

Autism and Employment: Youth YouTube Vloggers' Perspectives

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### **Abstract**

This research focused on young people with autism spectrum (AS) who share their first voice perspectives in relation to employment as described on their YouTube channels. Previous research shows that people with AS experience unemployment or underemployment, including a paucity of workplace accommodations. Therefore, there is a requirement to explore employment outcomes for this marginalized group in order to increase their quality of life, economic independence, and social integration and ultimately benefit both employers and employees. This thesis examines YouTube videos of youth vloggers (15-24 years old) who identify as autists and whose content is in English. The thesis uses a media content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to collect data from the YouTube experiences with employment using an inductive approach by coding and categorizing the data. The popularization of the Internet allows people with AS to be heard and it is a valuable source to listen to their lived experiences. The findings show that the youth in this study experience workplace barriers, such as: standardized interview process, lack of workplace accommodations and societal discrimination. These challenges led to various mental health problems, job termination and decreased quality of life. However, the youth vloggers also discuss different coping techniques for positive employment outcomes, including the option of self-employment. While contributing to the existing literature, this study also demonstrates the importance of accessing the first voice perspectives of youth with AS to ensure equitable access to their employment.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### ***Introduction***

For most young people, adolescence is filled with new challenges, responsibilities, and opportunities. One significant component of transitioning from youth to adulthood is gaining employment and, for autistic youth

this thesis uses a media content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to collect data from the YouTube an inductive approach by coding and categorizing the data.

Employment is a significant factor in a person's quality of life. It offers an opportunity for independent living, a way to contribute to the community and meet a person's needs for inclusion. Autism scholars have identified that employed autists often experience economic, emotional and health benefits compared to unemployed peers (Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2004; Wei et al., 2015). Research similarly indicates that autist employees usually pay close attention to details, enjoy specific tasks that other workers may find monotonous or socially isolating, and bring a different view to subjects, providing innovative answers to everyday obstacles (Hagner & Cooney, 2005; Jacob et al., 2015). Baldwin et al. (2014) suggest that autist employees have high levels of trustworthiness, integrity, honesty, work ethic, and quality of work. However, Roux et al. (2015) also state that autist youth are more socially isolated and economically disadvantaged than peers with other developmental disabilities, which leads to increased complexity when seeking employment opportunities. They have low participation in postsecondary education and competitive employment (Rioux et al., 2015). Specifically, autist youth tend to work in temporary, low-wage, low-skill positions, are laid off or fired at a high rate and have the lowest rate of engagement since high school among all other disability groups (Roux et al., 2013). Autists in the workforce experience periods of unemployment or underemployment, with their skills and education being underutilized (Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2004). There is often a lack of specific vocational support, traditional job application and interviewing processes, and limited workplace accommodations (Lopez & Keenan, 2014; Lorenz et al., 2016). Therefore, it is important to explore the experiences of autist youth in relation to accessing and maintaining

employment. This thesis aims to explore and understand their experiences since the research shows that autistic youth face various barriers when seeking employment.

Employer attitudes toward hiring individuals with disabilities play a crucial role in maintaining employment for autists (Hernandez et al., 2000). Sasson et al. (2017) and Sasson & Morrison (2019) show that adults, in general, perceive autists with less positive first impressions. When faced with the process of hiring disabled people, many employers appear conflicted and hesitant to do so (Copeland, 2007; Hernandez et al., 2000). The reason may be explained by lack of knowledge and misconceptions regarding disability (Ju et al., 2013), such as the assumption that hiring disabled individuals results in higher costs due to weaker productivity (Graffam et al., 2002). These challenges mostly make it troublesome for autists to find employment that will accommodate their needs and, secondly, allow them to stay at the same place long enough for career growth. This study shows the potential reasons behind the issues mentioned above from  
tive.

### ***Research Question and Aim***

The research question guiding my thesis is: What are the employment experiences of autistic youth vloggers (age 15-24) as described on their YouTube channels? Given the limited employment opportunities, there is a requirement to further explore autistic youths' first voice narratives about their experiences with seeking, obtaining and maintaining employment to improve society's understanding of the given topic. This thesis aims to understand the first voice perspectives from autistic youth as it relates to employment. I examine YouTube videos of autistic youth vloggers (15-24 years old) whose content is in English. I use a media content analysis to collect data from the YouTube social media platform and analyze their experiences with



employment using an inductive approach by coding and categorizing the data. The next section of my thesis outlines the relevant literature to show the gaps of access that autists often experience in relation to employment, including the important role social media has for autist youth as a mechanism to share their first voice perspectives. I then turn to methodology used to support my study followed by the findings when analyzing the autist youth vlogger videos on employment.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

### *Medical Model*

Autism spectrum (AS) is represented by challenges in social communication and interaction across various contexts, including challenges in social reciprocity, nonverbal communicative behaviours used for social interaction, and skills in developing and understanding relationships (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Autism may occur across all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups, and males are usually diagnosed with autism four times more frequently than females; however, the reasons behind biological differences between the sexes are still unclear (Wood-Downie et al., 2020). There are three levels of AS recognized by the American Psychiatric Association (2013) individuals with Level 1 autism typically require little to no support in everyday routines; they have some challenges initiating social interactions, formerly known as high functioning autism in the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Level 2 is characterized by some challenges with verbal and nonverbal communication. Level 3 individuals require very substantial support, formerly known as low functioning autism. The change to the criteria with three levels of support demonstrates the heterogeneous nature of autism and the requirement to understand that all individuals experience autism differently (Reddington & Price, 2016). While I acknowledge the role of the medical model, it is essential to document that all autists experience their disability differently, and it is crucial to attend to the broader dimensions of experience beyond medical discourses (Reddington & Price, 2016, 2017). The medical model usually frames autism as a *problem, illness, or disorder* (Oliver, 2018). Such terms, in turn, indicate the requirement for 'treatment' or 'cure' (Pfeiffer et al., 2017) and place the removal of autism as the primary objective. Academics, practitioners and autist self-advocates argue against using the medical model to recognize autism

(Arnold, 2005; Beardon, 2007). Scholars debate whether autism is a neurological 'disorder,' 'difference' or a 'disability' (Beardon, 2007; Howlin, 2010), and the most accurate definition is still being examined (Barnes, 2012; Shakespeare, 2014; Solomon, 2020). For example, Rutter's (1996) study recognizes that a large portion of autism literature focuses on causes and treatments, not personal narratives. Other past studies (Kobayashi & Murata, 1992; Smith & Coleman, 1986; Smith, 1995) suggest that the significant factor contributing to the negative experiences and poor work outcomes for autists is the deficit in social interactions and executive functioning. Instead of discussing strengths and expertise, they illuminate autists' behavioural challenges, including tantrums, aggression, self-injury, ritualistic behaviours, as one of the main reasons for employment restrictions.

As stigma is a crucial barrier associated with autism (Gillespie-Lynch, 2017), atypical behaviours might produce higher levels of stigma than the actual label autism (Butler & Gillis, 2011). Brosnan & Mills (2016) show that stigma toward behaviours associated with autism is decreased when autists disclose their diagnosis. Shtayermman (2009) concludes that autist adolescents and young adults who appear more normal to society report more frequent experiences of stigma and victimization than their peers on the other end of the spectrum since they receive less attention and support due to being *high functioning*.

Gray (2002) similarly underlines the crucial effects of stigmatizing reactions from other members of society. Gray states that autism is not always apparent to the masses; however, it can substantially affect relationships with other people due to its low visibility. Therefore, it usually leads to stigmatizing responses from society because of the lack of more apparent justifications of disability that other conditions can display. Therefore, it is important to explore the first voice experiences of autists and to shift to disrupt the stigmatized constructs of autism that circulate

within medical discourses. This study aims to access first voice perspectives and bring forward new ways of understanding autism experience as it relates to employment. By learning directly from autistic youth in this thesis, we can begin to disrupt the stigma associated with their identities as it relates to employment. I turn to my theoretical framework and more employment-specific studies that show the experiences of the autistic community with employment barriers and the need to learn more about their experiences.

Given that individuals experience autism differently, it is important to locate a disability model that reflects the heterogeneous nature of disability experience as the medical model only provides a narrow understanding on autistic identity. In this study, I will apply the social model of disability as it aligns with thinking about all dimensions of experience. In this case, it creates a space to examine the barriers to employment for young autists. I will explain now my rationale for employing the social model followed by relevant literature on employment barriers for autists, including how social media can serve as a productive space to share their lived experiences.

### *Social Model*

The social model of disability is employed to support the framing of my thesis with a Union of Physically Impaired against Segregation (UPIAS) in the UK in the 1960-70s, whose aim was to reconstruct segregated facilities with opportunities for physically impaired people to engage fully in society, live independently, maintain employment, and have complete power over their lives. The UPIAS (1974/5) argues that disabled people are an oppressed group and that it is societal barriers that prevent them from full participation in society. The specific barriers are

related to physical, communication, structural, environmental, employment and attitudinal barriers. The model differentiates between impairment and disability, classifying the latter as a difficulty arising from a lack of fit between a body and the environment (Goering, 2015), and the former, as "nothing less than a description of the physical body" (Oliver, 2018). That is, impairment is understood as the medical diagnosis and signifier and disability as a term is understood as a social construct. The social model frames disability as something that is socially constructed. Disability is created by physical, organizational and attitudinal barriers and these can be changed and eliminated (Barnes, 2019). The social model of disability has challenged

disabled people experience. For example, autists are required to adjust to an environment that is not adjusted for them in the first place since society tends to ignore the difficulties autists frequently experience by creating social barriers to their employment (Graby, 2016). While autism was constructed out of a medical model, recent developments that facilitate social model ideas strive to lessen and remove the issues associated with the current medical discourse. The social model is implemented within this research as it acknowledges society's responsibility in disabling individuals, shifting issues away from the person and onto society. I will turn now to outline the history of accessing the narratives of autists as it is important to contextualize the barriers autists have experienced in relation to communication and advocacy.

