Asperger's Syndrome and the Development of a Positive Work Identity

Cheryl K. McIntosh
University of Texas at Arlington

The development of a positive work identity is associated with stronger social resources and enhanced workplace performance. The development of positive work identity by adults with Asperger's Syndrome (AS) is a critical part of their long-term career success. This article focuses on the challenges that adults with AS experience with developing positive work identities. Research on positive work identity is integrated with a discussion of related issues of disclosure and ADA accommodation as they relate to the development of a positive work identity. The implications for practitioners are discussed.

Approximately 1 in 500 adults have a higher functioning form of autism, making them capable of full employment while also presenting them with distinct obstacles (About Asperger Syndrome: FAQs, n.d.). Asperger's Syndrome, which is defined by noticeable difficulties with communication and social interaction, has an estimated prevalence of 3.6 to 7.1 per 1000 adults (Attwood, 2006; Ehlers & Gillberg, 1993; Fombonne, 1996; Higgins et al., 2008). In spite of their large numbers in the adult population, adults with AS are understudied in literature (Bonete, Calero, & Fernandez-Parra, 2015). Most of the research that has been done is outside of the management literature.

Adults with autism spectrum disorders, coupled with an average IQ, are at risk for worse employment outcomes than those with intellectual disabilities because their disorder may not be formally identified at work (Taylor, Henninger, & Mailick, 2015). Thus, they do not receive targeted support (Taylor et al., 2015). Less than half of adults with AS are employed, and they face significant challenges maintaining that status (Baldwin, Costley, & Warren, 2014; Lorenz & Heinitz, 2014; Richards, 2012; Roux et al., 2013). They are also more likely than non-AS adults to be unemployed or underemployed, especially in relation to their abilities (Baldwin et al., 2014; Krieger et al., 2012; Nord et al., 2016; Richards, 2012; Shattuck et al., 2012; Roux et al., 2013; Scott et al., 2015). They are more likely to be overeducated and overqualified for their

jobs, meaning that the work they do is beneath their capabilities (Baldwin et al., 2014). As many as 46% of adults with AS are overeducated, and they are overrepresented in temporary work (Baldwin et al., 2014). They also work fewer hours per week on average compared to the general population (Baldwin et al., 2014).

The experience of working and developing a work identity—the process of defining who one is in relation to work—is a psychological process that is a key part of the experience of adulthood (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010; Gini, 1998; Kira & Balkin, 2014; Saayman & Crafford, 2011; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Working should ideally provide adults with an environment where they can have a sense of accomplishment and connection with other people (Krieger et al., 2012; Saayman & Crafford, 2011; Scott et al., 2015). Given the social nature of work, it is notable that many of the difficulties with career attainment and success for adults with AS are related to social concerns, rather than to actual job performance (Higgins et al., 2008; Scott et al., 2015). Work-related difficulties may include interacting and communicating with others, balancing multiple demands, adapting to change, and dealing with sensory stimulation (Baldwin et al., 2014; Higgins et al., 2008; Mynatt, Gibbons, & Hughes, 2014; Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2004).

These challenges may be reduced with workplace accommodations, but access to accommodation depends on the disclosure of the condition (Santuzzi et al., 2014). AS is an invisible disability since it cannot be readily observed by others (Richards, 2012). Adults with invisible social identities, such as invisible disabilities, have the option to reveal or to conceal them from others (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005). The consequences of revealing invisible stigmatized identities in the workplace may be both positive and negative (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; DeJordy, 2008; Ragins, 2008). Adults with AS must weigh the potential pitfalls of disclosing their diagnosis against the potential gains in the development of a positive work identity.

A positive work identity is developed as adults leverage their strengths, position themselves to receive positive feedback, and seek alignment between themselves and their work (Dutton et al., 2010). The process of developing a positive work identity is one of developing stronger social resources so that employment outcomes are improved (Dutton et al., 2010). Therefore, it may be both a necessary and an inherently challenging process for adults with AS. Adults with AS have strengths that add value to workplaces. Employers, by working with adults with AS, can capitalize on these strengths while helping adults with AS to build a sense of belonging at work.

