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Blueprint for Meaningful Employment: Adults with Autism  
Spectrum Disorders and Their Circles of Support

Marilyn F. Hays

BLUEPRINT FOR MEANINGFUL EMPLOYMENT: ADULTS WITH AUTISM  
SPECTRUM DISORDERS AND THEIR CIRCLES OF SUPPORT

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

Leadership and Education in

the Adrian Dominican School of Education of

Barry University

by

Marilyn F. Hays, B. S., M. S., Ed. S.

\* \* \* \* \*

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Area of Specialization: Leadership

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## ABSTRACT

### BLUEPRINT FOR MEANINGFUL EMPLOYMENT: ADULTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS AND THEIR CIRCLES OF SUPPORT

Marilyn F. Hays

Barry University, 2009

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Purpose: The purpose of this research project was to investigate the key factors that captured the dynamics between the high functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome (HFA) who were meaningfully employed and their professional circles of support in the education field or the business field, along with circles of support within the family system and how these relationships led toward better outcomes.

Method: The method for this study utilized a qualitative grounded theory research design. Many researchers (Atkinson, Coffey, & Delemont, 2003; Schram, 2006; Strauss, 1987) considered grounded theory research design as a process of examining social phenomena, the social world, or social situations in order to gain a deeper understanding of their participants' perspectives through their interactions with them. The ultimate purpose of this type of research was to go through the process of coding the data to form major themes that became evident as each case was studied, leading

to a substantive theory. Therefore, with this in mind, grounded theory methods were appropriate to give voice to the HFA individuals as to the factors relating to their acquisition of meaningful employment and, subsequently, hear the voices of the professional and familial circles of support and the roles they played.

Major Findings: The HFA participants all spoke in positive terms of their experiences of meaningful employment, although some of these experiences occurred in their past work. The findings revolved around three core categories: People Skills, Support, and Abilities aligned with their Interests. People skills were key to the HFA participants' acquisition and maintenance of their jobs. They either had to already have some people skills or be willing to learn them. The second core category, support, explained the major ways the circles of support assisted the HFA individuals, such as working together with them to better understand their need for certain skills. Some examples included adding to their repertoire of people skills, along with practical skills, and the means of dealing with the intricacies that arose frequently on many jobsites. During this process, relationships were formed and grew, and there was more of a sense of collaboration. The last category, abilities aligned with interests, is believed by many researchers that HFA individuals become more motivated in their work if their interests are somehow integrated. All participants had a strong sense of the work ethic and felt confidence and pride in a job well done. These results taken together offer many ideas regarding ways to improve the situation and areas of further research.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

One of the first things I learned about working on your doctorate was you cannot walk alone. Support is valued and a necessity! So you form groups, sometimes only one other person, sometimes many more. Toward the end, support is especially essential when you think you cannot write one more word or one more sentence. Therefore, I want to acknowledge my two dear friends and supporters, Dr. Ramesh Boodhoo and Dr. Joe Belinski for their frequent words of encouragement, direction, and knowledge. I love and appreciate my sister, Phyllis, for her “out of the clear, blue sky” pep talks (Did you learn that from Dad?). I cannot go any farther without thanking God for sending my Chair, Dr. Joseph Maddox, to my rescue and making the remainder of my trip to now an exciting, less fretful, and more fun one, one where he stretched me beyond what I ever envisioned. I thank you for your words of wit and wisdom.

Acknowledgements go to my other committee members, Dr. Kitty Eeltink and Dr. Marilyn Lutz. Dr. Eeltink, we go a long way back, and your strong supportive presence has been the backbone of Barry University of Orlando’s School of Education, and I am so thankful for that. Dr. Lutz, for several years your name was a legend, and I was not fortunate enough to have you for a class, let alone meet you. But as I prepared for this last lap, I met you and understood why so many others thought so highly of you! I also want to thank someone who originally was on my committee, Dr. Gene Tootle. I know you are here in spirit, smiling your special smile down at us. Your depth of knowledge about the very essentials of life and learning brightened my life so much. You are missed.

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## DEDICATION

The first person I dedicate this dissertation to is the person who has been by my side through the ups and downs and the in-betweens, my loving husband, Mark. He offered comfort when I cried, strength when I felt weak, discipline when I became distracted, encouragement and pride when I shared my “Aha!” moments. I truly would not be here now without him.

My parents have given me so much. My dad, though he passed away the year prior to my starting down this path, had always wished this for me and endowed me with his trait of perseverance which says it all. Mom, my sweet friend and parent, you always took the time, no matter what, to lend whatever support that was needed at the time. Your insight and everlasting love warms my heart and inner being.

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to those individuals out there that I have devoted my whole career to: the high functioning people both young and older with autism and Asperger Syndrome. This dissertation journey has given me more knowledge to fuel my hopes, along with concrete plans for you and your futures. We can do it! Especially, with the care and assistance of those Circles of Support working hand-in-hand with us.

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CHAPTER I  
THE PROBLEM

Introduction

*Society loses out if individuals with autism spectrum disorders are not involved in the world of work . . . . For those on the autism spectrum, finding a satisfying job also provides social opportunities through shared interests . . . . Work . . . . is the glue that keeps our lives together in an otherwise frustrating and sometimes confusing world [emphasis added]. (Grandin & Duffy, 2004, vii-ix)*

These statements by Grandin, a renowned author, professor, and international consultant who is also a high functioning individual with autism exemplifies the heights that can be achieved given the right circumstances. A theme she ultimately stressed in one of her most recent books was the significant influence meaningful employment can make in these individuals' lives (2004). This belief in the importance of being employed playing a major role in the quality of life for high functioning individuals with autism and Asperger Syndrome (HFA) is mirrored in the research on this topic (Attwood, 1998; Grandin, 1996; Grandin & Duffy; Hillier, Campbell, Mastriani, Izzo, Kool-Tucker, Cherry, & Beversdorf, 2007; Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2002, 2004; Muller, Schuler, Burton, & Yates, 2003; Romoser, 2000). A participant with Asperger Syndrome in Hurlbutt and Chalmers' 2002 study asserted this salience by stating, "Employment issues are the biggest concern for all people with Asperger Syndrome. It impacts so many other things" (p. 222). Despite how important employment is to the well-being of HFA adults, the picture remains rather bleak.



## Statement of the Problem

The more able individuals of this population, through their increased awareness of their employment predicament, were more capable of detailing the dilemmas they faced. Such problems that they spoke of were the inability to maintain a job as a result of poor communication between employee and employer or co-workers, difficulties due to the more social aspects of their work, and not being able to utilize their capabilities and educational training (Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2002, 2004). Muller et al.'s (2003) study revealed patterns of unemployment and underemployment and work being viewed as an essentially negative experience, though there was the isolated positive experience.

It is imperative to gain more understanding of the HFA individuals' plight in the employment field, and to gain a clearer picture of the perspectives of the educators who prepared them for transitioning, in addition to the business people involved in helping this population, so a more proactive course can be plotted for all parties. The employment situation under discussion presented an enigma. Although several studies showed that individuals with autism can be successful in their careers (Fullerton & Coyne, 1999; Grandin, 1996; Grandin & Duffy, 2004; Hagner & Cooney, 2005; Hillier et al., 2007; Keel, Mesibov, & Woods, 1997), there seemed to be others that demonstrated that these individuals were facing considerable obstacles (Billstedt, Gillberg, & Gillberg, 2007; Gerhardt, 2007; Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2002, 2004; Nesbitt, 2000, Romoser, 2000; Wood & Test, 2001). This quandary was also reflected in the research addressing transitioning prior to graduation. Several studies presented a positive outlook through their strategies during transition times (Frith, 2004; Howlin, Alcock, & Burkin, 2005; Plimley & Bowen,

2006), two studies highlighted both positive and negative outcomes (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Smith & Donnelly, 1998; Winter-Messiers, Herr, Wood, Brooks, Gates, Houston, & Tingstad, 2007), while another study portrayed more negative aspects (Barnard, Harvey, Potter, & Prior, 2001).

Hagner and Cooney (2005) were curious about this puzzling situation in the employment field and conducted a study that underlined the necessity to examine the thoughts and perspectives of employers. These employers offered guidance as to what abilities were needed for the HFA person to experience success in the workplace, along with key supervision strategies for those working with them. Examples of positive responses by supervisors about their HFA employees consisted of, “being methodical and conscientious in carrying out job duties; performing work of especially high quality; and being dependable, punctual, and consistent” (Hagner & Cooney, p. 93). Nevertheless, the limited number of HFA individuals acquiring meaningful jobs posed another reason for investigation into this complex situation (Unger, 2000) in order to discover solutions to rectify these obstacles.

Let us look at some of the factors that led up to this dilemma. Autism, considered a developmental disability, was only added as an individual disability category that required reporting at the federal government level in 1991, according to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and at the state level in 1992. Prior to 1991, it was included under the category of Other Health Impaired. Up until this last decade, very little specific information was known regarding Asperger

Syndrome; diagnostic criteria for high functioning or more able individuals was not detailed until 1989 (Ward & Meyer, 1999).

Recently, autism is on the forefront with a preponderance of articles, interviews, and videos on autism. A major reason for this was most likely due to the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) report on the increase in prevalence. According to their Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, there was one child aged eight with autism per every 150 children (2007). The Autism Society of America took this information very seriously. In their position paper on "The National Crisis in Adult Services for Individuals with Autism" (May, 2007), Sullivan extrapolated that in the years 2014 and 2016 those children will be 22 year-old adults. Assuming the ratio stays the same that would equate to approximately 1.5 million adults with autism in the United States. Sullivan stated, "The figure—and cost to society—is staggering" (p. 10). Some researchers were considering this to be epidemic proportions (Steuernagel, 2005).

Another factor brought out by the Asperger Foundation International that attached even more urgency to the employment dilemma was their report of a "crisis" facing high functioning adults on the autism spectrum in terms of quality of life (Geller & Cavanagh, 2006, p. 6). More specific information regarding employment issues included the fact that only seven per cent were employed full-time. A number of individuals, who were found eligible for job services, were unemployed and waiting for help from a staff person. Geller and Cavanagh scrutinized the mean income of these HFA individuals in comparison with persons at the national level according to their education. With a high school diploma, those with high functioning autism averaged \$1,267; the national level

was \$25,467. Even with a bachelor's degree, the difference was significant: \$19,750 versus \$49,050. The investigators emphasized the need for more research, along with locating and assessing adult services, "that are producing positive outcomes" (p. 6).