### *Autist voices*

Historically, autism has been predominantly understood through medical and psychiatric models. Mainstream, clinical and parental interpretations of AS have supported the stereotypical portrayal of autists as antisocial, emotionless, and non-communicative (Szatmari, 2004), as a autobiographies of autist advocates, like Temple Grandin and David Eastham in the late 1980s changed the route of autism portrayal (Masschelein & Van Goidsenhoven, 2016). This genre is a form of autism textual self-representation (Rose, 2008) that allows individuals to share their voices about themselves and autism. These narratives demonstrate how autists "inhabit the identities that have been ascribed to them and how they appropriate and/or resist autist ascriptions in their efforts to promote their sense of personal well-being" (Nadesan, 2013, p. 179).

Furthermore, publicized AS autobiographies benefit a non-autist audience since "the authors seek to 'explain' the condition" (Murray, 2008, p. 5). Those narratives help autistic advocates to describe to non-autists their lived experiences and to understand their lives beyond medicalized discourses (Costa & Grinker, 2018). Thus, AS autobiographies form communication paths between autists and non-autists and produce new understandings on autistic identity (Davidson & Henderson, 2010, p. 464). For example, Shore (2003) encourages "greater mutual understanding among society of life on and slightly to the right of the autism spectrum" (p. 184). Prince-Hughes (2004) writes that "many high-functioning autistic people who are unable to communicate with others about the ringing swirl, shout across canyons of reality by writing" (p. 25-26). Other AS authors, including Lawson and Williams (Masschelein & Van Goidsenhoven, 2016), have also promoted written communication over verbal to account for the complexity of lived experience. Hacking (2009) suggests that "stories about people with autism, told by the people themselves" (p. 1467) are helpful to those who might have limited interactions with autists.

With the rise of the Internet, chatrooms, blogs, and now Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other websites connections to autistic worlds are becoming more readily accessible. The growing use of the internet has played a vital role in allowing autists to make their views, wishes and ways of perceiving themselves and their differences known worldwide (Boundy, 2008). Thus, what started as a way for autists to make their voices be heard, eventually developed into an influential autism and disability advocacy network. However, for those who identify as autists due to their intellectual, social and sensory background and experiences, living in a society largely dominated by those not on the spectrum still make many daily life aspects more challenging and complex (Beardon, 2007).

Autist scholars and self-advocates argue that misrepresenting challenges between autists and non-autists increases stigma and misconceptions towards the former (Gillespie-Lynch, 2017). Many autist youth and adults identify societal factors that contribute to challenges associated with autism (Kapp et al., 2013). Autists still feel that their voices are not heard (Milton & Bracher, 2013; Pellicano et al., 2014b) since most scholars show skepticism toward the possibility of shifting significant power to those diagnosed with autism (Pellicano et al., 2014a). The disempowerment of autists is apparent in the continuous portrayal of autism in ways that the autist community strongly opposes. Goodley & Moore's (2000) study recognizes the significance of individual voice. Despite their work focusing on learning disabilities, the study acknowledges researchers' role in supporting the voices of individuals and groups to be heard. This thesis was designed to listen to and present the lived experiences of young autists via their YouTube platforms. Enabling autist youth to have a voice that is not concentrated upon a medical or deficit model allows the matter to be shaped by real-life interpretations. Social media is an excellent space for autists to share their first voice experiences.

### *Autism and social media*

Previous studies have shown that the Internet is a significant resource enabling autists to voice their ideas and experiences (Brownlow, 2007; Jones et al., 2001). As mentioned previously, the voices of autists are often left uncaptured, which excludes them from making decisions about their lives. Direct knowledge from autists is fundamental to providing quality services (ASHA, 2005) and for helping evaluate academic sources (Pellicano & Stears, 2011). The popularization of the Internet allows autists to be heard with fewer barriers through blogs, vlogs, forums, and other forms of social media (Brownlow & O'Dell, 2006; Davidson, 2008;



Donaldson et al., 2017; Pellicano & Stears, 2011). It has also been credited with facilitating the emergence of autism culture, (Davidson, 2008) self-advocacy and being an essential means of communication by which autists may offer each other emotional and practical support (Dekker, 2006). For instance, the Internet and social media are crucial standards of communication that allow avoidance of non-verbal cues that can appear confusing for some autists, thus creating a safe platform for social interactions. One of the most popular tools for expressing autist voices is blogging.

Blogging and blogs are potentially secure, personal Internet spaces where bloggers can control structural elements of their content, communication and identity (Schmidt, 2007). Ortega (2013) regards blogging as a potentially significant identity-building environment for autists. Boyd (2011) also discusses that blogs are representations of a genre where authors can manage online identity as both their digital self-representation and "a space for the embodied digital individual" (p. 49). Therefore, blogs can assist in one's self-expression and be a form of social practice. While other studies have collected data from discussion posts, written blogs, (Brownlow & O'Dell, 2006) and homepage websites (Jones et al., 2003), this study is one of the few to analyze video blog narratives of young autists.

YouTube is the most dominant online platform for adolescents (Chaffey, 2020), and it is a valuable source to listen to people's experiences (Rottenberg et al., 2007). For example, Sangeorzan et al. (2019) explored the individual perspective of severe mental illness shared on a YouTube video blog, also known as a vlog<sup>2</sup>. The results show that sharing their experiences on mental illness through vlogging may have positive outcomes, such as peer support, increased self-efficacy and reduced self- and societal stigma. Angulo-Jimenez & DeThorne (2019)

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<sup>2</sup> A vlog is a weblog (or blog) that contains video content (Sharpened Productions, n.d.). The term vlog can refer to a whole online collection of videos or to a single video in such a collection (Sanchez-Cortes et al., 2015).

analyzed the representation of autism among chosen YouTube videos to expand the field's understanding of autism through exploring the first-webloggers (vloggers). For this study, YouTube was chosen due to its reported popularity among autistic youth and adults (Davidson, 2008). Therefore, it is helpful to use YouTube as a data source to examine the experiences of autistic youth for this study's purposes.

Autists can create videos themselves without directly socializing with others, making their values and matters heard globally (Bromley, 2008). Consequently, they can use social media as a platform to educate others about autism and share their own experiences and challenges (D'Auria, 2010). Managing their content on social media allows autists to control their environment and communicate with others on their terms (Grandin, 2010). Thus, considering the positive engagement of autistic self-advocates with the social media platforms, researchers suggest more autism research in virtual spaces rather than gathering information in a more traditional, face-to-face setting (Brownlow, 2010; Davidson, 2008; Jones et al., 2003). Given the low employment opportunities, there is also a requirement to further explore autistic youths' first voice narratives about their employment experiences and challenges to improve society's understanding of the given topic which I aim to address in my thesis.

### ***Employment challenges***

The employment rates for working-age individuals identified as autists are the lowest of any disability category in Canada, with only 21.5% of people 15-64 years of age on the spectrum engaged in the labour force (Zwicker et al., 2017). Recent assessments indicate that approximately one million autistic youth will enter adulthood over the following decade (Shattuck et al. 2020). Unfortunately, many of these young adults will face inadequate access to the

employment opportunities, experiences and services, as well as misconceptions and stigma towards their diagnosis to obtain employment (Shattuck et al., 2011; Taylor & Henninger, 2015).

Past studies (Kobayashi & Murata, 1992; Smith & Coleman, 1986; Smith, 1995) suggest one factor contributing to the negative experiences and poor work outcomes for autists is the focus on deficit in social interactions and executive functioning instead of strengths and expertise. Those studies illuminate autists' behavioural challenges, including tantrums, aggression, self-injury, ritualistic behaviours, as reasons for employment restrictions. Human resource practices often concentrate on social skills and teamwork, even when those are not essential for the workplace thus creating a barrier for autists, who are perceived as *socially awkward*, to gain employment (Richards, 2012). Low employment rates for the autist population have usually been connected to deficits in social interactions, the presence of restrictive, repetitive behaviours, and deficits in other workplace-related skills (Hendricks, 2010). However, the impact of external factors, such as: the employer organizational culture, perception of added costs to support disability, and adverse reactions and stereotypes of staff towards disabled coworkers are also essential to consider (Chan et al., 2010; Erickson et al., 2014).

Autist employees can usually provide a workplace with valuable skills and abilities, often performing well in tasks requiring systematic data processing and a high degree of accuracy and repetition (Baldwin et al., 2014; de Schipper et al., 2016; Walsh et al., 2014). Concentrating on these skills (Clifton & Harter, 2003) and the good work environment (Lorenz & Heinitz, 2014) could help reach successful results for autist employees in a variety of job settings (Hendricks, 2010). However, despite growing information on the potential contribution that autists can bring to the workplace, they still face many barriers on each step of employment (Hendricks, 2010; Howlin & Moss, 2012; Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2004). Previous research demonstrates that autists

are more likely to lose their jobs for behavioural and social reasons rather than the inability to complete job tasks (Bury et al., 2020; Dew & Alan, 2007; Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2004; Solomon, 2020; Wilczynski et al., 2013). Recent research focuses on identifying the roles of external factors in defining successful employment outcomes from the viewpoint of autistic young adults seeking employment. For example, Sarrett (2017) demonstrates how public perceptions of autism create more challenges for autists who seek employment. Sarrett (2017) reports that autistic youth and adults often appear conflicted about disclosing their diagnosis to employers and colleagues because of the potential stigmatization and misinterpretation of autism. They also express frustration with the medical model and relevant rehabilitation services that often serve to change the individual to fit the workplace needs instead of developing accommodating work environments where the person could thrive. Hurlbutt & Chalmers (2004) interviewed six autistic adults who reported high anxiety levels due to trying to fit in socially with the neurotypical world. They mainly connected the job challenges to the social needs of the work atmosphere. One participant stated that the most fundamental work rule was to get along with coworkers since "jobs usually are 80% social and 20% work" (p. 219). McMahon et al. (2020) also assessed the employability of autistic youth whose performance included two details during a job interview: the presence of AS characteristics and disclosure of diagnosis. This assessment led to stigmatizing their identities and impeded their work opportunities. These studies are compatible with Gillies (2012), who discusses the consequences that attitudinal and structural barriers could have on disabled individuals' capability to obtain and maintain employment. For example, some autistic participants expressed confidence and inclusivity through postsecondary education and the astonishing lack of acceptance and support in the workplace. This research aligns with the social

model of disability that addresses the structural barriers society creates for autists when accessing employment.