Asperger's Syndrome at Work

Adults with disabilities have career experiences that differ from the mainstream populations that are commonly studied in the management literature (Heslin, Bell, & Fletcher, 2012; Zikic & Hall, 2009). Difficulties with social interaction may be particularly challenging as people with AS navigate their careers (Lorenz & Heinitz, 2014). The ability to solve problems and adapt in social situations may be limited (Bonete et al., 2015). Adults with AS may have trouble dealing with changing routines (Mynatt et al., 2014). They need clear, logical instructions for tasks and expectations (Fast, 2004; Richards, 2012 which may frustrate supervisors that expect adults to work with little supervision. They may also have a tendency to strictly follow rules without

regard for context (Bonete et al., 2015; Higgins et al., 2008; Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2004; Klin, Saulnier, & Sparrow, 2007; Mynatt et al., 2014; Richards, 2012). Knowing when to apply the rules and when to bend or break them is an important social skill. Many workplaces function on unwritten rules, which adults with AS are not be able to fully recognize (Richards, 2012). Misunderstandings may arise from differing interpretations of expectations at work, many of which are not explicit.

Adults with AS may also struggle with routine aspects of communicating at work, including making eye contact and allowing two-way interactions in conversations (Bonete et al., 2015; Higgins et al., 2008). They may also have trouble following the norms of conversations, including talking too much about one topic (Higgins et al., 2008; Hurlbutt & Handler, 2010; Mynatt et al., 2014). Speaking too formally or using inappropriate volume, tone, or inflection, are also common concerns (Higgins et al., 2008). When these differences in communication practices are interpreted as rude or odd by neurotypical coworkers and supervisors, adults with AS may find themselves becoming socially isolated at work.

In some circumstances, adults with AS may want to have some personal space at work. Many of them are bothered by sensory disturbances such as noise or bad lighting that are common in many work environments (Lorenz & Heinitz, 2014; Mynatt et al., 2014; Richards, 2012; South, Ozonoff, & McMahon, 2005). Working in an open plan office space may also be distracting for them (Lorenz et al., 2016; Wilczynski, Trammell, & Clarke, 2013). This heightened sensitivity to environmental stimuli may decrease productivity (Mynatt et al., 2014). When productivity is lower than expected, this can become the basis of legitimate concerns for employers that are not aware of the employee's disability status.

Adults with AS frequently experience bullying or harassment at work because they do not always blend well with others (Attwood, 2006; Higgins et al., 2008; Richards, 2012). Even coworkers who are not bullying may view adults with AS negatively (Bliss & Edmonds, 2008; Higgins et al., 2008; Richards, 2012). When adults with AS experience difficulties at work, they are more likely to become depressed (Baldwin et al., 2014; Higgins et al., 2008). Depression then adds to the problems that they may experience. When faced with challenges at work, adults with AS are more likely to become angry and less likely to ask for assistance (Meyer, 2001; Richards, 2012). All of these work-related issues complicate relationships with supervisors and peers (Mynatt et al., 2014).

When overwhelmed by conflict or stress at work, adults with AS may quit or miss work without prior notice (Richards, 2012). They are also more likely than their neurotypical peers to change jobs frequently, and, as a result, to experience higher levels of ongoing stress and financial concerns (Baldwin et al., 2014). While unemployed or seeking a change of employment, they are also less likely than adults without AS to use social connections to find new employment (Baldwin et al., 2014), perhaps because they tend to have smaller social networks (Higgins et al., 2008).

Having negative experiences at work may lead adults who differ from the norm to feel incapable of finding and keeping fulfilling employment (Heslin et al., 2012). This is particularly true of adults who have early negative experiences based on aspects of themselves that cannot be altered (Heslin et al., 2012). The combination of external

factors (like social ostracism), paired with internal factors (like communication difficulties), may be associated with an increase in feeling of discouragement about future employment prospects (Heslin et al., 2012). Adults who perceive that their opportunities are limited may simply retreat from the workplace (Heslin et al., 2012). Adults with AS may wish to work but give up on the possibility of career success after repeated negative outcomes in the workplace.