### Purpose of the Study

As one can see so far in this chapter, many studies explored various aspects concerning the employment issues that adults with autism were encountering at the transition stage and after that. In addition, studies that focused on employers or supervisors and their statements regarding their HFA employees were fewer in number. The closest to my proposed study was Hagner and Cooney's (2005) research project. Theirs was a qualitative study that examined the perceptions of the supervisors of 14 successfully employed individuals with autism. Two other studies that sought input from employers spotlighted specific program evaluations that were already in operation.

As a result, the proposed study was unique; it employed qualitative measures to seek input from educators who implemented successful transition practices, HFA employees with meaningful jobs, along with the perceptions of the business people who supported these individuals in their quest for more quality of life. I felt it was critical to gain insight and understanding from *all* [emphasis added] groups of individuals so as to present a more comprehensive picture of what seems to be working in this most needed area of existence. In addition, it was especially helpful to interview HFA employees who have jobs that add meaning to their lives in the hopes that the data that emerge will yield inspiration and encouragement to others less fortunate. Another important facet of this research was hearing from the educators who provided their students with the tools

necessary to transition into the world of work, and the supportive business people, whether they were supervisors as in Hagner and Cooney's (2005) study, or employers, co-workers, job coaches, and rehabilitation counselors. This combination of professionals associated by their common practice of assistance truly could be considered the HFA employees' *circle of support* [emphasis added], therefore, the technical term was professional circle of support.

Therefore, many sides of the employment scenario were covered. The purpose of this research project was to investigate the key factors that captured the dynamics between the groups that led toward better outcomes. The knowledge gained from this analysis may offer a blueprint or useful guidelines to be further utilized by the participants and, in turn, other HFA adults, transition personnel in the preparation stage or business people who may be working with them in order to see progress in their job situations. Ultimately, what was an "isolated positive experience" (see Muller et al., 2003, p. 2) may become one experienced by many.

#### Theoretical Framework

"The role of a theory is ultimately judged by the power of the methods it yields to produce desired changes" (Bandura, 1999, p.2). One aspect of this research project, as stated above, was to gain a better understanding about HFA individuals who were meaningfully employed. To build success for these individuals involved helping them develop their natural talents (Grandin & Duffy, 2004). When allowed to utilize one's talents or concentrated fields of interest, a person will feel more fulfilled and gain greater satisfaction from one's accomplishments. This can all equate to success. Bandura's

theory of self-efficacy addressed many of these same beliefs. It was for this reason this researcher chose to situate this research study within the framework of Bandura's well known and widely referred to theory.

As Tollefson (2000) pointed out in her discussion on Bandura's theory, "efficacy expectations are beliefs that the person is capable of successfully completing the course of action that will lead to success" (p. 67). This author was speaking in terms of application of several cognitive theories of motivation in the classroom. It is only natural for a student or employee to feel more confident and motivated when using one's natural abilities to finish the task at hand. Bandura (1993) addressed the many ways self-efficacy contributed to motivation. Grusec (1992) and Goleman (2000) brought out the fact that self-efficacy beliefs came to pass from a person's background of accomplishment in a domain, similar to a specific area of interest. Attwood (1998), an authority on Asperger Syndrome, encouraged utilization of a strategy for lack of motivation. The strategy was to integrate the student's special interest in an unmotivating activity, thus, often reversing the person's feelings regarding involvement in the previously "boring" activity. Frequently, these interests or talents were the initial steps toward an actual job in the person's life (Grandin & Duffy, 2004).

Bandura (1999) wrote about four major ways to influence an individual's belief in self-efficacy. He believed that of the four, the most effective manner to accomplish this was through mastery experiences, which provided evidence about one's ability to succeed. Mancini (2007) extrapolated on this by stressing that involvement in meaningful activities in work or school settings could go far toward developing one's skills and

confidence and, ultimately, led to mastery experiences. “Successes build a robust belief in one’s personal efficacy” (Bandura, p. 3) which, in turn, can add to one’s commitment and perseverance.

The second form of influence on one’s self-efficacy is through vicarious experiences which are provided by social models (Bandura, 1999). Difficulties in the area of social learning and cognition for individuals on the autism spectrum are well documented in the literature (Attwood, 1998; Grandin & Duffy, 2004; Howlin, 1997; Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2002, 2004; Muller et al., 2003). Some researchers (Bovee, 2000; Hurlbutt & Chalmers) revealed a relevant statistic regarding employment: Jobs are 80% social and 20% work. All this information highlighted that this type of experience, vicarious experience through social modeling, is one that HFA employees will need support and assistance for learning to take place. Thus, the data that may be gained from the circles of support of either the transition specialists or the involved business people may shed light on this aspect of Bandura’s theory. Regarding this particular influence, Bandura did stress the substantial impact of seeing others similar to them perform successfully.

Thirdly, social persuasion can influence one’s belief in self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995). Strauser and Berven (2006) developed an instrument, the Job Seeking Self-Efficacy Scale. The scale incorporated tasks determined to be critical during the job-seeking process implicitly for persons with disabilities. It was based on Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy and offered insight for rehabilitation counselors in the identification and implementation of interventions and training procedures that increased individuals with

disabilities' success in this area. Bandura emphasized the importance of structuring situations in which the person would achieve success and, accordingly, avoid situations where failure is likely to occur. These developers (Strauser & Berven) addressed the effects practice sessions could have on the main sources of influence under discussion. They felt that the encouragement that the counselors and trainers could provide would act as sources of social persuasion. Once the person with the disability, in this case, a HFA individual attained the job, others in one's circle of support could follow through with this critical type of feedback (Mancini, 2007).

Bandura's fourth manner of influencing a person's self-efficacy beliefs was "to enhance physical status, reduce stress and negative proclivities, and correct misinterpretations of bodily states" (p. 4-5). Anxiety and tension make the employee vulnerable to not being able to perform as successfully he or she would without these feelings. According to Paxton and Estay (2007), people on the autism spectrum have a tendency toward low levels of self-efficacy, along with limited coping skills. It is a common practice in educating students with autism to supply them with strategies to follow at the first signs of anxiety (Hays, 1997). This researcher, in her work with HFA young adults who were employed but faced particular situations that may trigger anxiety, provided them with concrete strategies to follow in order to alter their anxious states. The supervisors were made aware of the strategy and how they may support them. Regaining one's feelings of self-efficacy can go far toward ameliorating the effects of stress (Paxton & Estay). Bandura (1993) pointed out that when individuals believed they have control



over what they perceived as a difficult situation, they were more capable of coping with the situation and performed more effectively.

Bandura's (1999) four areas of influence on the development of one's self-efficacy aptly highlighted the various ways his theory of self-efficacy could apply to the purpose of the study. Other theories or constructs may also play a role. However, analysis of Bandura's influences on self-efficacy gave this study added depth and richness, along with furnishing this researcher a more panoramic view of the scope of the research questions appropriate for this study.

#### Research questions

In qualitative research, the research question or questions offer a narrower focus of the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2003). The questions can add to the clarity of the purpose and provide a deeper sense of the problem (Schram, 2006). Schram also suggested that in a grounded theory study, the investigator is committed to comprehending the manner in which "reality is socially constructed" (p. 104). Another facet of grounded theory research is that the questions could change during the process of data collection and analysis in order to be representative of the evolving nature of the data. The research questions for this study were:

Relating to the HFA participants:

What factors were involved when high functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome achieved and maintained meaningful employment?

- What made their jobs meaningful for them?

- What happened during their time at school to prepare them for attaining meaningful employment?
- How did involved business people assist and support them in preparing for and achieving meaningful employment?

Relating to their professional circles of support:

How did the educators or business people become involved in their supportive roles with the individuals with autism and in what ways did they support them?

- What type of training or experience prepared them so they could offer support and assistance?

For all participants:

What kinds of relationships developed between the individuals with autism and their circles of support?

What changes in perspective occurred as a result of these relationships?

#### Significance of the Study

This section of the chapter is an elaboration on the research study's importance, in addition to being a discussion of the implications it held for other researchers, professionals, and those involved in policy formation (Creswell, 2003). More specifically, Schram (2006) explained that this section addressed what difference one's study will make, "reaffirms" one's purpose, along with "provides an opportunity to heighten emphasis on the practical aims of your inquiry" (p. 176). It was this researcher's intention to discover the practicalities of finding and maintaining meaningful jobs for the many HFA individuals waiting for such guidance. Geller and Cavanagh (2005) wrote of a

crisis facing this particular population and their quality of life which included a miniscule employment rate; these researchers asked specifically for research demonstrating positive results in this essential domain of one's life.

This led one to the understanding of why this topic was so crucial to investigate. Would an increase in prevalence in epidemic proportions be additionally applicable to the rationale for investigation (CDC, 2007; Steuernagel, 2005)? How about the inconsistencies in the research on these individuals who are successful versus those facing major obstacles in the world of work? As a participant in one of the studies referred to earlier (Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2002) expressed, "Employment . . . impacts so many other things" (p. 222). We're speaking once again about quality of life issues. Due to HFA adults' awareness of their differences and how pervasively these affected them, it was critical that their issues were faced in as comprehensive of a manner as is possible. Since persons from this particular end of the autism spectrum are able to speak for themselves, it was crucial that we heard their voices. Another vital aspect of the proposed research was to gain input from influential educators, and in the employment field, from not only the employers and supervisors, but also from other business people that comprised the HFA participants' circles of support.

The proposed research was implemented in Florida, yet research has shown that this problem is of national significance (Sullivan, 2007) in addition to international significance (Attwood, 1998; Howlin, Goode, Hutton, & Rutter, 2004). The participants most likely will be representing several different job industries, a fact which adds to the study's generalizability, another feature relevant to a study's significance (Schram).

Patton (2002) qualified this further when writing of qualitative researchers' use of extrapolations which he defined as, "modest speculations on the likely applications of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical conditions" (p. 584).