Although economic circumstances and employer attitudes significantly affect job opportunities, employment outcomes can be improved by providing access to autism-specific social, behavioural, and work support (Schaller & Yang, 2005; Wehman et al., 2013). In addition, specific employer practices have been correlated with improved results for autist employees, such as collegial autism-specific knowledge, positive work atmosphere, and access to accommodations (Chan et al., 2010; Hayward et al., 2018). For example, Wehman et al. (2012) investigated the results of supported<sup>3</sup> employment for young autist adults. Thirty-three autist adults were enrolled in a supported employment program with the average age being 20 years. The study highlights how autists initially require a high-intensity level of support on job and social skills; however, all assigned individuals reached an appropriate level of independence within a year of support.

Social skills and supports for the workplace are receiving greater attention in the literature (Gorenstein et al., 2020). While employment support service providers should often offer autists social supports to effectively increase the chances of obtaining and maintaining employment (Ham et al., 2014), relatively few vocational rehabilitation counsellors and other service providers have a thorough understanding of services that are helpful in designing thriving work environment for autists (Dew & Alan, 2007). This thesis aims to contribute to this literature and locate new findings on how autist youth experience employment via a social media content

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<sup>3</sup> Supported employment helps disabled individuals find and maintain employment. Supported employment strives to incorporate clients in competitive rather than sheltered employment; job arrangements are personalized based on client choices, strengths, and experience. Clients are supported in finding and applying for a job and are provided with continuous individual support in the workplace (Mavranezouli et al., 2014).

analysis of autistic youth vlogs. I will now outline the methods I used to meet the aims of my research.

### **Chapter 3. Methodology**

#### ***Introduction***

Using a qualitative research approach, this thesis examined the first voice perspectives of autistic youth vloggers related to employment. Taking the previous summative data of my literature review into account, I explored the lived experiences of autistic youth via content from their vlogs on their access to finding, obtaining, and maintaining employment. In this study, I applied media content analysis on the YouTube platform to explore autistic youth vloggers' experiences with employment. By learning directly from autistic youth, we can begin to disrupt the stigma associated with their identities related to employment and offer new understandings on their lived experiences in relation to employment. Overall, this study focused on six videos as the final data set and used an inductive content analysis method (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to investigate the experiences of autistic youth vloggers with employment.

#### ***Qualitative research***

Given the study's interest in establishing the experiences of young autistic YouTube vloggers with employment, a qualitative research design was most suitable. Using a qualitative research approach was crucial to meet the purpose of this study and necessary to assist the contribution this thesis makes to the literature in this particular field. One of the reasons for selecting this method was to understand people's interpretation of their experiences, construction of their realities, and meanings they attribute to the events of interest (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Recent years have shown that qualitative methods in disability research are essential as they present data beyond statistics and numbers (Ritchie et al., 2013). Multiple approaches can be

used within the qualitative analysis since it is not based on a standardized theoretical and methodological notion (Flick et al., 2004). Therefore, a broad scope of approaches are now used in qualitative research, and they can be easily tailored to fit various research aims and purposes.

### *Media content analysis*

Krippendorff (2004) states, "content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use" (p. 18). At the beginning of the 20th century, scholars used content analysis as an analytical method in qualitative and quantitative research (Berelson, 1952). By the end of the century, researchers began to apply content analysis mainly to the qualitative area by coding text resources to categorize and describe the data (Morgan, 1993). Today, the content analysis approach is described as a method that subjectively explains given data content by processing the coding of systematic analysis and identifying ideas and patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It is characterized as systematic and rigid by analyzing the data that emerged in the research process. It is a highly flexible and adaptable methodology used in various fields (White & Marsh, 2006). Therefore, content analysis can have different purposes when applied in diverse areas and contexts and is a good fit for investigating autistic youth's personal experiences with employment.

In this study, I apply social media content analysis as it is reported that autistic individuals have greater ease and comfort sharing information online instead of face-to-face, and the central role of the Internet in allowing autistic users to communicate their experiences and perceptions (Brownlow & O'Dell, 2006; Jones et al., 2001). I used YouTube as a data source to examine the experiences of autistic youth since it is one of the most dominant online platforms in North America, alongside Facebook and Instagram. In their YouTube vlogs, individuals, including



autist youth and adults, share their opinions and feelings about various topics, usually in a natural diary-like form (Sanchez-Cortes et al., 2015). Overall, using a YouTube content analysis to investigate autist youth's experiences with employment is justifiable as this study brings a new perspective that reflects on one individual or group's stake in the community.

This study using a social media inductive content analysis method (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) that does not restrain or limit the researcher with preconceived ideas or assumptions. The themes and categories emerge rather from the media data resources. In this thesis, categories arose from data during the analysis process, which assisted the study in better understanding the phenomenon (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

### ***Data collection***

This thesis aims to understand the first voice perspectives from autist youth related to employment. Therefore, I used the keywords "autism" and "employment" as virtual variables, with additional clarifying keywords and phrases like "Asperger's," "on the spectrum," "autistic," "work," "career," and "job" to help discover relevant videos on the YouTube platform. The sixteen sets of keywords define the search parameters that align with these variables entered the YouTube search bar (see Table 1). I entered one set of keywords for each search, sixteen times in total. I used the *incognito mode* when searching for appropriate videos to prevent the YouTube search algorithm from generating the results based on my previous search history.

**Table 1**

*Sets of Keywords entered in the YouTube search bar*

| Keywords   | Autism          | Autistic          |            | On the spectrum |
|------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------|-----------------|
| Employment | Autism +        | Autistic +        |            | On the spectrum |
|            | Employment      | Employment        | Employment | + Employment    |
| Work       | Autism + Work   | Autistic + Work   |            | On the spectrum |
|            |                 |                   | Work       | + Work          |
| Job        | Autism + Job    | Autistic + Job    |            | On the spectrum |
|            |                 |                   |            | + Job           |
| Career     | Autism + Career | Autistic + Career |            | On the spectrum |
|            |                 |                   | Career     | + Career        |

Despite the new YouTube update that does not show the actual pages of the search results, I included the first thirty videos of every set of keywords' results since previous research (Seeley et al., 2019; Szmuda et al., 2020) shows that 90 percent of users prefer to watch the first three pages of videos, which was equivalent to 30 videos of the searching results prior to the update.

I chose the first thirty videos in this study by typing in keywords and using the "sort by relevance" search tool. The first thirty videos for each keyword result were recorded. Then I registered the search results with the YouTube signifiers, including title, upload time, and the channel owner.

I excluded videos older than five years to maintain up-to-date information (2018-2022) and videos uploaded by various organizations, charities, or news channels. To facilitate greater

research accuracy, I also excluded the videos for which there was confusion surrounding people's ages.

For selected videos, the youth's age can be determined by the information provided in the "about" section of the YouTube channel and/or other social media account or website provided by the video creators. I also included videos of autists who discussed experiences of their youth, pointing out the age they were at the time of the event.

Overall, I selected six videos as the final data set that met the abovementioned requirements. While I did not focus on a particular country or continent, the chosen videos represent the state of employment for autistic youth from USA, Canada, and the UK. All selected videos are in English and are no longer than 16 minutes. See Table 2 for detailed information (as of Jan 3, 2022) of the six selected YouTube videos I chose as the final data set.

**Table 2**

*Data on six chosen videos as of Jan 3, 2022*

| Video title   | Gender    | Posting date | Number of views | Number of likes | Number of comments | Description   |
|---|-----------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|---|
| <i>JOBS For People With AUTISM / (Why It Is HARD to Find A Job For Autistic People). 13 min 18 sec.</i> | Male/Male | 09/26/2019   | 8911            | 557             | 176                | The video is a collaboration of two autistic self-advocates and YouTube vloggers talking about their experiences with employment in the form of a dialogue. |

|   |           |            |       |      |     |   |
|---|-----------|------------|-------|------|-----|---|
| <i>Working a 9-5 While (Unknowingly) Autistic / AUTISM AT WORK. 16 min.</i>         | Female    | 04/20/2021 | 29043 | 2.1K | 293 | The author talked about her experience with different jobs during her youth years.  |
| <i>How To Manage Autism In The Workplace With @Aspergers Growth. 10 min 37 sec.</i> | Male/Male | 12/12/2019 | 3904  | 147  | 34  | The video is a collaboration of two autistic self-advocates and YouTube vloggers who share their tips on supporting autists in the workplace. |
| <i>Autism and the Workplace: My Experiences. 9 min 04 sec.</i>                      | Male      | 12/11/2018 | 1128  | 94   | 29  | The author talks about his experiences in the workplace.  |
| <i>Being A Personal Trainer With Aspergers Syndrome. 12 min 11 sec.</i>             | Male      | 10/10/2020 | 160   | 11   | 7   | The author talks about his career choice and managing his autism in the workplace.  |

|   |        |            |     |    |    |   |
|---|--------|------------|-----|----|----|---|
| <i>AUTISTIC &amp; JOB SEARCHING.<br/>10 min 45 sec.</i> | Female | 01/10/2021 | 338 | 32 | 21 | The author discusses her experience with job searching while identifying as autistic. |
|---|--------|------------|-----|----|----|---|

**Data analysis**

I used the research design based on White & Marsh's (2006) study and followed seven steps of the qualitative content analysis technique (see Table 3) described by Zhang & Wildemuth (2009).