Asperger's Syndrome and Work Identity

Identity, generally, is developed as adults continuously strive to maintain a balance between being a unique person and a person that fits with the larger social group (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Identities develop in an ongoing process of interacting with the environment, receiving feedback, and responding to it (Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006). Identities are legitimized by members of one's social group (Pratt et al., 2006).

Work identity is the way people define themselves in relation to work (Dutton et al., 2010; Gini, 1998; Meister, Jehn, & Thatcher, 2014; Walsh & Gordon, 2008). The cycle of work identity starts with learning about the job (Pratt et al., 2006). Then, one receives feedback, which in turn, is used to improve their performance (Pratt et al., 2006). Self-assessments are formed by comparing oneself to their peers (Pratt et al., 2006). Work identity is created as people strive to reconcile who they are as individuals with who the workplace needs them to be (Pratt et al., 2006; Saayman & Crafford, 2011; Wallace, 2002). This process is social in nature, and thus may be discouraging for adults with AS, who by virtue of their disability may not receive affirmations or be perceived as fully competent due to differences in social functioning (Pratt et al., 2006).

Dissonance occurs when the way that a person perceives themselves and their contributions at work does not match the perceptions of others (Meister et al., 2014). This dissonance is associated with negative personal outcomes like stress and anxiety, which may then affect future performance and job satisfaction (Kira et al., 2014; Meister et al., 2014). Sometimes these differences in perceptions are intentional, as when a person deliberately conceals an identity or works to appear different from their true selves in order to fit in at work (Meister et al., 2014). For example, adults with AS may choose not to disclose their condition at work and may engage in behaviors aimed at trying to fit in socially. When perception differences are unintentional, the person may respond negatively or feel internal turmoil (Meister et al., 2014).

Several possible responses for reducing this dissonance are possible. One response is to try to improve performance (Kira et al., 2014; Pratt et al., 2006). If differences in perceptions of performance are due to social skills and misunderstandings in communication, the potential for improving performance may be limited. Alternatively, a person may work to correct others' incongruent views by pointing out their accomplishments (Meister et al., 2014). Another reaction is to redefine oneself according to others' perceptions (Meister et al., 2014). In the case of adults with AS, this could mean seeing themselves in a more negative light, which could lead to depression or discouragement. Another way is to accept that the perceptions of others do not match their own views of their capabilities (Meister et al., 2014). This acceptance may occur if other efforts to resolve the differences in perceptions have

failed. When people are able to align their own positive perceptions of their work capabilities with others' perceptions, the outcome is a positive work identity (Kira & Balkin, 2014; Meister et al., 2014).

Positive Work Identity

Positive identity construction is studied less often than negative identity processes (Dutton et al., 2010). Research about positive work identity is valuable, given its ability to shed light on the mechanisms that adults may use to adjust to the work environment (Dutton et al., 2010). The development of positive work identity is associated with feelings of belonging to a larger group (Saayman & Crafford, 2011). It also provides adults with coping skills, flexibility, motivation, creativity, and access to knowledge (Dutton et al., 2010). The development of a positive work identity ultimately influences the way a person performs at work (Walsh & Gordon, 2008).

Much of the existing research about adults with AS emphasizes the negative antecedents and consequences of stigma and disclosure that adults with AS may experience. This article acknowledges these concerns while also discussing strategies that adults with AS may use in the process of developing positive work identity.

Positive Attributes and Feedback Loops

Adults with AS tend to have a low sense of self-efficacy, or belief in their capabilities, when it comes to work (Lorenz & Heinitz, 2014; Lorenz et al., 2016). One element of developing a positive work identity is recognizing one's strengths and using them to create a positive sense of work identity (Dutton et al., 2010). For example, though they may work in many industries and job types, adults with AS may be highly skilled at visual and technical tasks (Baldwin et al., 2014). They may also have positive qualities like "honesty, efficiency, precision, consistency, low absenteeism, and a disinterest in 'office politics'." (Baldwin et al., 2014, p. 2440; Richards, 2012). Recognizing and using these positive aspects of themselves is one way that adults with AS can enhance their work-related social identities (Dutton et al., 2010). This includes positively framing the personal traits that differentiate them from others while reframing or minimizing negative traits (Clair et al., 2005; Dutton et al., 2010).

