-making and weekly time saving of 10 hours across the team.

CorpConsult   **09/2012 – 02/2015**
Financial Planning Analyst

- Developed and produced monthly dashboard reports, providing regular updates on YTD, QTD and MTD performance to senior management.
- Carried out risk assessment analysis on financial information, including stress-testing for a potential economic downturn.
- Validated and tested the accuracy of company financial information to assist with the detection of fraud.
- Built and maintained strong working relationships with operating and financial controlling teams.

Pland   **07/2012 – 08/2012**
Finance Intern

- Completed 8-week summer internship at a FinTech start-up based in London.
- Rotated around various departments including Finance, Product and Marketing.

EDUCATION:

University of Bath   **09/2010 – 08/2013**
BSc Accounting and Finance, 2.1

SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS:

- Associate Chartered Management Accountant, CIMA
- Systems and software: Microsoft Office, Data visualisation (Tableau), SQL, VBA
- Interests: Emerging technology, cricket, marathon running

E. CARPENTER

Detail-oriented Senior Financial Analyst with several years of experience delivering work to senior stakeholders. Historical experience in both financial forecasting and investment analysis.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Fundia   **11/2016 – Present**
Senior Financial Analyst

- Conducted quantitative analysis of financial data to maintain and monitor fund and equity investments in the portfolio risk team of a leading boutique investment management firm, including inflows, outflows, valuations, risk ratings, performance analysis and record maintenance.
- Collected, analysed and managed quantitative data and created meaningful reports to drive business improvement
- Recommended and implemented policy and programme changes to maintain and improve the firm's competitive position and profitability
- High-profile role, working directly with the senior management team on a day-to-day basis

Core Ltd   **09/2014 – 10/2016**
Financial Analyst

- Part of the FP&A team at Core, a company specialising in identity and access management products and services.
- Produced accurate monthly reports, budgets and forecasts. Reviewed actual results against plan/forecast and provided explanation for material variances.
- Developed and monitored relevant booking, revenue and invoicing related KPIs and metrics. Performed regular ad hoc analysis and investigation on other KPIs (e.g. Unbilled Revenue and Aged Backlog) amongst other areas.
- Conducted range of ad-hoc financial analyst tasks and projects such as forecasting and producing dashboards.

Canopy Limited   **05/2013 – 08/2013**
Finance Intern

- Assisted with financial analysis, reporting and risk assessment for a large real estate investment firm
- Actively involved with quarterly close, supporting with investigating and validating investor queries/issues.

EDUCATION:

University of Nottingham   **09/2011 – 08/2014**
BSc Business and Management, 2.1

SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS:

- Chartered Certified Accountant, ACCA, May 2018
- IMC (Investment Management Certificate), July 2016
- Advanced Microsoft Excel and PowerPoint skills

O. NICHOLS

Advocate for disability rights and equality in workplaces as an employee with lived experience of physical disability. Experienced Financial specialist with a strong background in interpreting and analysing financial data. Areas of expertise include pricing analysis, operational performance, financial modelling and business intelligence.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Advazi Bank   **03/2018 – Present**
Senior Financial Planning Analyst
- Responsible for driving meaningful analysis to key decision-makers in the senior management team.
- Supported the Finance Business Partner in providing a partnering and management accounting service to budget holders and senior management across the organisation.
- Recommended and implemented initiatives to optimise the financial performance of target Business Units by identifying drivers of performance.
- Interpreted complex financial data from a variety of accounting and operational sources.

Scorling & Co   **12/2016 – 02/2018**
Finance Manager

- Headed Disability Equality Steering Group and helped streamline processes for disabled staff to obtain workplace adjustments
- Prepared various deliverables to support both internal and external financial reporting needs, including analytic commentary and the preparation of supplementary financial analysis for management and other stakeholders.
- Prepared and reviewed monthly balance sheet account reconciliations and annual financial statements.
- Led certain month end close activities, ensuring that relevant deadlines are met.
- Held direct responsibility for improving accounting processes and controls for a business with a high volume of transactions.
- Participated in launch of a new transaction processing system, including testing, launch and development of appropriate financial controls.