In reference to the research questions of this study, preparation for meaningful employment and support was another salient factor involved. By delving into the HFA participants' preparation during their school years, this information could offer suggestions regarding curricular practices and vocational strategies to be applied as early as the elementary school level. Also, the knowledge gained from the participants comprising the circles of support in the business world could add invaluable input into expansion of training practices and specifics that especially apply to high functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome. Finally, this comprehensive knowledge could be essential for administrators and policy makers when looking ahead for solutions to pressing problems that will not disappear.

#### Origins of the Researcher's Interest in the Topic

After 34 years of teaching this population, ages 3 to 21, I retired and began my doctoral studies. The utilization of the students with autism's interests and talents to motivate them to expand their knowledge and skills was always an integral part of my philosophy and teaching practice. As referred to earlier in this proposal, this was a strategy recommended by Grandin (Grandin & Duffy, 2004) and Attwood (1998). This researcher has seen several of my former students succeed in their lives largely due to employing that strategy; therefore, proving it could be a realistic direction to take.

However, I knew from contact with other former students the opposite could be true. That is, their quality of life was sorely lacking. As far as employment issues, these individuals either were not employed and struggling to find a job, or if they were employed, their jobs were menial, low income, and did not include their area of interest. Upon researching these disturbing situations, I found the same to be true in the literature. This was an area in need of a comprehensive solution or, at the very least, an area where all sides of the equation could be scrutinized in depth, so that greater insight could be gained.

### Research Design

The section above presented the rationale of why this particular topic of interest intrigued and actually propelled this researcher to gain a better understanding of the dilemma facing HFA adults in the world of work. In order to do so, the situation that encompasses not only these adults, but any educator or business person who proffered support in some way, required an in-depth study to comprehend the intricacies that were woven together to produce the rare occurrence of HFA individuals finding and maintaining meaningful employment. Since this positive result happened so infrequently, the number of participants was limited (Unger, 2002), which is a feature of qualitative research.

Taken together this equated to use of a qualitative research design. When a researcher examines “a social or human problem” (Creswell, 1998, p. 15) which is complex and enigmatic, he or she must explore the topic in depth. As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) expressed in their definition of qualitative research, “qualitative researchers study

things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 2). It was hoped that through this research project, the whole picture of this rare occurrence, HFA individuals enjoying and growing from the experience of having a job that adds to their quality of life, would be presented in a manner so that others could benefit from the knowledge that was gained. This picture was constructed from the analysis of textual data gleaned from semi-structured interviews. Schram so aptly explained, “we rely on depth, richness, and detail to provide the basis of our qualitative account’s claim to relevance” (p. 10). The facets of this discussion and the details of the proposed research project lend substantial evidence for utilization of qualitative research methods.

#### Definition of Terms

The terms that are defined here were terms used throughout the proposal. As Creswell (2003) pointed out, in qualitative research studies the researcher may begin by defining a few terms and in the final write up may add terms that arose as the study progressed.

The first group of definitions relates to the participants this researcher calls high functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome or in its shortened version, HFA individuals. However, initially I will define the more general term, autism, in order that high functioning autism and Asperger Syndrome are more clearly understood.

#### *Autism*

This researcher examined many definitions, so what appears here is a compilation of this researcher’s own knowledge and that of Sicile-Kira (2004). Autism is a lifelong

neurological disorder affecting the normal development of the brain with the onset generally before the child reaches the age of three. Affected areas are imaginative play, social interaction, and communication. Those individuals with autism can have learning difficulties, especially in the abstract area of thought. An individual with autism often exhibits obsessive behaviors, activities, and interests. Frequently, autism includes difficulties with sensory issues and motor skills; many individuals with classic autism are nonverbal.

### *High Functioning Autism*

Though this phrase is not included in medical diagnoses (APA, 1994), it is one used frequently in the literature. Ozonoff, Dawson, and McPartland (2002) wrote a book about individuals with high functioning autism and those with Asperger Syndrome, though the authors claimed that it is often difficult to distinguish between the two. There is an ongoing debate in the literature regarding this puzzling distinction (Baron-Cohen, 2002; Howlin, 2003; Macintosh & Dissanayake, 2004) and these sources agreed that the difference was not enough to consider them as separate disorders. The depictions given by Ozonoff et al. (2002) on high functioning individuals with autism (HFA) included that they have good communication skills, though in social settings they may experience problems; have normal intelligence; and few learning problems. They exhibit milder versions of behavior, nevertheless their intense interests can be disruptive to the extent that they may refuse to participate or follow directions unless allowed to include the subject or object of interest. The authors went on to say that HFA individuals experience,

“difficulty with the kind of close empathic relations,” (p. 6), may be awkward in their interactions, but have a desire to interact with others.

### *Asperger Syndrome*

This section will describe Asperger Syndrome’s features that may serve to distinguish it as a form of high functioning autism. For the purposes of this study, the use of the term “high functioning autism” will include persons who are considered to be Asperger individuals.

According to an online source, an autism forum (2004), Asperger Syndrome is thought to be the highest form of autism. When first defined by Hans Asperger in 1944, this definition included a pattern demonstrating, “a lack of empathy, little ability to form friendships, one-sided conversations, intense absorptions in a special interest and clumsy movements” (Attwood, 1998, p. 11). One major variation between Asperger Syndrome and HFA is that those individuals with Asperger Syndrome do not have a language delay, though their language may seem stilted or professorial. They are often not diagnosed at an early age, some in their teen years and others as late as in their fifties.

The online source (2004) highlighted what they regarded as Asperger Syndrome individual’s most well known characteristic, that of the obsessive compulsive disorder component with a topic of interest which they have the tendency to focus on more than anything else. They will attempt to bring it into many of their conversations, giving excessive details without knowing when to stop or if their conversation partner is bored or disinterested.



### *Autism Spectrum Disorders*

Autism spectrum disorders is the recently used terminology to describe the various forms of autism that are explained above (Steuernagel, 2005). Utilization of the word, spectrum, is descriptive of how these individuals with the disorder range from low functioning to high functioning.

### *Professional circles of support*

The circles of support represented professionals either at the educational field or the business field. Individuals in the educational field could include teachers, transition specialists, or guidance counselors, to name a few. The business people involved in an individual with autism's circle of support could consist of any one of or combination of the following: employer, supervisor, manager, co-worker, rehabilitation counselor, or job coach. It seems to me that the term most necessary to define would be the job coach. Therefore, it is for this reason I supplied a definition for this position.

### *Job Coach*

Wehman, Targett, and Cifu (2006) wrote an article specifically on the job coach as a workplace support. The following information on job coaches was the source of much of this information. A job coach is a professional usually assigned by the rehabilitation counselor to provide certain supports that an individual with a disability may need to gain and maintain employment. The role of the job coach can change according to the individual's needs. The coach's duties can consist of carrying out a job search, providing workplace supports such as employee training, helping the individual when needed to perform some duties, acquiring assistive technology, acting as a social

model, and training the individual to problem solve. After a certain period of time, the job coach fades himself or herself out, but, ideally, may return periodically to ensure the individual is not in need of further support.

## Limitations and Delimitations

### *Limitations*

Creswell (2003) discussed the limitations of a study to be the section where the researcher extrapolates what might be weaknesses inherent within the study. It also addresses the circumstances that may restrict the study that are beyond the researcher's control (Best & Kahn, 1998). Qualitative research, by its very nature, places the researcher as the natural inquirer or instrument of the study. The researcher must observe from a subjective orientation, and this posture may be viewed as a possible limitation of this present study.

The HFA participants will have self-reported that they are high functioning or have Asperger Syndrome and that they are gainfully employed. Participants will identify the business people and/or educators who have been helpful in the specific activities of training, obtaining, and maintaining gainful employment. These individuals constitute the circles of support as described within this study. A possible limitation of the study will be a misdiagnosis or possible incorrect self-report by the individuals involved.

### *Delimitations*

These are the boundaries of the study (Best & Kahn, 1998) or the means of narrowing the scope of the research (Creswell, 2003). The focus of this research study concerned high functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome who are

employed in what they consider meaningful work, the educators who assisted them prior to leaving school, and the involved business people who the HFA participants deemed as supporting them in their current position.

### Organization of the Study

This section of the first chapter informs the reader about the material presented in each of the five chapters. In Chapter One, the researcher introduced the focus of the research topic, clarified the specific problems that needed attention, explained the purpose for pursuing an in-depth understanding of the topic, and provided an explanation of the theory pursuant to the study. Following this, the researcher posed the research questions, brought the significance and implications to light, detailed what has led the researcher to this study, supported the reasoning for the use of a qualitative research design, defined the relevant terms, specified the limitations and delimitations, and summarized the chapter.

In Chapter Two, the researcher reviewed the pertinent literature that supported the examination of the research problem, described the context or setting involved, and laid out the theoretical framework in more detail, possibly explaining similar theories that tied into the theory relative to the study. From here the researcher proceeded with the pertinent topics and subtopics, and summarized the major points discussed in this chapter.

In Chapter Three, the researcher situated the study within its philosophical framework, providing a rationale for a qualitative study, in particular, grounded theory, and reiterated the research questions. In the Methods portion, the researcher explained the specifics regarding the participants, detailed the data collection and analysis procedures,

ensured the appropriate standards of quality and verification were followed, along with the necessary ethical considerations, and provided a summary of the methodology.

In Chapter Four, the researcher related the results or findings of the research, giving more explicit details regarding the participants' demographics, revealed the findings as they pertain to each research question, utilizing direct quotes from the participants as a means of providing examples, and delineated the course of the categories as they unfolded which eventually led to the core category. This core category in grounded theory studies contains the theory that emerged from the data. The last part of this chapter is the summary of the findings.

Chapter Five is essentially a discussion of the researcher's findings. After the researcher summarized the purpose, the significance, the methods, and the limitations, the discussion ensued. The researcher described how the theory evolved and was constructed, which is symbolized usually by a visual representation. Then the researcher reviewed recommendations as a result of the findings, specifying the implications for practice and what further research may be efficacious. This chapter ends with the chapter summary.

### Chapter Summary

This study proposed that by reaching a deep understanding of how high functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome were able to find and maintain meaningful employment, along with how educators or involved business people played a part in this accomplishment, possibly will give the world of work some much needed guidance in filling the void for those facing transition or those unemployed or underemployed. The literature and the relevant statistics supported the necessity of a

more comprehensive look at this crisis which affected the population of interest and the need to discover what it was that worked for the small number of individuals who are the recipients of positive outcomes in the field of employment. So by interviewing this group and following their lead as to who are or were in their professional circles of support, in addition to exploring the dynamics of those helpful relationships, we may glean new insight to an old dilemma.