**Table 3**

*Qualitative content analysis technique*

|   |
|---|
| Preparing the data                      |
| Defining the unit of analysis           |
| Developing categories and coding scheme |
| Coding the text                         |
| Assessing coding consistency            |
| Drawing conclusions from the coded data |
| Reporting methods and findings.         |

This research uses the content analysis conventional/inductive approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) and uses the YouTube platform as the data source of content analysis.

To improve the credibility and validity of the results, I applied triangulation within the analysis and discussion. The triangulation method (Patton, 1999) here is used to meet saturation of the data through levels of coding. I also included three types of data to support the study results, including the perspective of autistic YouTube vloggers, opinions of autistic youth who leave comments under the YouTube videos, and the viewpoints of the literature review. Thus, the results of this research have several resources to support them.

All the videos' audio and comments were recorded. I transcribed each video's audio content and each comment under every video. Every transcript was read several times and given comments and notes to the parts that appeared significant. Then I conducted more detailed axial

on the outcomes of this research.

## **Chapter 4. Findings**

This part of the research provides a thorough report of the research findings. This section explains how the following categories emerged in relation to the autistic youths' experiences with finding, obtaining and maintaining employment. The chapter contains three sections representing the three major themes: Experiences with Employment, Affective Connections to the Work Sector and Future Advice for Successful Employment. Each main theme has relevant categories to support analysis of the vloggers' lived experiences with employment as documented on their YouTube channels.

### ***Theme One: Experiences with Employment***

Theme one describes various experiences that autistic youth vloggers experience at different stages of employment. The literature indicates that the low employment rates for autistic youth and adults are potentially linked to personal and environmental factors. At the personal level, insufficient social and interpersonal skills are generally cited as challenges to finding and obtaining employment (Brownlow, 2010; Gal et al., 2015). At the environmental level, barriers to employment lie in society's perceptions and stigmatization of autism, marking autism-specific manifestations as "deficits" instead of positive qualities for the job (Lorenz et al., 2016). To begin with, the vloggers documented the barriers to finding and obtaining employment.

#### ***Barriers to employment***



In this research, autistic youth describe difficulties with standardized interview processes, masking<sup>4</sup> autistic traits during an interview, and issues with communication and interaction with a potential employer. The terms/codes that contributed to this category were mentioned in three separate videos several times. Therefore, the category "barriers to employment" emerged. For autistic youth, standardized interview processes in many workplaces significantly influence their performance in gaining employment. According to the following excerpts, autistic youth describe how interviews are usually not designed for them or their needs:

*Olivia: "Getting hired as an autistic person is extremely challenging because think about how hard it is to get a job and go through the hiring process as a neurotypical person, it's challenging, there's a lot of pressure, you have to say and do and present yourself in a way that they want, and this can be very challenging to nearly impossible for somebody on the spectrum because we're already bad at small talk, which a lot of times there needs to be in a job interview, we're bad at making eye contact which there definitely needs to be in a job interview, we can be bad at reading body language and we can be too blunt, so we'll just be blurting things out that maybe we shouldn't say, but that doesn't come into our head, we're just going to say them because that's who we are - we're blunt!" (Autistically Me, 2021).*

Other vloggers note that the interview structure can be a significant obstacle in recruiting since finding gaps in a conversation may be challenging for autistic youth as evidenced by vlogger, Joe.

*Joe: "I've been to interviews led particularly for some of the more casual stuff, like bar work, you know, where I've had people just talk at me for pretty much the whole time and that's hard because they don't a at sort of, you know, creating two-way conversation. So, I'm pretty much just gonna sit there and go "yeah, yeah, okay" for about 20 minutes while they keep firing all this information at me and then, of course, you know, obviously, I don't get the job because I've not really expressed any side of my personality in that time or sort of contributed anything to the conversation. But I'm not very good at finding gaps in conversations about, you know, should I speak now, I don't want to sort of, you know, like, um, interrupt (Joe Jamfrey, 2018).*

---

<sup>4</sup> Masking (camouflaging, compensation, adaptive morphing) is the intended or unintended suppression of natural responses and adoption of alternatives across different domains, e.g. social interaction, cognition, manners, and movements (

Joe mentions the challenges of navigating social norms during the interview and feelings of awkwardness when trying to navigate social expectations during a structured interview. The process of getting an interview can be challenging for anyone, and it is far more challenging for autists as Allie also notes:

*Allie: "The job application process itself is frustrating, filling out countless and countless forms of the same exact information and answering questions only to wait, have to do like at least two different interviews probably, and maybe you'll get a chance. That's a lot for a neu*

(Autistic Allie, 2021).

She adds that just finding a job is a whole separate task that requires considering many different factors and matching those factors with whatever is available on the job market. Other autistic youth vloggers criticize interviews focusing on effective communication and social skills instead of essential skills needed for the job as Olivia states:

*Olivia: "You shouldn't be judged on whether you can make eye contact or hold a conversation, it should be based on your work skills. But unfortunately, in the world we live in so many times, employers are not hiring you based on your actual skillsets and ability to do the work and task that they're asking you to do, which is what they should judge you on, but they're not; they're judging you on how you look, how you act, how you present yourself, because autistic people come off as quirky or, you know, just shy or different. Then we don't get the job even if we're the most well qualified and could do better than anybody else simply because we don't present ourselves in a regular cool way." (Autistically Me, 2021).*

They noted that some traditional interview types contain many questions that do not seek an honest answer from the potential employee, but a structural one that the interviewer seeks to hear. This is reflected in the following excerpt:

*Allie:  
that*

*not worded exactly this way, but inherently it is implying that, you know, how productive are you and what's your one weakness that isn't actually a weakness, but, you know, we're going to ask anyway." (Autistic Allie, 2021).*

Youth also mention how they usually have to mask and hide or change their true selves

according to the interviewee

*Olivia: "Sometimes, say for females on the spectrum, we could mimic our way in and fake our way in to get a job, I know that's what I did... because again, all they're looking at is what kind of a person you are, not your ability to do the job, which is so terrible, but I masked well enough to ace the interview. I did good because I can read what they want and mirror, and not appear strange to them [employers], but it's exhausting." (Autistically Me, 2021).*

This section indicates that interviews are a significant obstacle to employment for autistic youth.

They find the whole recruiting process (from applying for a job to going through the interview) challenging due to the requirements that might not necessarily be a part of the actual job (e.g.

with employment, the vloggers also discussed the sensory challenges they faced in the workplace.

### *Sensory Challenges*

In this study, autistic youth talked about their sensory challenges in the workplace, noting that sensory issues were often not justifiable and could significantly intervene with the work process. The terms/codes that contributed to this category were mentioned in three separate videos several times. Therefore, the category of Sensory Challenges emerged:

*Olivia: "...what else do you deal with at work? You deal with sensory things, you deal with lights, you deal with noises, and you deal with smells from people's lunches or normal and socialize and have small talk, then you're overstimulated with all of these terrible things that bug us, and so, it really is a recipe for disaster." (Autistically Me, 2021).*

Connor: *-plan, there's a thousand people on this one floor, okay, now we've got six floors, a massive hole in the middle, times six - six thousand people, all 6,000 people have keyboards... Extremely loud! I spent most of the days in the loo screaming! And then I got moved next to a desk which* (Aspie World, 2019).

The comment under one of the videos also supported the points made above:

*"I work in public administration in a big cubicle office and was lucky enough to be able to work from home (thanks Covid!) for the last year. I realized that this setting is real bad, considering the office noise (radios are the worst!), the temperature, the spontaneous team huddles that interrupt my work. When I used a noise-cancelling headset, they [supervisors] were on to me right away and claimed it would be a "safety issue," which is obvious bs because the fire alarm has a flashing light that is impossible to ignore, and even my phone has a visual ringer signal."* (Indie Andy, 2019).

often supported

in the workplace where normative readings on bodily expectations were assumed with minimal accommodations offers. Tom gives a detailed account of this below.

Tom: *"A lot of headphones these days come with this thing called "active noise-cancelling," meaning that it will get rid of all the constant background noises that would generally drive an autistic person up the wall and it allows them to also hear people who are talking to them, so they come up to you and talk, then the technology will filter out the background noise and the speech, and it will let them hear you, which is a very good thing. Therefore, if you do have an autistic person in the workplace, why not consider allowing them to wear headphones?"* (Indie Andy, 2019).

Autist youth in this study talk at length about their experiences with various sensory challenges in the workplace. According to their statements, some of those challenges could have been avoided by reasonable adjustments; however, judging from the remarks above, some workplaces (like open-plan offices) might not be the preferable occupation for autists due to many unpredictable sensory impacts. This notion also speaks to the barriers we create as a society with limited attention to the complexity of individual experiences in the workplace. When analyzing

this through a social model, we see that employers often take a normative able-bodied perspective with limited attention to the diverse ways that people navigate public spaces, like the work sector. This is evident when the autistic vloggers identify the barriers they experience when certain routines and organization structures are inconsistent.

### *Understanding Need for Routine*

Repetitive and restricted behaviours, rituals and routines are considered a significant part of functioning for autistic individuals. Specifically, one criterion outlined in the DSM-V is for individuals to present with repetitive behaviours and restricted interests (DSM-V) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Therefore, resistance to change can have a highly disruptive effect on an

become a significant barrier in employment for autistic individuals (Sevin et al., 2015).