Weiling Dech   **09/2014 – 11/2016**
Finance Analyst
- Assisted with finance processes as part of the Finance function in a large manufacturing firm.
- Updated daily bank transaction records and provided data for cash liquidity management.
- Provided recommendations and analysis to assist Company in meeting established financial objectives.
- Prepared daily, weekly, and monthly reports, providing the business with key financial information.

EDUCATION:
University of Bath   **09/2011 – 08/2014**
BSc Accounting and Finance, 2.1

SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS:
- Chartered Certified Accountant, ACCA, May 2018
- IT: Advanced Excel, SAP
- Interests: Running, cooking

J. FULLER

Senior finance professional with the ability to manage and prioritise a high volume of tasks effectively; works well under deadlines and in busy environments.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Overton Services   **10/2015 – Present**
Senior Financial Analyst

- Responsible for creating monthly financial reports and ad hoc reports for a large engineering business.
- Rapidly promoted to Senior Financial Analyst after one year.
- Identified opportunities for 15% increase in revenue through pricing and volume analysis.
- Increased the efficiency of the MS Access decision support database by 18%
- Saved the company £50m by identifying low-margin projects for attention.

Techip   **08/2013 – 10/2015**
Finance Analyst

- Provided financial analysis and advice as required to colleagues and stakeholders at all levels including senior management at a private equity backed technology group.
- Provided a partnering and management accounting service to budget holders and senior management across the organisation.
- Provided support in producing financial modelling and financial insight feeding into the development of the senior leadership team's long term financial strategy.
- Assisted the Finance Manager by contributing to financial analysis expertise and commercial acumen to deliver robust business evaluation and monitoring strategic priorities.

EDUCATION:

University of Leeds   **09/2010 – 08/2013**
BSc Accounting and Finance, 2.1

SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS:

- Associate Chartered Management Accountant, CIMA
- Languages: English (fluent)
- Technology: Advanced Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint), Experience working with a variety of finance software including Board (corporate performance management tool) and Oracle NetSuite.
- Interests: Currently training for UK cycling challenge, raising money for Breast Cancer Research

G. HALL

Experienced finance professional looking for a role focused on financial analysis and planning. Track record of high-quality outputs from projects across several roles, delivering significant process improvement and value in each.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Equition   **03/2017 – Present**
Senior Financial Analyst

- Prepared and delivered external quarterly and annual consolidated financial statements and related footnotes
- Assisted with the development, implementation and interpretation of complex financial analysis projects in support of financial planning and control strategies
- Continually identified and implemented improvements to business processes to increase efficiency
- Contributed to other accounting and reporting projects as subject matter expert
- Integrated disparate sources of data using a broad range of analytical data tools

TCDO   **10/2014 – 02/2017**
Finance Insights Analyst

- Data-driven finance role supporting the FP&A Manager.
- Designed and produced key reports to give insight into operational cost base by key drivers, including production of KPI data
- Provided periodic input to reporting to key stakeholders and the Board pack, including operational and financial metrics
- Monitored financial data integrity within Hyperion
- Provided input into the budget and forecasting process and reporting, understanding key drivers and variances
- Support ad hoc requests for analysis and information

EDUCATION:

University of Leeds   **09/2011 – 08/2014**
BSc Accounting and Finance, 2.1

SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS:

- Excel and PowerPoint
- SQL (to extract data from Oracle and BigQuery databases)
- Hyperion (for planning and budgeting)
- Interests: Art, reading, painting

M. NEAL

Commercial and highly rated senior financial analyst with over five years of experience working in front line finance and analytical roles. Autistic self-advocate with experience in developing staff neurodiversity and inclusion training programmes. Key strengths include attention to detail and insightful commercial analysis.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Conomics   **02/2017 – Present**
Senior Finance Analyst

- Played a strategic role in the Finance function of a global e-commerce technology platform's direct payments division.
- Conducted data-driven financial analysis in order to evaluate the performance of different technology products, identifying and isolating key growth drivers.
- Responsibility for multiple projects focused on monthly revenue recognition and forecasting, working to tight deadlines
- Played a key role in division's YOY improvement in profitability
- Increased efficiency in the team via creation of standardised SQL queries; queries rolled out to other divisions following success.
- Operated as a true finance business partner to the divisional managing director.