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy may shed some light on the manner in which the people who are the focus of this examination collaborated. The significance of this relentless predicament presented in a positive way was well established, along with the specific research questions that led us on our path of discovery. The exigency for a qualitative research design is verified by the in-depth and evolving analysis of a small number of participants being able to find meaning and enjoyment in their world of work. Definitions, limitations, and delimitations add further specifics to the topic at hand. Overall, this researcher sought to present a holistic view of these successful working relationships.

CHAPTER II  
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose behind this review of literature was to examine relevant research that pertained to the miniscule amount of high functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome (HFA) who were able to attain and maintain meaningful employment. This occurs while so many other individuals representative of the same population are underemployed or unemployed (Muller, Schuler, Burton, & Yates, 2003), a fact which was seen as being a crisis that must be addressed (Geller & Cavanaugh, 2005). Discovering the factors involved as to what brought the HFA individuals to be meaningfully employed, along with what forms of support these individuals received either in the educational or business field may hopefully shed some light on future directions for others not so fortunate.

The use of a grounded theory line of inquiry for this research impacted how this literature review was incorporated into this proposal. In fact, there was much discussion, debate, and controversy concerning this line of contention (Clarke, 2005; Creswell, 2003; Cutcliffe, 2000; Galvan, 2006; McGhee, Marland, & Atkinson, 2007; Schram, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). There were some researchers who believed that the literature review should only be included after the data collection has begun (see Gilgun, 1994). The reasoning behind this view was that the findings of the research may not relate to the review of literature and reviewing previous studies may compromise one's openness to discovery (Gilgun).

Many of the researchers were aware of the controversy regarding this issue. McGhee et al. (2007) and Cutcliffe (2000) remarked that researchers do not enter the research without knowledge and previous experience of their research topic. They are not “empty vessels” (Cutcliffe, p. 1480), and McGhee et al. advised researchers to be “open-minded” but not “empty-headed” (p. 336). The researchers’ interests and experiences related to the problem can be comprehensive and significant enough to bring to light (Clarke, 2005; Cutcliffe). Strauss and Corbin (1998) stated that an essential question to ask was how this material could enhance rather than restrict the development of theory.

There were a variety of reasons that authors have highlighted to include a review. Some are very practical such as dissertations require a literature review (Clarke, 2005; Creswell, 2003) in addition to satisfying the university’s ethics committee (McGhee et al., 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Other arguments for inclusion of an initial review of literature were: (a) being a “stepping off point” to form questions that the researcher may use during beginning interviews (Strauss & Corbin); (b) identifying gaps in the literature which would indicate the appropriateness of a grounded theory approach (Cutcliffe; Gilgun, 1994; McGhee et al.); (c) increasing awareness of the extant knowledge base (McGhee et al.), thus engendering more understanding and clarity of the concepts (Cutcliffe; Gilgun) and (d) augmenting researchers’ sensitivity to understated nuances that may emerge during the data collection and analysis phase (Strauss & Corbin).

According to Gilgun (1994), researchers with the desire to take a fresh look at phenomena are suited to utilize grounded theory methods. The practice of such researchers entering the field with minds as open as possible, along with staying aware of

their biases and preconceived ideas, goes far toward accommodating the issues inherent to use of a primary literature review in grounded theory research.

This review began by offering a historical backdrop to the path traveled by adults with disabilities followed by a slightly different path the adults with autism traveled. The heart of the theoretical framework was Bandura's social cognitive learning theory, at the center of which lies self-efficacy. A view of self-efficacy in the workplace followed by at school will bring understanding of the many ways this concept affected the individuals at those locales. The time of transitioning, which begins at the school level, before moving on to either college or attempts for employment, was a main area of study. It played a major role in an individual's chance for success in one's future life. The last section related the research found that concerned people with autism and compared and contrasted it with what was discussed previously. It ended on a positive note explaining a paradigm shift with HFA adults writing, blogging, creating websites, and speaking loud and clear about how they viewed the world and what they desired for themselves.

### Context

The primary means of data collection began by interviewing the high functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome (HFA) who were employed in meaningful work. Seidman (2006) discussed having a contact visit prior to the interview process. One purpose of this visit would be to determine the location of the interview(s). Seidman suggested that it "should be convenient to the participant, private, yet if at all possible familiar to him or her . . . . one in which the participant feels comfortable and secure" (p. 49). Therefore, during the contact visit this researcher asked them where this may be, for



example, their home, a quiet room at work, or a place this researcher arranged to be available for the interviews.

At the time of the interviews, the HFA participants had the opportunity to identify the educator or business person who supported them. With either case, the interview could be at their place of work, or should they not prefer this, a prearranged place was chosen. Overall, giving each participant a choice of the interview locale acted as a means of the participant entering this phase of the research feeling comfortable about the interview process.

### Historical Background

A short historical background should be helpful for the reader to understand the path individuals with autism have traveled to reach where they stand now. Prior to this description, a history of the disability movement in their fight for civil rights, in general, will be outlined, so a more well-rounded perspective may be gained. These accounts originated during the period of time when many individuals with disabilities faced dismal futures residing in institutions and proceeded up to the times when they banded together to become strong advocates for their cause of emancipation leading to empowerment. It is an ever-continuing battle, one of great challenge.

Perhaps the best way to summarize the stages of the disability movement is to integrate them around the “three waves” detailed in a most informative article by Wehmeyer, Bersani, and Gagne (2000). The first wave described by these authors rolled to shore toward the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At this time, the power was in the hands of the professionals, mainly medical ones. Society and these professionals viewed

people with mental retardation, “as subhuman or as objects to be feared” and pitied (Wehmeyer et al., p. 106; Shapiro, 1994). Disability was the result of a deficit in the composition of the body or mind (Baker, 2006). The professionals were the ones making the decisions with an emphasis on diagnosis to determine whether treatment would be beneficial. In many cases, these individuals were considered best served by receiving “care” [emphasis added] in institutions (Gerhardt & Holmes, 1997).

The second wave of the disability movement arose at the mid-point of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was considered the parent movement (Wehmeyer et al., 2000). With the medical and scientific advances that had ensued, the life span of individuals with mental retardation increased to a great extent. This increase of medically stable people engendered the impetus of considering how to best manage their care (Ward & Meyer, 1999). Thus, the stereotype from the first wave changed to one of perceiving people with disabilities as, “objects to be fixed, cured, and rehabilitated” (Wehmeyer et al., p. 107). This was the time of deinstitutionalization (Gerhardt & Holmes, 1997). They were still to be pitied and, in addition, considered worthy of charity. In fact, it was at this period the “poster child” surfaced and Shapiro (1994) wrote that this was, “a surefire tug at our hearts” (p. 12). In the long run, disabled people felt this symbol to be one of oppression.

Parents and families during the second wave began to form groups or organizations (Wehmeyer et al., 2000). Initially, the focus was one of supporting one another, but eventually turned to advocating for themselves and their children. Organizations such as The Arc and United Cerebral Palsy were founded and, with that turn of events, professionals joined the parents in their advocating efforts. The combined

forces were politically oriented during this period, the 1950's to the 1970's, which, in turn, propagated an increase in services. This acted as a precursor to the third wave: one of self-advocacy (Wehmeyer et al.).

This third wave was when the tide had turned, and individuals with disabilities began speaking up about what they wanted their lives to be like, lives that were “measured not by the task one could perform without assistance but by the quality of one’s life with help” (Shapiro, 1994, p. 51). A critical part of the self advocacy movement was the concept of self-determination which Fullerton and Coyne (1999) defined as, “Knowing oneself, one’s goals, and how to achieve these goals” (p. 42) through a process in which one developed and implemented a realistic plan for one’s life. And as their parents met in groups during the second wave, the self advocates began to do so also. As the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century drew near, old stereotypes were replaced with the recognition that individuals with mental retardation were competent human beings, worthy to be treated with dignity and respect (Wehmeyer et al., 2000).

#### *Historical Background Relating to Autism*

This section of the historical background focuses on the role adults with autism played in the disability movement. However, information in this area was not as plentiful as the section before. In addition, the needs of individuals with autism went unaddressed, often years behind that of the disability movement and the progress they achieved (Gerhardt & Holmes, 1997). Shapiro (1994), in his book regarding the disability rights movement, recognized the autism population when he discussed the organization, Community Services for Autistic Adults and Children (CSAAC). According to the

organization's website, CSAAC was founded in 1979 by four families in Maryland in order to help children and adults with autism, "succeed in day-to-day activities and become active members of their communities" (p. 1). Conversely, at the time of CSAAC's inception, most all adults with autism were situated in institutions. Although the task ahead was an arduous one, CSAAC was successful and now has the most comprehensive program of its kind in the state.

Shapiro (1994) wrote of a group of adults with autism from the same organization and commended them for helping him realize that, "integration is not just a goal for a few with the mildest disabilities but a feasible and a common good and a right for all" (p. 144). He continued by stating that the director at the time of his visit confirmed that people with autism were the most segregated of all the disabilities, often discarded and ignored. CSAAC went far to demonstrate that the population was not without hope. The organization later received national recognition for their pioneering work and the great strides that they took to transform previously institutionalized adults with autism to be contributing members of society (Shapiro). Bittersweet Farms was another similar venture occurring within the same time frame (Gidden & Obee, 1996).

Historically, adults with autism were basically ignored (Gerhardt & Holmes, 1997; Gidden & Obee, 1996), as if, "autism is something relevant only to children" (Ne'eman, 2008, p. 3). This is apparent even now with legislation and policy making aimed mainly at early intervention, research on possible cures or prevention, and educational strategies prior to adulthood. In Chapter I of this proposal, this researcher reported that Sullivan (2007) announced a national crisis in adult services. A document

titled, “Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) Roadmap” (2004), and presented to the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee, stressed,

Although serious gaps exist in provider capacity to meet service needs at all stages of the life cycle, gaps in the availability of services for adults with ASD are most glaring and urgently in need of attention . . . . There are even fewer services available for higher functioning youth and adults. (p. 10)

However, this was not impeding individuals from speaking out about the conditions they faced and the ways they needed to be included. A trip to Amazon.com shows one the plethora of books written by individuals with autism, offering a variety of interpretations of how these individuals perceive life, and the struggles they faced in trying to explain their differences. And with the small amount of supports, as stated above, this only added to the challenges adults with autism are confronted with on a regular basis.