Self-selection plays a role in work identity development (Gerber & Price, 2003; Walsh & Gordon, 2008). Adults with AS need to find workplaces that fit them well (Fast, 2004; Richards, 2012). Seeking out work that better fits with the strengths and weaknesses of AS reduces the effort that has to be expended on strategies to align internal and external perceptions of one's work (Meister et al., 2014). The types of jobs applied for can be chosen based on requirements that play to the strengths of adults with AS while minimizing exposure to duties that relate to one's weaknesses. Work that requires careful attention to detail, sequencing of tasks or strict adherence to deadlines and schedules may be preferred. This may increase positive relationships at work as hurt feelings and discomfort over competing views of oneself decrease (Meister et al., 2014).

Adults with AS may also choose the jobs and organizations with which they affiliate, focusing on those with attributes that seem most likely to enhance development of a positive work identity (Madaus, Gerber, & Price, 2008; Walsh & Gordon, 2008). They can investigate a company's reputation for inclusion of adults with disabilities, which

could impact the choice to apply for positions. Given the relationship between positive work identity and characteristics that relate to stronger work performance, aligning themselves with employers that are known to be supportive of disabled adults could result in improved performance outcomes.

Employers are increasingly including disability in their definitions of diversity, which may be viewed as a positive sign of progress (Shore et al., 2006). It is also notable that larger companies have better track records for ADA accommodation (Gerber & Price, 2003). Fortunately, some employers also pride themselves on their inclusion of adults with disabilities (Gerber & Price, 2003). Identifying companies with strong inclusion and accommodation practices may help adults with AS to self-select potential workplaces.

Adults with AS without a college degree or with a history of job changes may have limited options for self-selecting into careers or organizations that fit their positive traits. One alternative may be self-employment, which would allow the adult with AS to have greater control over their work environment. For those that have the resources to pursue jobs that capitalize on their abilities, the opportunity to channel their efforts into work that emphasizes their strengths can enhance the work identity process. For those that do not, the development of positive work identity will hinge on decisions about how to deal with the work environment that is accessible to them.

Working toward establishing a better fit with internal and external requirements is also part of the developmental process (Dutton et al., 2010). The development of positive social identity involves a continuous feedback loop based on interactions with others (Walsh & Gordon, 2008). This implies that adults with AS may need to seek explicit feedback more often to help identify and manage unnoticed behaviors that are impacting their work. This could help bridge the gap between internal and external perceptions, providing a basis for improvement in the workplace. This does imply reaching out to supervisors more frequently, which may be difficult for some adults with AS to do.

Alternatively, they may seek support and feedback by working with a mentor (Skelton & Moore, 1999), which could be set up by a trusted friend or family member. Mentoring enables adults to learn adaptation skills from others who have successfully navigated the workplace (Skelton & Moore, 1999). Adults with AS may be able to find mentors inside the workplace, though targeted mentoring is also available through autism-specific support organizations.

Disclosure and Stigma

Meshing aspects of multiple identities is also part of the process of developing positive work identity (Dutton et al., 2010; Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). This involves reducing conflict between one's personal and work identities so that they are in harmony (Dutton et al., 2010). One way to do that is by expressing one's genuine personal identities in the workplace (Dutton et al., 2010). The ideal outcome is increased disclosure and authenticity, though for adults with AS this issue is complicated by a number of contingencies.

Unlike most physical disabilities, AS is not readily apparent to others (Santuzzi et al., 2014). The need to make a conscious choice about whether or not to disclose

a stigmatized invisible identity is a unique concern not faced by most adults with physical disabilities (Clair et al., 2005; Ragins, 2008). The decision to disclose a hidden disability such as AS at work has been compared with the challenge of revealing other hidden identities (Davidson & Henderson, 2010).