Paylyst   **08/2014 – 01/2017**
Finance Analyst

- Advised senior management team on inclusive workplace practices as neurodivergent member of Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee
- Key member of the finance team at Paylst, a global specialist in payments technology and consulting.
- Analysed and architected financial intelligence models to measure complex data, cash flows, NPV and ROI.
- Worked with multiple datasets to apply qualitative and quantitative business profitability analysis that resulted in cost savings of 17%.
- Promoted from Junior Analyst to Finance Analyst within 12 months of starting in role.

EDUCATION:

University of Exeter   **09/2011 – 08/2014**
BSc Business Management, 2.1

SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS:

- Chartered Certified Accountant, ACCA
- Advanced capabilities with Microsoft Excel
- Extensive experience of SQL and PowerBI

D. FROST

Self-driven, qualified financial analyst (ACCA) with a proven track record in financial modelling, analytical skills and strategic thinking. Experienced in preparing budgets, streamlining processes, and driving efficiency.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Teier   **02/2017 – Present**
Financial Planning & Analysis (FP&A) Senior Analyst

- Translated financial metrics into actionable insights to improve decision making, performance and business growth.
- Implemented key performance indicators to create, maintain and preserve value.
- Provided financial support to accomplish plans, including financial modelling, scenario planning, monitoring performance against strategic targets.
- Completed advanced analysis of economic and competitive business risks.
- Identified opportunities to improve data integrity to enable analysis and insights.
- Worked independently under minimal supervision.

Tracom   **09/2014 – 01/2017**
Finance Analyst

- Produced monthly management accounts and commentaries.
- Supported financial decision-making through effective design and analysis of key financial information, producing regular reports to monitor the delivery of key financial targets.
- Addressed and resolved non-routine, complex variances in financial data and reports.
- Coordinated the Fixed Asset register and ensured depreciation was accurately charged.
- Processed local and international payments and receipts; reconciled foreign currency transactions.

EDUCATION:

University of Birmingham   **09/2011 – 08/2014**
BSc Business Management, 2.1

SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS:

- Chartered Certified Accountant, ACCA
- Strong PowerPoint and Excel skills preferably with advanced knowledge of V-lookup and pivot tables

W. HANCOCK

Highly motivated and enthusiastic qualified accountant with a strong track record of delivering value. Several years of experience focused on high quality outputs for senior leadership teams in complex businesses.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Fundia   **05/2017 – Present**
Senior Portfolio Analyst

- Held a high profile role in the finance team of Fundia, a boutique investment management firm specialising in private debt placements.
- Responsible for the disbursement, collection and restructuring of investments, assisting with the management of 16 funds with €60bn of capital under management.
- Delivered bespoke MI reporting through Tableau to the Board and Senior Management team.
- Reviewed and forecasting portfolio performance and analytics, analysing financial risks and making strategic recommendations to reduce risk and cost.
- Reconciled portfolio information to our accounting records, supporting the Financial Controller with month-end and management accounts processes.
- Assisted with annual preparation of budgets and calculation of responsible for forecasting expected management fees.

Helitz Investments   **09/2014 – 04/2017**
Investment Analyst

- Responsible for preparing and monitoring lending cash flows, new loans pipeline, and allocation of loans to specific funds.
- Managed cash liquidity to ensure adequate funds to meet loan deployment demand, supporting the firm in reducing our cost of capital
- Key contributor on initiative to redesign our investment management systems and processes, including detailed business analysis, investment function review and portfolio data analytics activities.
- Reduced time required to produce a key monthly report by five days, improving speed of decision making.

EDUCATION:

University of Nottingham   **09/2011 – 08/2014**
BSc Accountancy, 2.1

SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS:

- Chartered Certified Accountant, ACCA
- Technology: Experienced with several modern business applications, including Tableau, Office and iLevel.

