

Leveling the employment playing field for people with autism: Does diversity training help?

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Overview

Individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have high rates of underemployment and unemployment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). One significant barrier to employment for people with ASD is the job interview (Whelpley & May, 2022). Although employers perceive candidates with ASD as qualified, they tend to reject those candidates because of atypical interpersonal and social interactions (see Fig. 1)

This is true in situations in which evaluators are naïve to candidates' ASD diagnosis and have no training about neurodiversity.

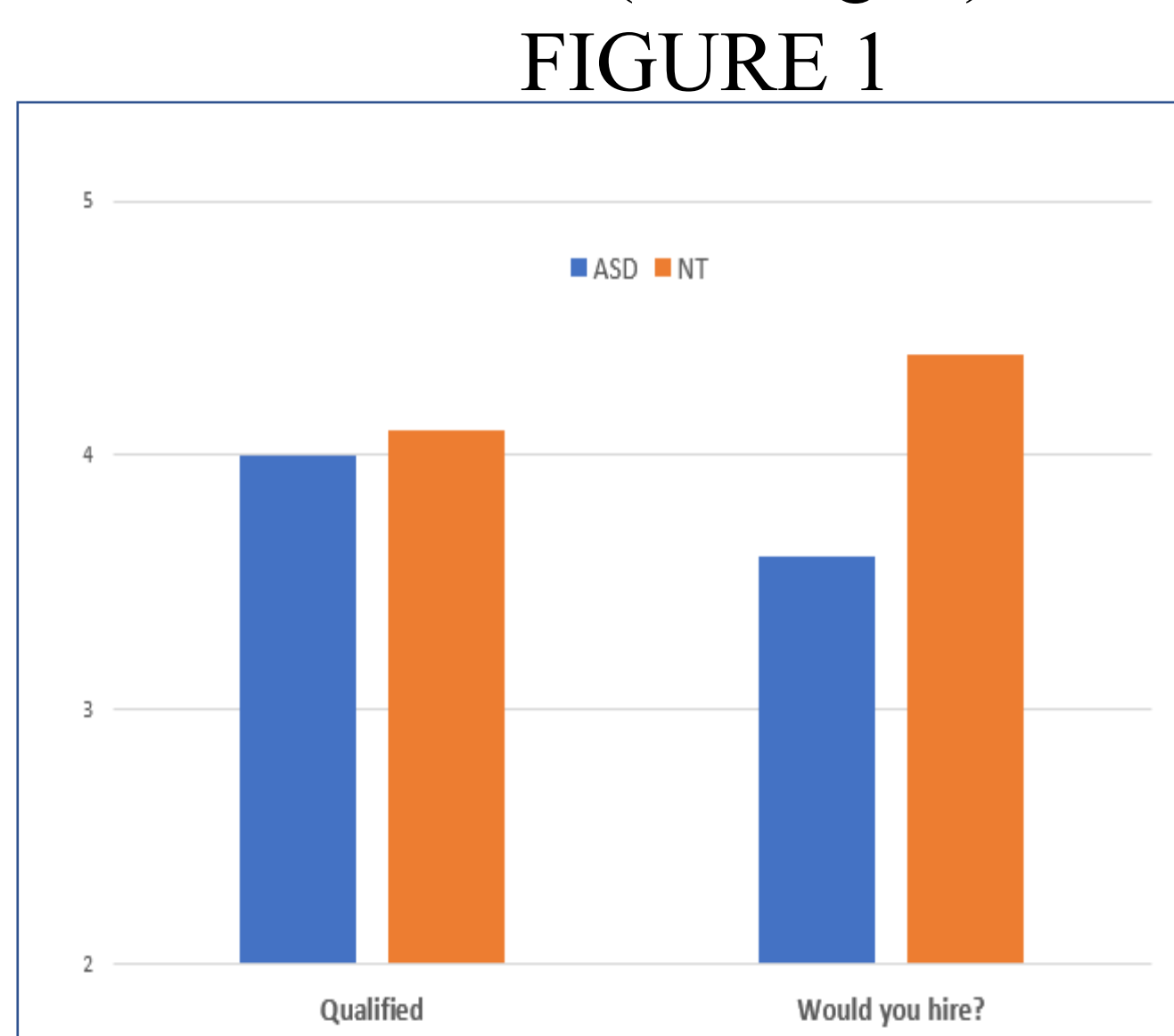
Our study assessed the impact of training and diagnosis disclosure in a job interview setting. We explored whether providing neurodiversity training to employers and having candidates disclose an ASD diagnosis would improve hiring outcomes for people with ASD.

In our study, college students with and without an ASD diagnosis engaged in mock job interviews. The interviews were videotaped and were later watched and evaluated by raters. Each rater first completed a neurodiversity training + quiz before watching the interview videos. Before watching each interview video, raters were informed about whether the candidate did (or did not) have ASD. Raters evaluated each candidate on nine social dimensions. They also indicated whether each candidate was qualified for the job, and how likely they were to hire each candidate. Our findings have important implications for both employers and individuals with ASD in the job market.

Design

Participants were college students who first completed a 30-minute online neurodiversity training. They then watched taped mock job interviews and evaluated them. The interviews included candidates with and without ASD. All interviewees were college students. There were 30 mock job interviews in all, and each rater evaluated 10 videos (5 ASD; 5 NO ASD).

Before watching each video, raters were informed as to whether the candidate did (or did not) have an ASD diagnosis.



Autism Training

Training consisted of two videos:

1. Overview of Autism
 - autism diagnosis criteria
 - first-hand video of autistic adults
 - common traits of those with autism



2. How to better interact with an autistic individual
 - Video made by a professor with ASD
 - Common misconceptions about autism
 - Recommendations for allies



Each video was followed by a short quiz assessing knowledge of the material. Students had to score 100% to proceed.