Most adults with invisible disabilities do not choose to disclose them at work (Madaus et al., 2008; Neely & Hunter, 2014; Parr, Hunter, & Ligon, 2013). Adults with invisible disabilities may try to hide them to avoid stigma and potential misunderstanding (Clair et al., 2005). Stigmas are negative, undesirable associations that are made with a group of people who differ from the norm in some way (Heslin et al., 2012; McLaughlin, Bell, & Stringer, 2004). A stigma may impact adult acceptance and therefore should be considered when making the decision to conceal or disclose AS in the workplace (McLaughlin et al., 2004). The stigmas associated with adults with autism may make adults with AS reluctant to disclose their disorder at work (Davidson & Henderson, 2010; Krieger et al., 2012). Choosing to disclose a potentially stigmatized invisible identity like AS may also be associated with increased concerns about discrimination at work (Johnson & Joshi, 2014; Ragins, 2008).

Adults with AS also may be reluctant to disclose their disability at work because of concerns about reputation and retaliation (Krieger et al., 2012). Many adults either do not believe that brain-based disorders like AS are "real", or they have irrational fears about people with neurologically-based disorders (Patton, 2009; Ragins, 2008). One study found that 33% of surveyed adults attributed brain-based disorders to "emotional weakness" rather than biological brain development (Patton, 2009). This misattribution may be a source of discomfort for adults with AS and a reason to conceal their disability.

Some adults with AS choose to "pass" by making a careful study of the behavior of neurotypical individuals and then copying their behaviors (Davidson & Henderson, 2010). However, concealing an invisible identity can have a negative psychological impact (Ragins, 2008). The decision to pass, while influenced by concerns about stigma and acceptance, can have unintended negative consequences on performance (DeJordy, 2008). Social isolation may occur when adults choose not to disclose hidden identities (Clair et al., 2005). Social isolation is already a key concern in the workplace for adults with AS, so it is possible that hiding their disability compounds it. Hiding an invisible identity is also associated with an increased risk of stress, depression, and other health concerns (Santuzzi et al., 2014). Efforts to "pass" may also deplete cognitive resources that are needed for work productivity (Beatty & Kirby, 2006; Clair et al., 2005; DeJordy, 2008; Dutton et al., 2010; Santuzzi et al., 2014). Given the cognitive basis of AS, disclosure may be an essential part of increasing positive work outcomes.

Being able to safely disclose and then define the disorder to others may help to clear up misconceptions (Gerber & Price, 2003). This may be particularly important, given the lack of awareness that others may have about adults with AS. Highly functional adults are perceived by their coworkers as essentially "normal", and their negative behaviors are often incorrectly attributed to character flaws rather than to neurological differences (Patton, 2009). In a recent study, 66% of respondents with AS say that they would like to have more support in the workplace, including more understanding and

respect (Baldwin et al., 2014). Disclosure has the potential to help with acceptance at work and may make it easier for supervisors and peers to separate the work from the person (Davidson & Henderson, 2010; Gerber & Price, 2003; Meister et al., 2014). Disclosure may also pave the way for training supervisors and peers about the needs of the employee with AS (Wilczynski et al., 2013).

Of particular concern is the need for people with a disability to be perceived as capable of performing a job well (McLaughlin et al., 2004). Proactive disclosure may yield positive results, while reactive disclosure may lead to negative results (Gerber & Price, 2003). The distinction between these two concepts is that proactive disclosure precedes work-related issues, and reactive disclosure follows work-related issues (Madaus et al., 2008). Reactive disclosure could pose a problem for adults with AS who choose not to disclose their disability early in their employment. Should they display the characteristic social issues prior to disclosure, the odds of gaining acceptance after disclosure could be reduced. People with invisible disabilities may therefore wish to proactively disclose their status in order to maintain control over the perceptions of others (Clair et al, 2005). People with AS may also prefer to disclose it since authenticity tends to be a highly regarded value among adults with AS (Krieger et al., 2012).