There is one particular environment where this population has found their niche and that is online. In the world of the Internet, they feel less of the social pressures that they encounter in face-to-face interactions, along with feeling more security and freedom to be themselves. Through this form of communication, a culture has formed and ideas abound and are refined.

There is much talk about neurological differences regarding the condition of autism. In fact, a term was coined by Singer (1998) and that term was neurodiversity. The term was referred to and explained in an Autism Spectrum Disorders Fact Sheet found on the Internet. Included was the statement that the term has been discussed ever since

people with autism began creating their own websites and blogs. As the fact sheet pointed out, “Neurodiversity is a concept that atypical neurological wiring is a normal human experience that is to be tolerated and respected as any other human difference” (para. 2). Individuals with autism view autism not as a disorder, just a way that they are. And most of all, those that believe in the concept do not want to be cured.

## Theoretical Framework

### *Introduction*

The history section concentrated on the changes that took place concerning services for individuals with disabilities and, in particular, those with autism. However, in this section our lens widens in order to incorporate the constructs and theories that pertain to high functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome and, in addition, those that pertain to the worlds of business and education where their circles of support may lie. In the theoretical framework section of Chapter I the focus was on Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy and how that applied to HFA individuals in the employment scenario. This review of literature expanded by incorporating information about Bandura’s social cognitive learning theory, compared it to operant conditioning principles, and explained how self-efficacy applied to those individuals in the field of business and in the field of education concentrating at the end on the transition process, followed by research as it related to HFA individuals.

### *Social Cognitive Theory*

Bandura was considered to be a key exponent of social learning theory (Grusec, 1992). His theory was preceded by learning theories founded on principles of behavior

that, “embraced an input-output model” where behavior, “. . . was shaped and controlled automatically and mechanically by environmental stimuli” (Bandura, 2001, p. 2). In the late 1950s and early 1960s many theorists and researchers challenged these behavioral theories (Schunk, 2000). At the beginning of the development of Bandura’s social learning theory in the 1960s, there seemed to be some influence of Skinner’s behaviorism. However, this influence rapidly changed by the addition of cognitive aspects into the equation; his theory became one more representative of an information-processing theory (Grusec). In fact, Bandura explained it in terms of consciousness, “A functional consciousness involves purposive accessing and deliberative processing of information for selecting, regulating, and evaluating courses of action” (p. 3). In this way, he was adding the human element into learning which Bandura felt was missing (Schunk). Bower and Hilgard, in their classic text, “Theories of Learning” (1981), described social learning theory in reference to Bandura and others as offering a balanced fusion of cognitive psychology with principles of behavior modification. Cognitive practices have less of a focus on what learners do (behavioral stance) and have more of a focus on what learners know and the manner they come to know it (Schunk)

Other areas incorporated in Bandura’s theory were observational learning and vicarious reinforcement (Pajares, 2002; Schunk, 2000). Bandura identified his focus on observational learning as being his first step away from “the primacy of conditioning” (“From Behaviorism”, 2008). Basically, observational learning involved four interconnected subprocesses which included attentional, retention, motor reproduction, and motivational processes (Bower & Hilgard, 1981). The attentional subprocess, “is

observer attention to relevant events so that they are meaningfully perceived” (Schunk, p. 87). According to Bower and Hilgard, this included modeling stimuli and observer characteristics. An example of this might be that the observer needs to be paying attention to the model, and the model and the model’s actions must be conspicuous and competent, thus more apt to facilitate learning. Retention subprocesses concern forming an image in one’s mind (coding) and being able to revive those images at a later time and rehearse what was modeled. The third subprocess, motor reproduction requires that the learner is physically capable of performing and, if so, may be in need of some shaping of the response with accurate feedback. Schunk emphasized that in the case of learning more complex behaviors, one may be gain knowledge through a blend of modeling, guided rehearsal, and corrective input. The last subprocess, motivation, mainly concerns reinforcement which included such features as anticipation of reinforcement and when reinforced, the chances of performing a vicarious learned response were increased (Bower & Hilgard).

Within the framework of Bandura’s social cognitive theory came the recognition of the interrelationship between individual or personal factors, the environment, and behavior. Bandura (1999) termed this interrelationship triadic reciprocal causation. This aspect of Bandura’s social learning theory was another means of distinguishing his theory from that of behavioral views of learning. According to Schunk (2000), Bandura’s theory was based on the constructivist paradigm, whereas behavioral theories were in contrast to constructivism. Gist and Mitchell (1992) viewed triadic reciprocal causation as the essence of Bandura’s social cognitive theory, while Alkire (2005) wrote of it more in



terms of the limitations that can be imposed. One portion of this triad, personal factors, consisted of cognitive, affective, and biological events (Pajares, 2002). Pajares gave a very clear example how this triadic reciprocal causation might be utilized as a combination of strategies to promote positive growth. “Strategies for increasing well-being can be aimed at improving emotional, cognitive, or motivational processes, increasing behavioral competencies, or altering conditions under which people live and work” (para. 3). This type of approach could be implemented at home, work, or school.

Pajares (2002) illuminated an addition to Bandura’s social learning theory that came to pass in the 1970s. It was at this time that Bandura became aware that another important component seemed to be missing from the foremost learning theories of the day including his own. The addition to his theory was formally introduced with the publication of Bandura’s book in 1977, “Self-efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change” (Grusec, 1992; Pajares). Indeed, self-efficacy seemed to round out Bandura’s social cognitive learning theory and brought it to increased prominence. Tollefson (2000) identified self-efficacy’s role as, “efficacy expectations are beliefs that the person is capable of successfully completing the course of action that will lead to success” (p. 67). The significant word here is “belief.” Pajares pointed out that self-beliefs were salient factors of self-efficacy theory. If one has the skills to accomplish a task, yet does not believe it to be so, then success is unlikely.

An important facet to self-efficacy theory is that it is domain specific. As Grusec (1992) and Goleman (2000) highlighted in their writings on the theory, self-efficacy is based on a person’s background of achievement in a domain, such as an area of special

interest where one has performed well. Moreover, it arises from observing others and what they are able to do, from others persuading the individual of his or her capabilities, and from the individual taking note of the feelings experienced during the accomplishment of the task (Grusec). This encompassed the four major ways to influence one's belief mentioned previously in this proposal: mastery experiences, vicarious learning through modeling, social persuasion, and the physiological and emotional states that may affect the judgment of their capabilities (Bandura, 1999). Self-efficacy has an impact on what paths or challenges people may undertake in life, the effort they want to expend, and the extent of their perseverance (Bandura, 2001).

This was all a matter of choice. "Any factor that influences choice behavior can profoundly affect the direction of personal development" (Bandura, 2001, p. 10). However, even people who are highly efficacious and have high skills, "may choose not to behave in concert with their beliefs and abilities" (Pajares, 2002, para. 25) due to lack of incentive or resources, or the perception of social impediments in their environment. Harrison, Rainer, Hochwarter, and Thompson (1997) highlighted that people who show strong self-efficacy are more liable to attempt challenging tasks.

#### *Self-efficacy in the workplace*

There is an indistinct line between work-related self-efficacy and education-related self-efficacy. As a means of distinguishing between the two, the guidelines were that if the focus was on the workplace or efforts toward acquiring employment, then it would be included under this section. If it had to do with planning or training that took

place in a school setting, then it would be included under the section on self-efficacy in education.

There were journal articles that provided information for both sections. Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) offered one example when they stated that their social cognitive framework related to academics and career behavior. How this occurred was, “academic development . . . (is) dovetailing, developmentally, with career development” (p. 81). They proceeded by saying that during the school years, the interests and skills that were developed “ideally” become the students’ career selections. This truly is a model situation, one that if realized, transitioning would not present the problems that it often does. However, Lent et al. admitted that social and economic circumstances frequently impeded progress so that choices were affected. Betz (2004) highlighted the behavioral circumstances, including the fact that lack of confidence can also limit one’s chance of career success.

Self-efficacy’s role as depicted in the career literature was under the spotlight, especially in enhancing one’s exploration into occupational options such as activities and environments (Bandura, 1999; Hackett, 1999; Lent et al., 1994). Bandura recognized the contribution of efficacy beliefs in promoting development of interests. One’s interests could be a primary motivating force in one’s career pursuits (Grandin & Duffy, 2004). People are known to prefer career options that are aligned with their interests. However, at times, when environmental supports were absent, this limited or acted as a barrier to attaining a job in a preferred field (Lent et al.).

One type of environmental support is vocational assessment. Breeding (2008) conducted a study that examined vocational assessment as it related to career decision self-efficacy and empowered status. What Breeding found was that the traditional assessment activities did little to improve self-efficacy that can be critical in making a choice regarding one's vocation and the activities that followed. This, in turn, affected one's ability to be an active participant with informed choices and to possess the tools for making knowledgeable decisions about the direction of one's career. The presence of self-efficacy in making one's career decisions is, "an empowerment-related variable of considerable interest" (p. 104).

Alkire (2005) believed that one's efficacy was frequently obstructed by the external environment, along with one's behaviors. Bandura broke free from the prevalent career development beliefs of the day in the 1980s (Lent et al., 1994). These beliefs at this time incorporated the interaction and influence of the person and the environment. Instead, Bandura forged new ground by recognizing a third form of influence, one's behavior, as an addition to the former bidirectional influence. He termed his model triadic reciprocal causation (1999), mentioned previously in Chapter One. Lent et al. explained that this scheme consisted of, "(a) personal attributes; (b) external environmental factors; and (c) overt behaviors (as distinct from internal and physical qualities of the person) all operate as interlocking mechanisms . . . ." (p. 82). Because researchers were not acknowledging the role behavior employed, they were overlooking the extent of its influence in the workplace and other environments which this process may come into play.