In this study, autistic youth talk about the importance of routines, sameness in workflows and fixed schedules. The terms/codes that contributed to this category were mentioned in five separate videos several times. Therefore, the category "Understanding Need for Routine" emerged. They noted the importance of understanding the reasons behind different decisions and sticking to one thing at a time. One of the factors for successful work was understanding the business and the people behind it since unexpected information or change can be challenging to process for autistic youth in the workplace.

*Andy: "When it comes to integrate autistic people into businesses, is really getting them in a position where they know all aspects of the business and getting them to understand the nooks and crannies of the business as a whole. Because for me personally, I perform a lot better when I know what other people in the business actually do, I get an understanding of the business structure, what people's job roles are, so I can do my job efficiently. Once an autistic person has figured out the type of environment that they're*

*going to be working in and they have an idea of what that can be doing day to day, we can come up with a strategy of how to deal with things that might not necessarily agree with us. We don't really like change, so knowing who is doing what exactly can really help us navigate through everyday tasks." (Indie Andy, 2019).*

Another frequent challenge for autistic youth in a workplace was taking on too many tasks or quickly transitioning from one task to another.

*Dan: "When I was a kid, I think I was like sixteen and then my friend was like, fella, my uncle runs ice cream van, so you wanna do ice cream vanning? You get free ice cream! I was like, awesome! But then I realized oh my god... It's like, it's this or that, and do this and that, dealing with different orders, different stuff going on, and it's also dealing with money as well and I'm totally shit with, like, you know...." (Aspie World, 2019).*

*Connor: "I struggled most when I would be given a task, I'd start programming tablets, like 10 tablets in, "oh yeah, by the way, we need you to do that," and said "now drop what you're doing" and completely change tasks. Couldn't do it." (Aspie World, 2019).*

They also mentioned struggles with irregular schedules and fast-changing environments.

*Connor: "The only way I'd be able to get lunch would be through a van that comes around and the van would come around when we had team meetings, and we were all sat down around in a circle and the van would come outside and sometimes, you know, it timed out well, so I could run outside and grab something, however sometimes it was, we're in the meeting, other people are just like "I want to get some food, Boss," I couldn't physically do that, because we were in meeting mode, whole other (Aspie World, 2019).*

*Olivia: "Another thing that sucked about that job is there wasn't a set schedule, you had one day off a week and it was any random day and your schedule was never the same. One day you'd be coming in at 5 am, the next day at 2 pm, and the next day at 11 am and so you couldn't get on a schedule which is obviously a recipe for disaster for somebody with autism." (Autistically Me, 2021).*

While 3 out of 6 videos mentioned the importance of precise instructions, others were overwhelmed with an excessively restrictive environment that impacted their social communication and capacity to navigate the work sector. This is well outlined in the following excerpts:

Olivia: *"He [the boss] had made another woman, become my babysitter. She walked me watch me like I'm not doing my work, follow me to the bathroom, ask permission to go to because I quit the very next day...."* (Autistically Me, 2021).

Joe: *"It [the job] rigid in its rules and I was always observed when I was doing things and I felt very uncomfortable because of that, I wasn't just allowed to do things my own way, had to do everything the company way, I don't think we as a species do well, in that kind of environment, in any kind of regimented environment."* (Joe Jamfrey, 2018).

Three autistic vloggers also mentioned the jobs they liked to perform because of routine work and predictable tasks.

Dan: *"I was working for McKesson healthcare and they would have the contract for the NHS and I was doing reconciliation of financial reports; loved it, because it's work with numbers and all I was trusted with were numbers, and it was amazing, nothing unexpected, very routine work."* (Aspie World, 2019).

Connor: *"I was a finance assistant, and basically all it was, was filing stuff and scanning stuff, I actually found it really cool because it was just doing a repetitive thing over and over again."* (Aspie World, 2019).

Adam: *"A good thing is, with Asperger's, is a lot of people find, like patterns, routines routines. So it's like, I've got my work schedule, I like the schedule, and I like to stick to it all over the place, you know, what you've got at what time and that can help with... with managing stuff and not overwhelm yourself."* (Adam Gittings, 2020).

This data illustrates that many challenges autistic youth face in the workplace are due to the lack of advance notice of changing tasks, irregular routines, and fast-changing environments. Moreover, the autists expressed their concern over the requirement to understand the nuances they experience when navigating work environments as the communications between people are constantly in flux.

*Social environment*

Challenges with social communications and interactions are often mentioned as the primary barriers to employment for autistic youth and adults (Harmuth et al., 2018; Lorenz et al., 2016; Solomon, 2020) and are the second criteria for autism diagnosis as seen in the DSM-V. In this study, autistic youth mention having little to no difficulties engaging in the actual work process, however, they do express the emerging social communications as complex, exhausting, and stressful, and negatively affecting their work performance. The terms/codes that contributed to this category were mentioned in all six videos several times and therefore, the category "Social environment" emerged. For example, Connor recalled being uncomfortable with the social side of the work environment that had little to do with the actual job:

*Connor: "I was also just scared with the my skills were gonna work in someone else's environment, but I always wanted to be able to utilize my brain, because I'd always been told I was really intelligent, and I just wanna do the job and not freak out about the weirdest things that don't have anything to do with the job, like, what I'm gonna look like, what I'm gonna say, is this the right moment to speak or not talk at all...." (Aspie World, 2019).*

Dan also pointed out that the social environment usually prevents autistic employees from feeling included in the workplace:

*Dan: understand the social roles with it. It's like, when you're put in a position where you're on spectrum, when you go and like... you think about job, then the idea of the job becomes way more daunting, but not because of the task at hand because I'm was lazy for work, that's not an issue, the problem is - oh my Goodness, I have to sit in this room with people I can't converse with, and they all think I'm weird or something, they all seem not (Aspie World, 2019).*

Olivia similarly discussed two sides of social barriers faced by autistic employees:

*Olivia: "First, what do you do when you're at a job? You socialize, you have coworkers and that's terrible if you're autistic because a lot of times we don't like socializing, we struggle with small talk and we struggle with social cues and things like that. But it's not*



*just us; it [anxiety] can also be caused by the workplace environment among coworkers with gossiping or bullying or not allowing the autistic people to fit into their cliques because whether we like to admit it or not, high school is forever and it is." (Autistically Me, 2021).*

The comment supporting this statement was posted for another video of this study where a lack of support for autistic employees was evident:

*"For someone starting out, make sure you have the support of the company. If the company doesn't support you, move on and find one that does. I have been on the receiving end of bullying for a while because I stumble over my words or I don't express myself clearly. As a result, colleagues laugh and snigger at me, or they talk down to me like I'm a 5 year old...." (Indie Andy, 2019).*

Adam and Olivia similarly describe communication as one of the challenging tasks a job as a personal trainer includes:

Adam:

*ht have good social skills, but we don't always have good understanding of social situations and stuff like that, and so I knew this was going to be hard [being a personal trainer] coming tough, like just going up and talking to someone on gym floor can be tricky if you've got no context, um, or no apparent reason for doing that." (Adam Gittings, 2020).*

Olivia: *"Another thing I think is overlooked with autism in the workplace is a lot of times autistic people have trouble understanding verbal directions, um, we're very much like, um, hands-on and visual learners; and so for me when people like my bosses and stuff were giving me, you know, social instruction or verbal instructions about meetings and things like this, I couldn't retain them, and so, then I would be scrambling trying to figure out what I was supposed to do because I just couldn't understand." (Autistically Me, 2021).*

In an attempt to fit in socially, autistic youth share masking as an effective employee yet find it exhausting.

Olivia: *"Mimicking every single day for nine hours is extremely exhausting and I couldn't keep it up anymore. So once that mask kind of slips off then suddenly your boss is thinking you're slacking off or you no longer want to be there or you're doing bad at your work, which happened to me... But it's not that, it's just we're so exhausted that we can't possibly keep up this fake act anymore." (Autistically Me, 2021).*

Olivia and Allie elaborate on the consequences of having to perform in the workplace as neurotypical.

*Olivia: "As my mental health deteriorated, I didn't try as hard to wear my mask because I just was too exhausted to do it, and so this took notice from my bosses because I wasn't my smiley, happy, funny self, I was very reserved, kept to myself and didn't socialize, I just stopped trying in that aspect. Did I stop trying to do my work? No, my work never faltered, it was just as good as day one as day whatever when I was extremely struggling, but this wasn't okay with my bosses because I was no longer doing it with a smile on my face." (Autistically Me, 2021).*

*Allie: "... it's really draining to have to mask whether it's directly at work, on a phone, or just typing it out, you know, you're having to act that, I guess, character of the ideal question of, you know, what's worth my time and what's not." (Autistic Allie, 2021).*

Additionally, several comments under the videos also related to the experiences described above:

*"It is often a high stress and anxiety fueled effort to fit in a work environment. I relate to the efforts to mask my differences, socially challenges, managing anxiety throughout the day, as well as dealing with various sensory overloads. Overall it often leaves me exhausted and challenges my efforts to cope with anxiety and stress." (Autistically Me, 2021).*

*"This is why I am exhausted after socializing. I have no clue how to act and spend the whole time at work trying to mask my autism and mimic other people and then worry about if I'm doing it right." (Autistic Allie, 2021).*

*"I think I am having that identity crisis, as not sure how to be me without masking. But I got burned out after masking for every single day at my job, and I need to find a way to live that is less exhausting." (Autistically Me, 2021).*

In summary, autistic youth struggle with various workplace challenges, from standardized interview processes to masking on a daily basis. Autist vloggers note that these challenges negatively affect their overall job experience, including their quality of work and view of their persona. This part of the findings shows 5 out of 8 autistic youth agreeing that the hiring managers should be looking for someone who can perform high-quality work with a reasonable level of

support and accommodating working conditions. They critique the notion of judging individuals by their social and interpersonal skills if those are not required for the actual job. They also express the experiences with the requirement to fit in socially and the need to mask daily, therefore decreasing their ability to effectively perform their work duties due to quick burnout and exhaustion.