N. BAILEY

Senior Financial Analyst with experience working across industries looking for new opportunities. Good attention to detail and high quality of outputs. Ability to rapidly adapt to new situations and processes. Neurodivergent (dyslexic) individual with a passionate interest in advocacy for disabled groups.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Harpington   **01/2017 – Present**
Senior Finance Analyst

- Performed varied roles supporting portfolio finance director at a mid-size technology firm.
- Modelled firm's financial covenants and cashflows to identify and address financing options and financial risk with the senior management team.
- Helped develop and implement a mentorship programme for neurodivergent staff as member of the Neurodivergent Staff Network
- Assisted in developing a new business plan to support refinancing.
- Responsible for preparation of monthly performance pack for the board.

Sance Securities   **12/2015 – 12/2016**
Analyst

- Analysed financial statements and performed valuation analyses applying dividend discount model, cash flow and comparable companies' approaches. Experience in calculating WACCs and financial ratios.
- Assisted in the development of financial models including scenario analysis
- Assisted in the execution of an on-going M&A transaction.

MintVest   **09/2014 – 11/2015**
Analyst

- Responsible for daily portfolio pricing for OTC portfolio, including the creation of pay-off patterns in the system of swaps and derivatives
- Performed ad hoc financial analysis and business analysis tasks
- Prepared and analysed monthly financial reports

EDUCATION:

University of Nottingham   **09/2011 – 08/2014**
BSc Business Management, 2.1

SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS:

- Associate Chartered Management Accountant, CIMA
- Technology: Advanced Microsoft Excel skills, including VBA and PowerPivot
- Interests: history, art, poetry

Appendix G

Frequency of CV appearances within disclosure conditions

CV Number	Appearances in Autism Condition	Appearances in Physical Impairment Condition	Appearances in Dyslexia Condition	Appearances in No Disclosure Condition
1	2	2	3	15
2	2	2	2	16
3	3	3	3	13
4	3	2	3	14
5	3	2	2	15
6	3	3	2	14
7	2	3	2	15
8	2	2	2	16
9	2	3	3	14
Total	22	22	22	132

Appendix H

Employability Rating Scale Questionnaire (based on Huffcut, 2011)

For each question, please rate the candidate from 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest score and 5 being the highest.

1. How confident are they?

      1   2   3   4   5

      Please explain why you assigned the candidate this rating:

2. How motivated are they?

      1   2   3   4   5

      Please explain why you assigned the candidate this rating:

3. How knowledgeable are they?

      1   2   3   4   5

      Please explain why you assigned the candidate this rating:

4. How conscientious are they?

      1   2   3   4   5

      Please explain why you assigned the candidate this rating:

5. How competent are they?

      1   2   3   4   5

      Please explain why you assigned the candidate this rating:

6. How intelligent are they?

      1   2   3   4   5

      Please explain why you assigned the candidate this rating:

7. How good are they at communicating?

      1   2   3   4   5

      Please explain why you assigned the candidate this rating:

8. How likeable are they?

      1   2   3   4   5

      Please explain why you assigned the candidate this rating:

9. How easy to work with are they?

      1   2   3   4   5

      Please explain why you assigned the candidate this rating:

Appendix I

Autism Awareness Scale Questionnaire (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2015)

Response choices included strongly disagree (−2), disagree (−1), neither agree nor disagree (0), agree (1), strongly agree (2).

1. Autism is more frequently diagnosed in males than females.

2. Children with autism do not show attachments, even to parents/caregivers.

3. People with autism are deliberately uncooperative.

4. Children with autism can grow up to go to college and marry.

5. There is one intervention that works for all people with autism.

6. Autism can be diagnosed as early as 15 months of age.

7. With the proper treatment, most children diagnosed with autism eventually outgrow the disorder.

8. People with autism show affection.

9. Most people with autism have low intelligence.

10. Children with autism grow up to be adults with autism.

11. People with autism tend to be violent.

12. People with autism are generally disinterested in making friends.

Note: Bolded items are reverse scored.