Hackett (1999) focused upon the use of the four sources of influence for self-efficacy as a vehicle for intervention. These include mastery experiences, vicarious learning experiences (e. g., through observation and modeling), verbal persuasion (e. g., accurate feedback and coaching), and physiological arousal and affective states (Hackett). Nevertheless, the author wrote that use of these specific interventions was only in the beginning stages of being recognized as such.

Betz (2004) cited Betz, Borgen, and Harmon (1996) as offering a specific example of a successful intervention that utilized these four sources of influence. An individual receiving career counseling was assessed to discover areas of interest. This particular person's interest was in business and sales which, in turn, required assertiveness and social skills. Unfortunately, the client demonstrated low self-efficacy in these skills. The counselor worked with the client to come up with a plan employing the four sources. First, the client joined a social skills group and enrolled in a course on public speaking (mastery and vicarious learning experiences). Next, the counselor, after persuading the client to participate, gave him moral support, often acting as a cheerleader (verbal persuasion). Lastly, the counselor taught the client progressive muscle relaxation to use when feeling anxious or threatened by the new experiences (physiological and arousal states). This combination of treatments allowed the client to move forward to pursue a career of interest, having acquired the skills and proceeding forward with increased feelings of self-efficacy.

Thus far, this discussion concerned the role of self-efficacy in career attempts. This brings us to the point of relating what the research discovered about what happened

at employment settings. Luthans and Peterson's (2001) review of literature emphasized that profitable companies had their workers involved in tasks or positions that suit their interests. These researchers examined employee engagement, the part the manager's self-efficacy played in employee engagement, and the implications this held for successful management practice. What Luthans and Peterson found was that when employees had emotional ties with their manager and deemed that the manager was interested in how they developed, the outcomes were positive and added to the manager's self-efficacy. In addition, the opposite was true: The manager's increased self-efficacy affected the enhancement of the employees' effectiveness and engagement. This phenomenon was termed by the authors as a "positive spiral" (p. 385).

How does social cognition and self-efficacy influence work performance? This would seem to be a critical question to resolve. A series of two articles by Stajkovic and Luthans (1998a, b) addressed this question and provided promising results. Their first article (1998a) offered a comprehensive description of Bandura's social cognitive theory and self-efficacy. In fact, the purpose of this article was that by delving into self-efficacy and its relationship to work-related performance, "will lead to a better understanding of the complexities of human resources in the modern workplace and more effective management of human performance" (p. 63). As the result of a meta-analysis that both articles referred to and both researchers implemented, their synthesis demonstrated a strong positive correlation between self-efficacy and work-related performance. The significant relationship indicated an increase of 28 percent which, "is relatively much

stronger than has been to date demonstrated by popular intervention techniques such as goal setting or even organizational behavior modification” (p. 73).

The second article by Stajkovic and Luthans (1998b) gave a more precise and detailed version of the mega-analysis. The researchers began by highlighting the fact that no prior quantitative study had, “synthesized, tested, and compared” (p. 240) the relationship of self-efficacy and work-related performance. Exact specifics were related regarding inclusion and exclusion criteria starting with over 2000 studies over the past 20 years and winnowing this down to 114 studies with a total sample size of  $N = 21,616$ . In addition, a second research question was identified in reference to study characteristics that systematically moderated the relationship of the two variables under study. After examining several possible moderators, two were found to moderate the relationship between self-efficacy and work-related performance: task complexity and location of performance. For example, the more complex the task was and, if it was conducted in a setting with many distractions, the lower the relationship would be between self-efficacy and work-related performance. However, following these findings, the authors offered several specific suggestions that might help to improve performance, including that managers could provide precise descriptions of the tasks assigned, make sure the work environment was free from physical distractions, and offer programs that enhanced employees’ self-efficacy so they had a better chance at being successful with the more complex tasks.

What about failure? What was the relationship between failure and self-efficacy? Boss and Sims (2008) were curious about this and examined this relationship within a

business setting, using a manager as an example. After expending much time and effort working to accomplish a particular goal and have it come to naught, a manager could begin to question his or her abilities. Thus, the authors recognized self-efficacy as a factor that could be affected by failure and, alternately, affect recovery. However, Boss and Sims viewed self-efficacy in a different manner; as a mediator along the path from failure to recovery. These researchers stated, “failure can provide the foundation for long-term success” (p. 138). Boss and Sims offered more understanding how this could be so by referring to Manz (2002) and his perspective. Manz, in his book, “The Power of Failure,” redefined both failure and success, giving old and new definitions. The contrasts between the old and new represented a paradigm shift and were powerful seeds to sow. The new definition of failure demonstrated how it could act as, “a stepping stone” to eventual success, along with providing opportunities to learn and grow, opening doors for “creative change and innovation” (p. 7).

#### *Education-related self-efficacy*

The first segment of this section concentrated on self-efficacy and its effect on academics. Following this, specifics were given on teacher self-efficacy in reference to student self-efficacy. The last segment focused on the school-to-work transition process and the role self-efficacy played toward providing adequate and effective preparation for successful employment. In addition, what was needed to ensure this provision was shared.

Bandura (1999) believed that children with high self-efficacy not only were able to regulate their learning and master academic skills more readily, but were socially more



capable. Some examples Bandura gave about these social capabilities were having more prosocial behaviors, being considered more popular, and experiencing less rejection by peers. One can only imagine how this inclination could affect a special needs child with learning problems and social difficulties. As Bandura stated, “Over time, growing self-efficacy doubts in cognitive competencies foreclose many occupational life courses, if not prosocial paths themselves” (p. 19).

Academic motivation was another area influenced by a student’s feelings of self-efficacy (Schunk, 1991). Motivation covers a large amount of territory in the field of learning, therefore, Schunk addressed motivation and self-efficacy under various person or situation variables, the first being goal setting (a person variable). When students either created goals or goals were given to them by their teachers, their initial tendency was to believe they could attain them. As they viewed the progress of their goals, self-efficacy grew which led to motivation and skill development.

However, it was certain types of goals that proved to be the most beneficial in terms of motivation (Schunk, 1991). These included proximal or close-at-hand goals, specifically stated goals which the students clearly understood, and less difficult goals. Later, after achieving progress on one’s goals, which, in turn, affected positive feelings of self-efficacy and motivation, the goals could increase in difficulty. Another means of increasing one’s skill, self-efficacy, and commitment, would be to allow the students to set their own goals (Schunk; Zimmerman, 1999). Once individual goals were met, students felt self-satisfaction, an internal reward. Tollefson (2000) commented that

Bandura viewed internal rewards for goal attainment to be a more potent incentive than external rewards such as grades and praise.

Learning strategies that improved students' capabilities to cognitively process academic materials was another method of enhancing their self-efficacy and motivation involved in the learning process (Schunk, 1991). Such strategies included the use of models who not only demonstrated the strategies, but (also) encouraged utilization of the strategies. The models could either be teachers or peers. A critical feature of this strategy was observing others perform successfully. Alternately, seeing performance by others end in failure could be detrimental and have the opposite effect (Schunk; Zimmerman, 1999). High self-efficacy can contradict certain aspects of failure. For example, Zimmerman stressed the fact that with high self-efficacy, students abandoned solutions that were not working and redid problems that were incorrect. This is an excellent example of how powerful positive self-efficacy can be in a student's academic accomplishments.

A salient discussion topic in Zimmerman's chapter on self-efficacy and educational development (1999) was implications for educational policy. The researcher advised that improvements in students' self-efficacy cannot take place unless the curriculum was one that was more flexible. An example of this included issues of time constraints being addressed individually. Other practices suggested by Zimmerman were those that allowed more self-regulation (e. g., student's method of learning, knowledge of specifics regarding what motivated the student, and utilization of supports including

behavioral, environmental, and social). These considerations could only lead to students assuming more responsibility for achievement in academics.

The interplay that occurred between teachers and their students had much to do with self-efficacy, on both sides. Ross and Bruce (2007) defined teacher efficacy as, “a teacher’s expectation that he or she will be able to bring about student learning” (p. 50). Tollefson (2000) concurred when reviewing the literature and emphasized the relationship between teacher efficacy and student achievement. Ross and Bruce detailed the many factors involved in this relationship:

1. Teachers with high self-efficacy measures were more apt to apply novel teaching ideas in their classrooms.
2. Their classroom management techniques were more efficacious and did more to encourage student self-sufficiency.
3. The teachers were more adept at paying close attention to the needier students in their classes and were able to maintain a positive attitude toward their progress.
4. Teacher efficacy can engender changes in their students over the school year. As the students’ self-efficacy grew, so did their enthusiasm toward classroom tasks, along with the students seeking contact with their teachers on a more frequent basis.
5. Teachers with high self-efficacy perceived failure as a cue for increasing their efforts versus perceiving failure as beyond their control.

This perception is reminiscent of Manz's (2002) new definition of failure discussed under the section on work-related self-efficacy, that failure can be a stepping stone on the path to eventual progress.

Hoy (2004) offered suggestions on how teachers can influence students' beliefs about their self-efficacy. Some examples given were to highlight their progress in specific ways (e. g., portfolios), to provide explicit ideas for improvement and make revisions in their grades to reflect this improvement, to emphasize links between past efforts and past achievements (e.g., reflecting on goal attainment), to be direct regarding problems they may experience, but remember where their strengths lie and make use of them when possible, and, lastly, to welcome the encouragement of a mentor or coach for the students.

Schwerin (1998) brought in empowerment and transformational teaching when discussing self-efficacy. According to Schwerin, self-efficacy contributed to an individual's psychological empowerment in a significant manner. In addition, transformational teaching was a component most relevant to individual empowerment. Schwerin believed that transformational approaches should be created to enhance self esteem and self-efficacy. Lastly, a guiding question for this type of teacher should be, "What can I do to make my approach more empowering?" (Schwerin, p. 108).

In order for this positive interplay of self-efficacy beliefs to continue between teacher and student, it is crucial for teachers to not lose sight of nourishing their own sources of efficacy (Hoy, 2004). Some ways to accomplish this could be to have a mentor that they can turn to, to ensure that the tools required for successful teaching are

available, and to maintain journals that relate their success or innovative ideas and their results.