### *Theme two: Affective Connections to Work Sector*

This section of my findings explores the second theme that relates to the emotional challenges. In following, theme two, I have outlined categories to support the discussion of their affective connections to the work sector.

Previous decades have shown that various companies worldwide create job opportunities for "high functioning" autistic youth and adults in the information technology sector, mainly software testing. Software testing is considered a job that autists perform better than the general population due to great attention to detail, accuracy, tolerance for repetitive tasks, and known interest in technology (Gonzalez et al., 2013; Mottron et al., 2006). This practice has successfully developed jobs for many autists. Nevertheless, the number of positions offered is limited, and they appear to target the skills of only a subgroup of autistic employees. In this study, autistic youth discussed the importance of loving one's job and preference for an occupation that includes their special interest. The terms/codes that contributed to this category were mentioned in four separate videos several times. So, the category "Special interests / loving a job" emerged. I begin with Adam who expresses his passions for particular topics, such as fitness.

*Special Interests/Loving a job*

Adam: *"So, first of, why do I want to do this? Uh, so fitness is my passion, a lot of people on the spectrum there will have their specific interests, but I love my experience, just love everything about you know, all the good stuff with fitness a lot, I love just exploring it, experimenting and seeing what I can do, so that's the main reason."* (Adam Gittings, 2020).

He then suggested that if one has a passion for a particular occupation that is a key to success.

Adam:  
*you're gonna do it, you're gonna get up every day wanting to do it and eventually it will all workout if you put your mind to it."* (Adam Gittings, 2020).

Another essential side of loving what you do can be seen from the following excerpts, where Joe expressed his passion for the job because of the positive attitudes of his coworkers.

Joe: *"I still have my book job, my Saturday job which I love and that is just a wonderful to me and, you know, I work harder because of that because I appreciate how I'm treated of yourself back."* (Joe Jamfrey, 2018).

He also mentioned that while the job comes with its inconveniences, it still brightens his Saturdays.

Joe: *"...my Saturday job, it's the highlight of my week, I love it because of the subject matter, it's one of my special interests, um, also the place and the people, I don't care that I have to drive so long to be there because to me it's just so worth doing, it really is, and it's not the greatest money in the world, but that doesn't matter to me, you know..."* (Joe Jamfrey, 2018).

However, due to past negative experiences, some autistic youth were also less optimistic about potential employment as evidenced by Allie.

Allie:  
*and I say that both because of the statistics of, you know, employment or otherwise during a pandemic, might I add, but, you know, I, you know, over the course of my time doing so many different things, trying to find something that works, which again for*

*anyone that's difficult, it's a whole discernment process, and it's quite a luxury to be able to seek something out and have it be really tailored to you, something you're really passionate about, maybe something that includes your special interest and not just something that makes you money to survive." (Autistic Allie, 2021).*

While other autists outlined the importance of liking what you do rather than having a job for the sake of a job.

*Joe: "I know sometimes it feels just when you look at the stats for people on the spectrum, job you're lucky, and yes, that's true to a certain extent, but I also feel, you know, it's so important to be happy in what you do in life, I don't think there's a great deal of point to life if you're not happy, because ultimately, you know, you're going to spend so much of your life in work, by the time you have a full-time job and are able to support yourself you'll be spending most of your life working than you are doing anything else, so that's why I think it's so important to enjoy what you do if you can, or at least be able to tolerate it." (Joe Jamfrey, 2018).*

Joe expresses the relevance and importance of enjoying what a person doing for a living and this is similarly stated by Olivia when obtaining her dream job at 18 years of age. However, upon entering the field Olivia also realized that strains of employment even though it was her area of interest.

*Olivia: "... from a young age that was my dream, I wanted to be a sports reporter, I wanted to be a sports journalist and I wanted to talk all about football because that was one of my special interests and still is. Now, I didn't know I was autistic at the time, so I didn't understand what was happening, why did I hate working so much in the field that I supposedly loved so much..." (Autistically Me, 2021).*

While it is clear that autist youth in this study prefer finding an occupation in the field of their special interest, it is also worth mentioning that sometimes they feel obtaining one does not guarantee successful employment outcomes due to many external factors intervening with their everyday work. This leads to the majority (six out of eight) of the youth accounting for the challenges with mental health.

*Mental health*

There is a strong connection between job satisfaction and mental health in the general population (Wright & Bonett, 2007). However, there is a lack of research focusing on the same topic among the autistic population. The terms/codes that contributed to this category were mentioned in feelings about employment. The terms/codes that contributed to this category were mentioned in talked about his mental health decline due to sensory overload and constantly altering work environment.

*Connor: "I had to leave that job myself because I basically had to be picked up every single day by my mom, kicking and screaming, so to be 18 years old in that position and leaving your work, your grown-up work."  
(Aspie World, 2019).*

Autist youth also talked about their mental health experiencing a negative impact due to the social aspects of employment and not being understood by supervisors or colleagues and this strongly correlates to the previous category on social environment.

*Dan: "I went into a depression because of the environment, coworkers and stuff, social side of things, I was on antidepressants and it was really bad and I... and no one couldn't understand me."  
(Aspie World, 2019).*

*Olivia: "He [the boss] accused me of no longer doing a good job and I got so upset at that because I will fight tooth and nail to prove that my work did not falter and for him to say that my work faltered simply because I was no longer doing it with a smile was horrendous. I then broke down."  
(Aspie World, 2019).*

Four out of eight autistic youth vloggers also talked about poor work-life balance and the eventual need to quit, resulting in job inconsistency that impacted their mental health and affective connections to enjoying their employment.

Connor: *"So what was happening is I was going to work, picked up kicking and screaming, going straight to bed, waking up in the morning, going to work, same with the weekends, and my entire life I was either in work or I was asleep, like or you know, in shutdown mode, yes, so um, yeah, I think that's the cycle we all get ourselves into."* (Aspie World, 2019).

Andy: *"Although my first job was actually really good in almost every aspect, it was completely unsustainable. So after three years I was completely spent and I basically had to quit because I couldn't see myself, I was putting so much effort into just getting up and going to work and getting stuff done and coming home that I didn't have time for anything else, that would drain me very quickly, I felt stuck and needed to quit...."* (Indie Andy, 2019).

Olivia: *"After masking whole day and dealing with all that sensory stuff, I would get extremely anxious and then my anxiety would turn into depression and it was a vicious cycle. So even though I would go into all these jobs super excited and I would very much succeed at the job and do fantastic, not trying to chew my own horn or anything, I would always end up having to quit because I would get so anxious and so depressed and just get into a terrible spot in my life and nothing is worth your mental health."* (Autistically Me, 2021).

Allie: *"You don't feel great when you feel like you keep getting rejected if you're trying to find a job or that you've had far too many experiences with jobs that do not serve you, that aren't sustainable to be in and you keep having to switch because nothing seems to work, at least that's my experience... I've had times where I start a new job and I'm excited about it for the first month or so and then I realize - I hate it and it's not working anymore, which means I just have to find something else, which is very frustrating."* (Autistic Allie, 2021).

Two autistic vloggers also mentioned that they might experience negative repercussions because of their autistic traits that affectively impacted their capacity to engage at work.

Olivia: *"... I feel with my experience, if we don't mask anymore and show our true selves, it can cause us to get fired or demoted or not promoted even though we're very deserving of it...."* (Autistically Me, 2021).

Adam:  
*and likable, and so, it's like, if you're quiet and not very outgoing, which is usual for*

*Asperger's, then you're gonna get left in the background, maybe they won't notice that you are actually good at your job, it's still something that I'm trying to, uh, get better at."* (Adam Gittings, 2020).

The comment under one of the chosen videos also supports the fact of autistic employees being left out of the workplace dynamic:

*"I really hate office politics. At my job the loud mouths were always the ones that messed around all day! They didn't do their work and yet they were the ones getting promoted."* (Adam Gittings, 2020).

In this study, autistic youth mentioned various mental struggles they experienced because of work challenges, including frustration with the overwhelming environment, high anxiety levels due to the task to fit in socially, depression because of job instability, lack of support and poor work-life balance. These challenges can significantly impact one's ability to engage in successful employment and result in adverse long-term outcomes.

The existing system is not satisfactory to adapt the needs of autistic youth and adults as they transition to work (Taylor & Seltzer, 2011). Listening to voices and understanding the experience of autistic youth in the workplace is essential. Part of the discussion when expressing their affective experiences with employment was in relation to disclosure of their disability. In this study, autistic youth vloggers talked about their thoughts on disclosure, including the negative and positive aspects of being open about discussing their autism to their co-workers or employers. The terms/codes that contributed to this category were mentioned in four separate videos several times. Therefore, the category "disclosure" emerged.

### *Disclosure*



Whether or not to disclose one's autism diagnosis is a significant matter on the subject of employment. Although the number of autistic workers has increased (Burgess & Cimera, 2014; Hensel, 2017), there is still limited research that addresses whether disclosure influences decision-making outcomes on each step of employment.