Interview Rating Task

After completing the neurodiversity training, participants watched and rated 10 mock job interview videos:
5 videos of candidates with ASD
5 videos of candidates without ASD



Using a seven-point Likert scale, participants rated each candidate on several measures, including:

likeability trustworthiness attractiveness
awkwardness confidence qualifications

Additionally, participants rated:

- The overall performance of the candidate
- How likely they would be to hire the individual

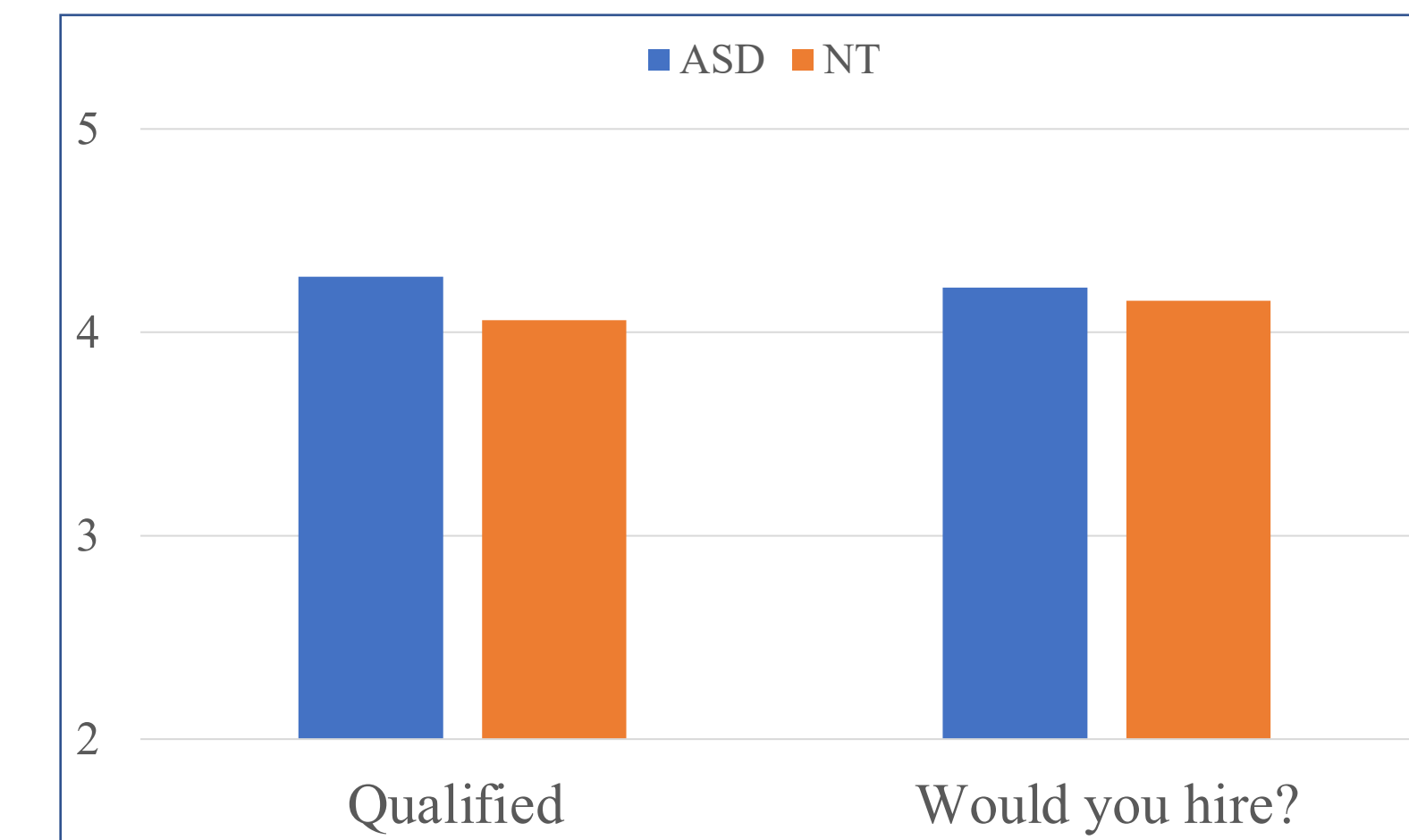
Results

As can be seen in Figure 2, even with training and diagnostic disclosure, evaluators continued to rate candidates with ASD poorly on some social dimensions relative to neurotypical (NT) candidates.

FIGURE 2

However, as can be seen in Figure 3, the autism training and diagnostic disclosure did have an impact on perceptions of candidates' qualifications, as well as on the likelihood that they would be hired. After completing the neurodiversity training, and with knowledge that a job candidate was neurodivergent, raters perceived candidates with ASD as slightly more qualified than NT candidates and were equally likely to hire them.

FIGURE 3



Discussion

Many aspects of social interaction are atypical for individuals with ASD, including vocal prosody, facial expression, eye contact, and gestures. As a result, observers who are unfamiliar with ASD often judge people with ASD as odd or awkward. Previous research indicates that as a result of these judgments, NT observers are less likely to hire people with ASD after a job interview, even when they perceive candidates with ASD to be qualified (Whelpley & May, 2022). Our findings suggest a way of leveling the playing field for employees with ASD. Specifically, we found that evaluators who completed a 30-minute training about ASD, and who were aware of a candidate's ASD diagnosis before the interview, were equally likely to hire candidates with and without ASD. To combat disability bias in the hiring process, we thus recommend neurodiversity training for employers involved in the hiring process. With that training in place, we encourage candidates with ASD to disclose their diagnosis.