A major thoroughfare to travel down to increase teacher and student efficacy was through professional development, inservice, or preservice programs for the teaching staff (Ross & Bruce, 2007; Tollefson, 2000). Tollefson recognized these programs as a vehicle for furnishing teachers with more knowledge about motivation theory and how to create, “classroom environments that foster student motivation and engagement in the learning process” (p. 78). However, attending inservice programs had the optimal effect when the teachers returned to their classrooms and employed the curriculum materials or the techniques that were taught at the inservice (Ross & Bruce). These researchers conducted a study examining techniques that were conducive to positive change following participation in a professional development program. Some influential practices included use of simulations, the requirement of classroom application followed by a sharing session with the other teachers detailing their experiences, and the emphasis offered to the participants that the criterion of success is “student knowledge construction” (p. 58).

Bandura (1997) had some additional words to say on student’s knowledge construction:

Educational practices should be gauged not only by the skills and knowledge they impart for present use but also what they do to children’s beliefs about their capabilities, which affect how they approach the future. Students who develop

strong beliefs in their personal self-efficacy are well-equipped to educate themselves when they have to rely on their own initiative. (p. 176)

The aspect of schooling most relevant to students' futures involves transition practices. Transition practices ideally begin at the beginning of high school (also referred to as secondary school); beginning this early is especially critical for youth with disabilities. Unfortunately, the ideal was often not the case (Gold, 1999). In fact, Collet-Klingenberg (1998) examined the transition-related practices in a school identified as successful in this regard. However, the results of the study indicated significant areas that were lacking. These included lack of parent and student involvement, lack of cohesion in individualized transition planning, and, most critically, little information on follow-up services and linkages to these postschool services. Another study by Powers, Gil-Kashiwabara, Geenen, Powers, Balandrun, and Palmer (2005) that examined transition practices or planning illuminated more bleak and discouraging outcomes. This group of researchers scrutinized the Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) written for special education students and found they contained goals with very little detail, a small percentage making any mention of the student's area of interest, and an even smaller amount of the goals referred to accommodations or supports necessary for the students.

The amount of literature on transition practices or career development as it pertains to self-efficacy was limited. The most common message given was how crucial it was to seek a match between students' interests and occupational environments. Bandura (1999), when he wrote of career development, emphasized that individuals' efficacy beliefs determined what they considered as options for their career direction. So it would

follow that if a student's interest was not indicated in the goals written to address the career direction, the issue of efficacy would be overlooked. The "slate of options" that Bandura stressed would be virtually uninviting or non-existent.

A study by Piquart, Juang, and Silbereisen (2003) explored the concept of self-efficacy in school and its resultant effect in the field of employment. This longitudinal study questioned whether increasing the self-efficacy beliefs of students, ages 12-15, would help prepare them for successful school-to-work transitions of the same students at the age of 21. Though the study took place in Germany, the conditions seemed to parallel those found in the United States, and this aspect was actually mentioned in this article. The results of the study were encouraging; the higher self-efficacy beliefs in combination with better grades were associated with lowering the risk of unemployment and increasing the levels of job satisfaction. These types of findings offered the promise of attaining meaningful employment. Lastly, Piquart et al. stated that if the students were able to find employment fitting "their high aspirations and vocational preferences, they deserved satisfaction out of it" (p. 343). A study such as this grants one hope that through offering interventions that concentrate on the enhancement of students' self-efficacy, that employment and job satisfaction could become more of a reality.

#### *Research Related to Autism*

There is a dearth of research in the field of autism that referred to Bandura's social learning theory (2001), though the absolute necessity for social learning leading toward social competence for this population cannot be refuted. It is one of the triad of deficit areas for those on the autism spectrum (Frith, 2003). Under the subject of

transition planning, one study inferred understanding of the concept of self-efficacy without naming it (Smith & Donnelly, 1998). However, as this portion of the chapter unfolds, the reader will see many instances described that pertain to self-efficacy.

The topic of one study that referenced Bandura's social learning theory (2001) concerned the consideration of using socially competent peers to model and reinforce initiation of interactions with children with autism (DiSalvo & Oswald, 2002). This consideration was in contrast to adult-mediated strategies in this area. The use of models came from Bandura's (1999) premise of social modeling as an adjunct to learning. He included modeling as one of the four forms of influence for self-efficacy. In Bandura's discussion of social models, he emphasized the beneficial use of "people similar to themselves" which added to the success of the modeling experience (1999, p. 3). Peers would seem to be more similar than adults. However, the term, self-efficacy was not mentioned in the journal article.

Video self-monitoring as a learning strategy was the subject of two other research studies that referenced aspects of Bandura's social learning theory as well. Shipley-Benamore, Lutzker, and Taubman (2007) employed the strategy of video self-monitoring to teach functional living skills to three children with autism. These researchers explained video self-monitoring as a process in producing "self-as-a-model" videos which maximized the performance of the child using what prompts were needed, followed by editing errors or irrelevant footage (Benamore et al., p. 166). Hopefully, the result was a segment of video where the child was displaying the desired behavior. One variation from the first study was the use of the child versus peers. The facet of this procedure that



was attributed to Bandura was observational learning (1999). The results of this technique showed clearly that the children's correct responses improved subsequent to the video viewing.

The final study replicated the utilization of video self-monitoring in order to increase spontaneous use of language skills to request a desired object or action (Wert & Neisworth, 2003). Social-communication skills are a major area of difficulty for individuals with autism. Once again, this research was primarily based on Bandura's social learning theory, more specifically, observational learning or modeling (1999). Not only was the skill, spontaneous requesting, being taught, which was different from the past studies, but (also) the circumstances were dissimilar. The videos were 30-minute structured play sessions in the home setting where the children had the opportunity to request a favored toy or game. The format followed a precise set of steps for the adult prompter to emulate. Again, editing out prompts and negative behaviors was part of the procedure. Exposure to the resultant video occurred both at home and at school prior to intervention. Data were collected at the school setting where the adults involved did not offer any prompts. This study was also successful; video self-monitoring produced a noticeable increase in spontaneous requests for all participants.

It was puzzling to this researcher that these studies did not delve further into Bandura's social learning theory to discover self-efficacy and how it pertained to the parts of Bandura's theory that they discussed. As stated before, social learning was so often the focus of a multitude of studies in the field of autism (Attwood, 1998; Baron-Cohen, 2008; Bovee, 2000; Frith, 2004; Grandin, 1995; Grandin & Duffy, 2004; Hays,

1997; Howlin, 2004; Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2002, 2004; Jobe & White, 2006; Ozonoff, Dawson, & McPartland, 2002; Pierce & Schreibman, 1995). Jobe and White stated clearly, “Impaired social functioning is a hallmark of autism spectrum disorders” (p. 1479). In addition, Myles and Smith (2007) commented that even though people recognize the social deficits inherent to Asperger Syndrome, “there is a dearth of empirically-based instruments” to measure their strengths and challenges (p. 66). Therefore, without a means of measurement, how can a truly effective plan be developed to overcome their deficits and move forward in a proactive manner?

This next section of research relating to autism will illuminate the state of affairs regarding transition services from the high school years through transition into the field of employment. For the sake of clarification, transition services will be defined according to what is written in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004. This definition is,

a coordinated set of activities for a student designed within an outcome-oriented process which promotes movement from school to postschool activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, and independent living, or community participation. (IDEA, Section 602.30)

Smith and Donnelly (1998) stressed how critical transition planning is for students with autism due to their difficult behaviors and social skill and language problems. What added to concerns regarding transition was the knowledge of the poor adult outcomes that a majority of these individuals faced. Barnard, Harvey, Potter, and

Prior (2001) stated in their report on the reality for adults with autism spectrum disorders that only 12 percent of the higher functioning adults were employed full time and approximately a quarter (24 percent) were at home. Smith and Donnelly outlined considerations that students and their families should keep in mind which included awareness of their goals and dreams, the steps needed to reach their goals, programs available for attaining their goals, and utilization of the students' strengths and interests and what jobs may incorporate them. These authors felt that in order for students with autism to cope with the transitions ahead of them, they required, "a strong sense of self-determination and an understanding of their capabilities" (p. 273). Understanding and believing that people can use their capabilities to accomplish a task or take a course of action suggests feelings of self-efficacy.

There are certain qualities of individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) that could be regarded as assets to a work environment (Plimley & Bowen, 2006). The qualities these authors highlighted were love of accuracy and detail, a lack of desire to take part in workplace gossip, and a tendency not to extend their break times. In addition, Plimley and Bowen emphasized use of these individuals' strengths, a theme that continues throughout this section. Frith (2004) remarked about individuals with Asperger Syndrome and their strengths and included, "their meticulous work whether it is in crafts, art or science and their ability to identify hitherto overlooked details" (p. 680).

Humphrey and Lewis (2008) detailed the views and experiences of students with high functioning autism and Asperger Syndrome (HFA) in mainstream secondary schools. These authors' presentation reminded this researcher of a microcosm of what it

might be like in the work environment, with many of the same issues at play. This qualitative study illuminated the numerous barriers these types of students faced such as school being viewed as stressful and causing anxiety; experiencing feelings of social isolation which can, in turn, lead to feelings of loneliness; and being involved in instances of bullying along with a few cases of being attacked by other students. The teachers of the HFA students often felt ill-equipped due to lack of training and support no matter how committed they were to inclusion.

When the HFA students shared their thoughts regarding other experiences in their mainstream setting, they reported mixed responses from the other students toward their special interests. Where one student's special interest seemed to fascinate his or her peers which, in turn, gave the student increased feelings of confidence, another's caused problems and a lack of understanding as to why the HFA student would have such an interest. There were some instances of exploitation due to the students' social naivety, where other students seemed to take advantage of this tendency, resulting in the students with ASD becoming an object of teasing. Though what was reported in Humphrey and Lewis's (2008) article up to this point came across for the most part as negative, they went on from there to offer interventions and strategies known to work with this population. In addition, the researchers related positive occurrences such as support given by the HFA students' peers when unpleasant experiences occurred (e. g., social isolation and bullying). This support often led to lasting friendships. Therefore, Humphrey and Lewis suggested an additional strategy to change negative experiences into positive ones

through the teachers promoting this support of peers which seemed to hold promise for more success in inclusive settings.