However, due to the stigma already attached to AS, early disclosure could negatively impact views of the competency of adults with AS. The more negative the stigma surrounding an invisible identity, the more negative the likely result of disclosing that identity (Chaudoir & Fischer, 2010; Ragins, 2008). Adults with AS should therefore consider the goal being sought and the potential negative impact of disclosure on their work identity (Chaudoir & Fischer, 2010; Learmonth & Humphreys, 2011).

When adults with AS decide to disclose it at work, disclosure is complicated by struggles with social and communication skills (Davidson & Henderson, 2010; Johnson & Joshi, 2014). Knowing when and to whom to disclose may be even more challenging than for a neurotypical person with a different type of hidden identity (Davidson & Henderson, 2010). It may be helpful to recruit a neurotypical family member or friend to assist with the decision and plan how to carry out the disclosure (Davidson & Henderson, 2010; Hane, 2004).

The context of the individual work environment should be weighed into the decision about whether or not to disclose a person's disability status. Certain aspects of the workplace are cited repeatedly for fostering positive reception of disclosure. A supportive organization that enforces strong anti-discrimination policies can encourage disclosure (Clair et al., 2005; Chaudoir & Fischer, 2010; Ragins, 2008). Company culture that actively promotes diversity may also be important (Gerber & Price, 2003). Having a positive, trusting relationship with a manager or having a manager that is known to have the same disorder could also impact an adult's disclosure decision (Clair et al., 2005; Chaudoir & Fischer, 2010; Ragins, 2008). The presence of coworkers that are known to have AS and have been accepted could also signal that the workplace is safe for disclosure (Clair et al., 2005; Ragins, 2008).

ADA Accommodation

One can disclose an invisible disability without requesting accommodation, but actually receiving accommodation can help adults with AS improve their work

performance. To receive workplace accommodation and protection from discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1991 (ADA) and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, a person must have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder prior to having problems on the job, and the employer must be aware that the person has autism (Santuzzi et al., 2014). Thus, adults with AS are responsible for disclosing their condition at work in order to receive protection under the ADA (Madaus et al., 2008; Neely & Hunter, 2014; Santuzzi et al., 2014).

Accommodations for physical disabilities may be more obvious than those for invisible disabilities such as AS (Neely & Hunter, 2014). Each adult with AS has a varying degree of symptoms which interact with different work environments in unique ways. In general, adults with AS tend to prefer work environments where the instructions and expectations are clearly defined (Lorenz et al., 2016, Wilczynski et al., 2013). Putting performance expectations, work assignments and deadlines in writing may be helpful. The freedom to focus on one task at a time, rather than multi-tasking, is also important (Lorenz et al., 2016). Being placed in a job that is a good fit and in a structured environment contributes to job satisfaction and positive outcomes at work for adults with AS (Scott et al., 2015; Wilczynski et al., 2013).

A comprehensive list of potential accommodations that can be offered to adults with AS in the U.S. are outlined by the Job Accommodation Network (Higgins et al., 2008; Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2013). Some suggestions are simple and free, such as giving adults with AS breaks away from their work area and dividing work assignments into smaller tasks (Higgins et al., 2008). Allowing flex-time and working from home could also improve performance for some adults with AS. Other accommodations, like installing cubicle walls, providing coaching, or conducting company-wide training on disabilities, are more expensive and time-consuming. Employers may resist providing accommodations to adults with AS because in a tight job market it is less expensive and easier to simply hire a qualified person that does not have a disability.

Some of the suggested accommodations, like allowing adults with AS to use noise canceling headphones and communicate in writing, are well-suited for office environments. These accommodations may not be feasible in jobs where ongoing verbal communication is required however. Adults with AS who lack post-secondary training or education may not have the qualifications to work in office settings where the environment can more easily be altered. Perceptions of fairness may also be an issue when accommodating adults with all types of disabilities (McLaughlin et al., 2004). Disabled workers who request workplace accommodations may be seen as weak, which can increase their stigmatization (Baldridge & Swift, 2013). This is pronounced when accommodations are made for adults with invisible disabilities, who may be perceived as receiving preferential treatment (Clair et al., 2005; Patton, 2009). Providing a private office or allowing a person with AS to work from home, for example, may be viewed as a privilege in some workplaces. Without an explanation—which privacy concerns dictate that coworkers are not entitled to receive—jealousy may arise. Given the tendency of people to discount invisible disabilities, this may occur even when coworkers are informed of the reasons for the accommodation. Accommodation may include training coworkers, which may increase awareness and sensitivity around

issues of disability in the workplace (Neely & Hunter, 2014).