Allie: *"Even the question of whether to disclose that you are autistic, dyslexic, ADHD, and you know with a big risk it can be a big win or it could be a big [shows "thumbs I'm asking for, um whoever I'm applying to, I guess, to not be fully honest and to be authentic right off the bat rather than potentially working backwards, which has been (Autistic Allie, 2021).*

Tom: *"Sometimes people understanding or knowing about a diagnosis can be very helpful, but on the flip side, not every single autistic person wants everybody to know spectrum to tell their employees out of fears of, you know, possibly not receiving an interview just because they're on the autistic spectrum, which is pretty much absurd because they are amazing workers." (Indie Andy, 2019).*

Autist youth also mention the importance of being themselves in the workplace and not settling for a position where they are not valued:

Andy: *"And I fill out every job application if it asks the question, I disclose that I'm disabled right away, that's not what everyone else does, you don't have to, but for me, I don't want to walk into somewhere where I in my full self am not recognized, that's happened too many times." (Indie Andy, 2019).*

Allie: *am able to be me and not have to feel like I'm going against the odds because I'm trying to be someone I'm not, if that makes sense." (Autistic Allie, 2021).*

Two autistic vloggers noted that disclosing autism does not necessarily guarantee any additional support or accommodations in the workplace. It can be seen from the statements provided below:

Joe: *"Then I was given all the paperwork I had to fill in, I wrote down under the section "do you have a disability" "yes," "would you like to specify?" "yes, Asperger's," and I would have hoped that a company, who placed so much importance on filling out all their*

*hours to fill out all of this paperwork, I would have thought they would have taken the time to actually read what I've written, and I just thought it'd have been their obligation a good job, but they didn't, so, never mind." (Joe Jamfrey, 2018).*

*Allie: "When you specify your autism, you may either not get a chance at all or get a chance and either be let off at some point or are disciplined for, you know, for different situations that really need accommodations to make them work, to not being respected by supervisors, colleagues, there are so many different dynamics that go on regardless of what workplace you're at, that it's important to recognize that it's not a failure on your part that being employed and finding employment is difficult, it's the system and it's the people behind the system...." (Autistic Allie, 2021).*

The following excerpts show how disclosure presents itself as a complicated topic for autistic youth in job searching. While they realize it can be the reason for job refusal, it is also worth noting that disclosure is seen as beneficial in accessing various accommodations for autistic youth.

*Joe: "I mean, disclosure is a hard one because, obviously, you know, of course, it's a reason why somebody may choose not to hire you, I mean, although technically people aren't allowed, from a legal perspective, to actually, you know, discriminate because of a not necessarily say that's the reason why you didn't get the job but, you know, it may [disclosure] can also be the best thing you do because, you know, actually if you don't tell, if you don't disclose, they can't help you and by telling them they might be under combinations in place to help you as much as is possible with your job role. Eventually, you spend a lot of time in your workplace and, you know, around these that you can be honest, you know." (Joe Jamfrey, 2018).*

Therefore, one of the key findings in this research is the hesitance of autistic youth around diagnosis disclosure in the workplace. They agree that being themselves would serve them much better in the long term; however, there is no guarantee that disclosing will always have positive outcomes from supervisors and coworkers. Autistic youth in this study suggest that disclosing their diagnosis may give them a chance to be themselves and be accepted for who they are and the skills they bring to the workplace.

In summary, autistic youth have various feelings about their work backgrounds. Many talked about the importance of having a job in the area of their special interest; however, it was not always guaranteed success. For some, employment was a constant struggle of facing different social, sensory and environmental factors that were not necessarily directly connected to the job tasks. Four out of eight vloggers mention masking as a significant reason for the above-mentioned mental health issues. Although being a good short-term strategy for obtaining and maintaining a job, it would continuously result in harmful long-term effects, like quick burnouts, depression and inability to perform work-related tasks.

While autistic youth in this study have many unfortunate experiences with job adjustments, two of them noted that today's workplaces are far more accommodating than before. I turn now to outline the third theme of the research, Future Advice for Successful Employment.

### ***Theme Three: Future Advice for Successful Employment***

In order to fully understand the experiences of autistic youth with employment, this study provided summarized information on various advice and tips on employment discussed in the  
- e coding  
process. Other suggestions were summarized in the category of the same name. The terms that contributed to this theme were mentioned in three separate videos several times. This theme demonstrates how autistic youth handle challenges at different employment stages and show their advocacy.

Since many jobs have limitations due to social barriers, negative attitudes, lack of accommodations, and sensory factors, many autistic youth question what occupation path they can pursue successfully. Entrepreneurship via self-employment owned by disabled people is

becoming more common (Ouimette & Rammler, 2017). Autist vloggers in this study discuss self-employment as a potential space for future successful employment.

### *Self-employment*

Dan: *"But one thing I will say though, is what people always ask me on this channel, is they say, well what jobs I can as autistic person do and my honest answer would be - create your own job. And it sounds stupid, but, it's gonna be the best one."* (Aspie World, 2019).

Five out of eight autist vloggers in this study were self-employed, and at least six can potentially monetize their content on YouTube<sup>5</sup> and other social platforms, which has become a popular form of self-employment. They talked about their experiences and recommendations on the self-employment path.

Connor: *"... present-day we are both self-employed people, which is great for some reasons because we can adapt our job for our own condition, we can, you know, flex things around things that we shovel with, things that we find easier."* (Aspie World, 2019).

Olivia: *"After I quit, I realized there was no way I was going to be able to have a regular job, obviously, look at all these failed experiments that I've had, I just couldn't handle it, and pretty well at having my own business."* (Autistically Me, 2021).

While self-employment can be beneficial for autists since it allows them to shape their job as they consider best, autist youth vloggers in this study discussed other aspects that are also important to take into account.

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<sup>5</sup> To start earning money directly from YouTube, creators must have at least 1,000 subscribers and 4,000 watch hours in the past year. Once they reach that threshold, they can apply for YouTube's Partner Program, which allows creators to start monetizing their channels through ads, subscriptions, and channel memberships (Perelli, 2022).

Connor: *"It's the biggest thing in self-employment, knowing not to take too much on, cuz we get overloaded, but when do we actually learn that ha-ha?"* (Aspie World, 2019).

Adam: [reflection on his job as a personal trainer] *"And another thing that is quite difficult is obviously self-you've got mandatory time, you've got to manage y*

*of your career. Obviously, you get help and stuff, but it is mainly down to you, so that includes, like, time management and your clients are communicating, making plans, keeping on top of stuff, making sure you don't forget certain things to do with clients and make sure you punctual, you're on time, all that stuff. And like I said, at the end of the day it's your reputation."* (Adam Gittings, 2020).

Dan: *"When you're self-employed, all responsibility of everything is on you, and that pressure, making sure you get that right because your life depends on it, literally your life depends on it, is a bit of an odd task, because if you can't organize and schedule*

*every about two, no, three to four weeks, I end up having a complete freak out because my schedule planner doesn't work, so Naomi will be like, okay, this is what we're gonna do, you know, the new plan in place and unfold the schedule and I've been following this*  
(Aspie World, 2019).

The idea of self-employment as a tool of supporting autistic to work for themselves in a preferred field has recently gained substantial awareness (Revell et al., 2009; Wehmeyer et al., 2009). This study provides a brief insight into autistic youth's opinions on self-employment and the positive and negative aspects of managing a business. They highlight that creating one's own job may be the best path to successful employment.

Findings in this study also demonstrate the various barriers to and during employment that autistic youth vloggers face, like stigmatization, standardized interview formats and the workforce were discussed in previous parts of the findings chapter, autistic youth vloggers also share tips and advice that help or helped them cope with various challenges at work. The

following excerpts illustrates that having confidence and a positive disposition during the interview can positively impact the final decision.

*Other suggestions*

Joe:

*the interviewer is saying and coming across as being polite, I think that itself goes a long way, you know, if you can just try and make yourself likeable, not necessary in an extroverted way, but, um, you know, just because, obviously, all of us are just not*

*and, you know, a nice person that does, I think, stand in your favour." (Joe Jamfrey, 2018).*

Joe shared his strategy on coping with anxiety prior to the interview and exuding more confidence and he also addresses the importance of maintaining eye contact and relating to social norms to improve their interview outcomes.

Joe: *"Eye contact is a major irritant and a real difficulty. A lot of us can mask that, you there are techniques for those of us who might find it harder or all of us, you know, if the somebody's forehead it actually does look like it gives the illusion that you're looking into their eyes and they don't know this because I've tried it out on numerous people who didn't know I was doing it, and then, afterwards, I texted them "was I looking in your*  
(Joe Jamfrey,  
 2018).

As socializing and making small talk is a considerable challenge for autistic youth discussed in this study, Adam provides tip on avoiding pressure and stress associated with social communications and appearing more confident.

Adam: *"So, if you want to approach someone on gym floor, you could have like not a script as such, but just like bullet points, so you can go off and not really look at them,*  
d  
*to give you a quick advice for this machine," and just then, um, you've got a few points to go off and you're not just doing it off top of your head, which, like say if you struggle with certain social interactions, can make it really hard to do and so, yeah, just, um, make a*

*list of key words that you can say and go off them as much as you can and it'll just make that conversation just a bit easier, taking pressure off and from there you can just maybe flow into conversation a bit better." (Adam Gittings, 2020).*

Social media is a helpful way to communicate with the world for autistic youth since they can be heard without necessarily having to socialize in a traditional face-to-face setting. The following quote demonstrates this in practice:

*Adam: "I'm really good at like writing, like social media posts, emails, stuff like, that whereas I've not got best communication skills in person. I'm really good, stuff like that, so for me having a real strong social media is crucial, because I know, um, if I can get [gym] members to follow me on there and I can deliver quality content, well-written stuff, and that is going to give me a big advantage, because whereas like viewers might be better talkers, I can relax trying to sell myself on social media... I don't have to look someone in the eyes, I don't have to worry about social skills, I can just talk to the camera and if I mess up, I can pause the video, do a clip again, it's that simple... I still talk to people, obviously, you need to do about this part of job, but I'll do a lot on social media because, like I said, you'd have to worry about social skills, you can just, uh, like, you can rehearse what you're going to say, you can rehearse a message, you can rehearse a video just like this and it just takes up pressure of needing perfect social skills out of it." (Adam Gittings, 2020).*

Three out of eight autistic youth vloggers in this study recognize the importance of acknowledging one's skills and being prepared to try out different things as evidenced here.