Employers, however, may not want to spend extra time assisting people with AS with socialization, communication, and instructions, or providing sensory accommodations (Biggs et al., 2010; Richards, 2012). Helping managers to see the positive aspects of employees with AS plays a role in the accommodations that could be provided (Higgins et al., 2008). Employers are more likely to approve of disability accommodations for employees with solid records of good performance (Patton, 2009). This suggests the benefit of raising the issue of accommodation early in the working relationship. Employees are more likely to form a positive work identity when their leader shows compassion toward them, and desirable work outcomes are then more likely to follow (Moon et al., 2016). When disclosure is met with accommodation, and that accommodation occurs without resentment, employees and their supervisors are more likely to benefit than when the accommodation is grudging.

Conclusion

Within the autism spectrum, adults who have higher IQs and thus higher intellectual functioning are less likely than adults with lower intellectual functioning to be employed or involved in a meaningful daytime activity (Taylor & Seltzer, 2011). Having a higher IQ and being perceived as more capable, which is the case with adults with AS, may limit access to support systems that are designed to help adults on the autism spectrum transition into employment (Bonete et al., 2015; Wilczynski et al., 2013). That leaves them to wade through concerns about job selection, disclosure, and accommodation on their own.

Adults with AS who are able to successfully compensate for their disability through self-initiated strategies that focus on strengths are able to develop positive work identities without disclosure and accommodation. In that case, they may be well-advised to conceal their AS at work (Krieger et al., 2012). For other adults with AS, their peers and supervisors may notice that they are different from the norm (Davidson & Henderson, 2010; Johnson & Joshi, 2014). In that case, disclosure may be helpful. Either way, the appropriate balance between the need to avoid stigma and the desire to enhance work performance must be determined by the individual (Dutton et al., 2010; Shore et al., 2011).

Although employers may be concerned about the capabilities of adults with AS, research suggests that both affected adults and their employers can bridge gaps in ability by working together to leverage strengths and minimize weaknesses. Human Resource managers are largely unaware of invisible neurological disorders (Patton, 2009). Creating a supportive workplace rests on understanding the makeup of the human capital in the organization. The prevalence of AS and its impact in the workplace implies a need for better understanding. The need to train managers and supervisors at all levels in organizations about AS and the handling of disclosure and accommodation is apparent, but it must be preceded by training employees in the HR department. The development of strong policies supporting inclusion of adults with invisible disabilities is also warranted. As HR practices are formalized to comply with laws, historically marginalized groups should have greater career opportunities (Fuller,

Edelman, & Matusik, 2000; Konrad & Linnehan, 1995; Yang & Konrad, 2011).

Many of the costs affiliated with accommodating adults with AS to improve performance are nominal. Given the potential for a high return on investment due to increased productivity, employers should be interested in providing accommodations for adults that need them (Gerber & Price, 2003). The ability to perform detail-oriented work that has been reliably demonstrated by many people with AS, as well as their tendency toward values like honesty and loyalty, should inspire employers to view adults with AS as potential assets. Employers that have already established mentoring programs, social support systems, counseling, and accommodation practices should publicize these services to raise awareness of their availability.

Work identities collectively impact the performance of an organization, implying that organizations benefit from enhancing the development of work identities for adults with AS (Walsh & Gordon, 2008). Positive work identity is more likely to develop when both the employee and the employer strive to integrate both work and personal identities in the workplace (Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). In the case of adults with AS, strategies that include aligning strengths with job requirements, finding an employer receptive to employees with disabilities, and receiving environmental accommodations are all elements that can lead to the development of a positive work identity.

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