*Dan: "You'll try something out and then you go, okay that didn't work, you try something else and it didn't work and you feel like, oh my goodness, everything is failing, I'm crap at  
hat all those  
jobs are not for you, keep going, you'll find the one eventually." (Aspie World, 2019).*

*Connor: "The thing that I always say is - ignore the autism, first of all, just for a little bit, what skills have you got... look at your own skills, write them down, write down several columns, what you think you're good at, perhaps get someone that you know as well, because you often don't realize your own skills, whether it's parent, sibling, friend, whatever to help you build up your skills, but also if you write down your anxieties as well it will help, basically you'll form something." (Aspie World, 2019).*

*Adam: "And the final tip I'm going to be on this is be yourself, if you're a bit quirky, a bit different - share that, show everyone that's a g  
out, that's how you stand out, you're a bit different, that's how you do it and show your*

*difference, show what makes you different whether people like it or not, who cares?"*  
(Adam Gittings, 2020).

Autist youth in this study recognize the complications the autist community experience when trying to gain employment and came up with different advice and coping strategies. They introduce the option of self-employment as a potentially optimal path for many autist job seekers who struggle with traditional job settings. Other coping strategies support the challenges described in previous parts of the findings chapter. Autist vloggers also note the importance of not being anxious to try different things, since the failure to achieve success in the particular job may mean just the lack of fit between the job and the autist person.

### ***Conclusion***

Autist youth struggle with various workplace challenges, from standardized interview processes to masking daily, as evidenced in their statements on their YouTube channels. This chapter shows evidence of the various barriers autist vloggers experience in relation to employment, and also provide creative tips and advice to limit the negative influence of the work environment that is not always designed to accommodate them. Their video narratives offer valuable insights for future research, guidelines and regulations. This study demonstrates the importance of listening to those whom the existing environment affects the most, as a way of contributing to the existing literature. I will turn now to provide a short summary of the study and recommendations, when advancing employment opportunities for autist youth.



## Chapter 5: Discussion

This study provides rich insights into the complexities that autistic youth can experience when entering the workplace. As evidenced in this research, the autistic vloggers document how employer demands and expectations to meet socially acceptable norms can impact their daily experiences within various employment sectors. The social model of disability used as a form of analysis in this study brings attention to the barriers that the autistic vloggers experience and how their disability continues to be predominantly understood through a traditional medical model in the work sector. Explicitly, the social model in this study draws attention to how disability as a type of social construction is static where disability is read as something to be fixed (Reddington & Price, 2016). The social model also helps us to see how problematic it is when we only think see and understand the wider dimensions of their lives (Reddington & Price, 2017). This is evidenced in this study when the autistic youth express the barriers they experience when trying to access full participation in the workplace.

Interestingly, in this study, we also see the autistic vloggers at junctures challenging how their disabilities are understood by employers and make the argument for employers to think beyond medicalized ways of knowing. The autistic vloggers show their agency to disrupt static representations on their identities and shift the narrative on how disability is viewed in public spaces. This research highlights the importance for the work sector to think more broadly about disability identity and to reevaluate their employee policies so individuals can experience full participation in the work sector regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, and disability.

When thinking about future employee hiring practices, the social model is useful as it places the rights of disabled people at the forefront of employment policies and equitable hiring

practices. The social model of disability also brings a socio-political view that draws significantly on the social construct, acknowledging that culture is a fact that exists prior to an individual's actions and "shapes views and perceptions that act as a point of reference" (Darcy et al., 2016, p. 1245). Thus, we as a society cannot predetermine what a person is capable of or what type of work, they should fulfill based on their diagnosis.

It is therefore essential to identify how to fundamentally shift the theories and philosophies towards an employment model that values diversity in the workplace. This might include analyzing workplace policies to reflect the principles of equity, inclusion, diversity and accessibility where all employees have access to supports that allow for full participation in the workplace. It also requires paying attention to the diverse ways that individuals experience their disability and to avoid labelling and categorizing disabled employees as certain kinds of subjects (Reddington & Price, 2017). As Berghs et al. (2019) argues society should and can do better in terms of duties of a social contract to all of its citizens. According to these findings, there is a need for additional research, which I address in the next section.

### ***Recommendations for future research***

The findings in this study align with the existing literature, supporting the need for additional research on the lived experiences of autists in relation to employment. The barriers to finding and gaining employment, challenges with sensory sensitivities, and the social aspects of the workplace are well documented in past studies. However, according to autistic youth in this study, there is still room for improvement in the abovementioned categories. This study demonstrates the need for future research on topics that received less attention in previous studies.

Understanding the need for routine was one of the significant categories that were identified during the analysis process. Existing studies recognize the information and communication technology area as highly appealing to autistic employees and their employers who value skills like attention to detail and a high tolerance for repetitive tasks (Austin & Pisano, 2017; Scott et al., 2017; Wehman et al., 2020). Future research could focus on identifying more areas of employment that can benefit from those skills and therefore create more workplaces for autistic job seekers. Additionally, autism scholars could identify paths to implement reasonable adjustments to accommodate the need for routine for autistic employees, like adjusting the timing of requests to harmonize with the completion of current activity or allowing additional time to process the information before the change may benefit transitioning.

Another significant category that emerged during the analysis process was the importance of special interests in employment. Autistic youth vloggers in this study talked about their dream jobs, appreciation of particular occupations and preference to work in the field of their special interests. This research demonstrates that autistic youth vloggers in this study prefer working in the field of their special interest and are willing to face minor inconveniences (e.g. transportation difficulties) to perform their duties successfully. Nevertheless, it is also worth noting that sometimes they feel obtaining a dream job does not guarantee successful employment outcomes due to various external factors interfering with their daily work. Surprisingly, limited studies explore special interests related to employment among autists. This study highlights the importance of future research focusing on incorporating special interests in autism employment, mainly enabling existing employment support practices to harmonize special interests with potential occupations.

This study revealed that, despite having a job that includes their special interest, autistic youth vloggers still had to terminate their employment due to mental health issues, primarily associated with job environment and social factors. Tremendous lack of support and poor work-life balance were just a few reasons reported by autists in this study that eventually led to adverse mental health outcomes. They saw employment as a "constant struggle" due to the overwhelming work environment, tasks to fit in socially and sensory overstimulation. Since just a few empirical studies focus on the association between job satisfaction and mental health in this population, future research could develop guidelines that will assist employment support programs in identifying potential risks for autists' mental health in a particular workplace. Additionally, scholars might further concentrate on specifying the reasonable accommodations employers can implement in their workplaces.

One possible way of getting adequate accommodations and thus removing some of the barriers to employment discussed by autistic youth vloggers is to disclose the autism diagnosis. While autistic youth in this study acknowledged the importance of individual choice to disclose the diagnosis, they stated their preference to show their authentic selves in the workplace without the need to mask or hide their identities. It is often unclear what factors are associated with either positive or negative disclosure outcomes for autists since those are often mixed. Therefore, this study suggests further research to assist autistic youth and adults in making an informed decision about disclosure at work. In addition, this study supports the importance of autism-specific knowledge in the workplace, which can be increased by providing specific programs and training for employers and employees.

Lastly, while autistic youth in this study provided various advice on positive employment outcomes, half of the chosen videos mentioned the advantage of self-employment over the

traditional work settings for autists. While current studies focus on entrepreneurship options for the disabled community in general, there is a lack of research exploring autism and self-employment. The findings in this study contribute to the increasing knowledge about self-employment opportunities among autists, both their potential benefits and challenges. According to these findings, there is a requirement for additional research specific to entrepreneurship since running a business is a complex initiative. All of the autists in this study who were self-employed were getting some help with scheduling, financing or time management, mainly from family members or partners. Further studies might focus on specific skills and supports that autist people may need for successful self-employment careers.

### *Limitations*

This study applied video content analysis, so the data was collected from video sources. In the study, I concentrated on the transcripts of the video narratives and did not include the analysis of facial expressions, gestures, or other emotional manifestations. Therefore, this could potentially limit the precise understanding of the messages the autist youth intended to deliver in this study.

In addition, while this study did not focus on a particular country or continent, the chosen videos represent the state of employment for autist youth from USA, Canada, and the UK. This may restrict the global representation of autism as it relates to employment. Another limitation connected to the location of the vloggers may be the difference between the regulations and employment services present in each of the countries, states, or provinces included in this study. Therefore, the study cannot ascertain whether the autist youth were in similar or different conditions.

Finally, one of the limitations of this research was my understanding of cultural expressions or speech. Since my first language is not English, my interpretation of the chosen videos may not have been as accurate as of someone whose first language is English.

### ***Conclusion***

This study explored the voices of young autistic YouTube vloggers on their experience with employment. The current employment situation requires substantial attention, and autistic youth self-advocates contribute to the existing knowledge by sharing their opinions through social media. In conclusion, autistic youth face significant challenges on the work trajectory. They struggle with social interactions in the workplace, encounter overwhelming work environments and deal with stress, anxiety and depression due to various job barriers. Although many of the outcomes for autism employment outlined in this study are negative, there is room for future research to improve employment outcomes and the quality of life of autistic youth. To achieve this goal, prospective studies related to autism and employment should consider environmental and personal factors and their prospect of affecting work participation among autistic youth.

This study shows how by listening to the voices of autistic youth, the themes for potential research can be identified (e.g. self-employment, disclosure, special interests). This thesis demonstrates the importance of taking the first voice perspectives into account to ensure equal access to job and workplace opportunities by contributing to the existing literature.

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