Winter-Messiers, Herr, Wood, Brooks, Gates, Houston, and Tingstad (2007) focused primarily on the special interest areas (SIAs) of children and youth, ages 7 to 21, with Asperger Syndrome (AS) and introduced a strength-based model. An initial point made by these authors was that AS was most generally defined by a deficit model. They cited the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR*; American Psychiatric Association, 2000) in which the criteria for AS delineated the deficits, with not a mention of strengths. After specifying what the *DSM* detailed as deficits for individuals with AS, Winter-Messiers et al. elucidated on the following deficit areas: social, communication, emotion, sensory, fine-motor, and executive function. Very little has been written in the literature about what executive function entailed. So that the reader is clear about this deficit, the definition, as given by Barnard, Muldoon, Hasan, O'Brien, and Stewart (2008), was:

an umbrella term used to describe the processes involved in the preparation and implementation of action. Markers of executive dysfunction included difficulty in initiating action, planning ahead and inhibiting inappropriate responses (where inflexible thinking results in perseveration with those inappropriate responses), and strategy monitoring. (p. 126)

Following Winter-Messiers et al. (2007) explanation of the deficit areas, they affirmed that people with AS can, however, display surprising strengths under one condition: That is, “they must enter social, communication, emotion, sensory, fine-motor,

and executive function skills through the sole door of their individual SIAs” (p. 70).

Temple Grandin, a HFA person who is known for her expertise world wide due to her SIA, designing cattle chutes, advised others with ASD to become more aware of their strengths and interests and pair those with a suitable job (Grandin & Duffy, 2004).

Attwood (1998) echoed Grandin’s opinion in relation to the use of special interests as a source of employment and income.

Through interviewing 23 participants, Winter-Messiers et al. (2007) discovered a distinct pattern of behavioral and functional change exhibited by their participants when answering questions about their SIAs. In areas previously identified as deficit areas, the participants showed improvement detailed by the researchers through participants’ statements and the researchers’ observations. Subsequently, Winter-Messiers et al. delineated specific practical applications of their strength-based model for parents and professionals to integrate into home, school, and community activities. This would seem to be essential preparation for the students transitioning into the world of work. In fact, creating a school-based job that utilized the student’s SIA was one of the applications suggested in this research article. One finding of the study was that 22 of the 23 participants were able to connect their SIAs to their visions of future professions. Realistically, youth *without* [emphasis added] disabilities frequently do not have the assurance and knowledge about possible future careers prior to graduation. As the authors emphasized in their concluding remarks, being employed in a job related to their SIAs would be conducive for the individuals to make use of their natural talents.

Harvey (2008) made a vital point to consider when adults with AS are reflecting on employment options. That is, to keep the options practical and realistic. The adults may not be able to recognize what jobs would be suitable for providing meaningful employment. Harvey gave examples that included a career as an astronaut where very few are chosen, a position in business that is stressful, or a job where the pay is low. This writer believed that all types of careers and jobs could be divided into those which are and are not likely to be successful. Grandin (1995) advised that students should broaden their areas of interest and, “channel it into constructive activities” (p. 100). Grandin also viewed special interests as a means of gaining a social life and making friends, as Humphrey and Lewis (2008) brought out in their qualitative research study. In fact, along these lines, Grandin provided an example of special interests and the effect on one’s social life. The example given was that in the field of computers, social eccentricities were more likely to be accepted, due to shared interests with peers.

An article written about a supported employment program in England specifically to address the needs of individuals with autism who are higher functioning gave an in-depth look into the dilemma that is the focus of this proposal (Howlin, Alcock, & Burkin, 2005). At the beginning of this 8 year study of the outcomes of the program, called Prospects, the authors reported that in the USA, as in England, the employment needs of high functioning individuals with autism or Asperger Syndrome were frequently overlooked. That is why the program, Prospects, was developed in 1994. This model program covered areas such as work preparation, job finding, and workplace support. A

central focus of the program was on finding jobs that are appropriate to the individuals' intellectual ability, in addition to their educational background.

Howlin et al.'s (2005) evaluation of the program examined: (a) changes in the numbers and types of jobs found since the beginning of the program; (b) comparison of the characteristics of present clients with those enrolled at the inception; (c) the costs and benefits of helping these individuals gain employment; and (d) assessments among clients, employers, and Prospect's employment consultants. The number of clients they assessed was 89.

The results were very promising; 66 percent were in work compared to 31 percent prior to the program. Since the period of assessment, the percentage continued to increase. The majority of jobs were in administrative, professional, or technical fields, therefore, suited to the intellectual and educational abilities of Prospects' clients. Even those who had more severe social, communication, or cognitive problems were appropriately placed in less demanding and lower skilled jobs. Job satisfaction was high. One downside was mentioned and that had to do with the employment consultants. The demands they faced were considerable with the consultants feeling as if they were, "running against the tide," referring to not having enough time, money, or other essential resources (Howlin et al., 2005, p. 547). The authors, by pointing out that although the needs of children are very important, adulthood lasts many more years, and in order that this program and many more like it continue, government funding is crucial for, "equality of opportunity in the workplace be achieved" (p. 548).



Equality of opportunity clearly expresses what is needed in the lives of HFA individuals and is essential for success in the workplace. Earlier in this chapter under historical background in autism, the term neurodiversity was introduced as an explanation of how individuals with autism were beginning to speak out regarding how they truly felt about their role in this world. They were expressing this through books that they wrote and, more frequently, through blogs or articles on the Internet. One could say they were advocating for themselves. Frith (2004) is an accomplished writer and researcher whose main focus is on the high functioning individuals on the autism spectrum, the HFA individuals. Under the topic of listening to people with Asperger Syndrome, Frith wrote, “Many forcefully point out that they are not patients, do not feel affected and are not suffering from any disorder, but instead have different personalities, different needs and different views from those they like to call ‘neurotypicals’ ” (p. 681).

The views regarding neurodiversity were not related to those on the spectrum alone. Swain and French (2000) wrote of neurodiversity in terms of those with disabilities. They discussed how perspectives were changing from the medical model which painted a picture of disability as one of deficits, a tragic scenario, one where disability is caused by, “the oppression of people with impairments in a disabling society” (Swain & French, p. 571). In contrast to this perspective was the newer social model (Breakey, 2006) which switched the spotlight off the person having the problem and refocused it on a problem within society. The model presented by Swain and French was termed an affirmative model. These researchers had some argument with the social

model; however, it is not within the scope of this proposal to delve into the specifics of their argument.

The purpose behind presenting the ideas surrounding neurodiversity was to demonstrate its more positive outlook toward life taken by many adults on the spectrum at this critical time at the beginning years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Recently, on the first World Autism Day (April 3, 2008), Ari Ne'eman, the president of the Autism Self Advocacy Network (ASAN) and an individual on the autism spectrum, spoke to the Autism Task Force. He said:

I hope to communicate to you that, contrary to the unfortunate paradigm that has pervaded the media discourse about us, autism is not a tragedy. We are, as with any minority, a community with unique needs, strengths, challenges and aspirations . . . . we have an interest . . . of ensuring for every person the rights of communication, inclusion, self-determination and respect. (para. 2)

Ne'eman (2008) continued by emphasizing the need to respect neurological diversity and, in addition, the need to realize that people on the spectrum can make contributions to the world that are significant with the appropriate support, services, and education. As to the educational point of view, Lewiecki-Wilson, Dolmage, Heilker, and Jurecic (2008) addressed neurodiversity as it should affect teaching practices. These professionals suggested that this perspective must impact the teachers so they understand the need to alter pedagogy, “rather than simply assisting students to conform” (p. 314). Lewiecki-Wilson et al. referred not only to students with autism, but (also) other students with disabilities. Breakey (2006) recognized the necessity for a paradigm shift from one

that sought to make people with autism more normal, to one that wanted to better understand the individuals with autism themselves and the barriers they faced at the workplace, so inclusion was a distinct possibility.

### Chapter Summary

The review began by generating a thorough examination of the use of a primary literature review in the field of grounded theory qualitative research, making note of all sides of the controversy and highlighting the most effective manner of accommodating the issues involved. The history regarding the roads traveled by adults with disabilities and, in particular, HFA adults was presented. Unfortunately, the road less traveled was the road to meaningful employment for this population.

Self-efficacy, the core of Bandura's (2001) social cognitive learning theory, was discussed at length as the theoretical framework for this study. Subsequent to a discussion of Bandura's theory and how self-efficacy became the means of rounding out this theory, studies of self-efficacy as they applied to the workplace and in education were reviewed. Relationships between self-efficacy and its impact as an intervention, in career attempts, on job performance, and as a mediator on the path from failure to recovery were brought to light. In the section on self-efficacy in education, its influence on academics, social capabilities, and motivation and as a learning strategy was stressed. An important aspect of self-efficacy in business as well as education was the interplay between both manager and employee and, in education, between teacher and student, adding to the increase of self-efficacy on both sides. Luthans and Peterson (2001) termed this as a "positive spiral" (p. 385).

The final section on research relating to autism accentuated the application of a strength-based model (Winter-Messiers et al., 2007) which encouraged the use of HFA individuals' special interest areas which were frequently indicative of their talents. This emphasis on strengths acting as a backdrop to job preparation and transitioning seemed to be a feature worthy of consideration. Usage of one's talents or capabilities is a composite of mastery experiences, the most significant influence on one's self-efficacy. Finally, though a few studies in the field of autism employed modeling and observational learning, both recognized as influences of self-efficacy, the term was unfortunately never applied.

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

#### Introduction

This study questioned what factors were involved when high-functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome (HFA) find and maintain meaningful employment. Rounding out this exploration was the inclusion of data taken from the educators or business people who were identified by the HFA participants as being most helpful in this process. The methodology of choice explained and clarified the philosophical framework guiding the study, delineating the predominant paradigm and its assumptions that were nested within this research. The reasoning behind the appropriateness of qualitative research design, in particular, grounded theory, was detailed so that the rationale for both was understood. Following this, the sequence of topics included the research questions; the role of the researcher; the sampling procedure; and the collection, process, and analysis of the data. This chapter also explained the standards upheld to assure quality and what means of verification were utilized to strengthen the study, along with the ethical conditions that were in place.

#### Philosophical Framework/ Paradigm

A paradigm is the way one looks at the world, a lens from which the world is viewed and filtered (Schram, 2006). From the research standpoint, Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined it as a vehicle which a researcher employed to join together structure and process in order to better comprehend the multiple realities lying within the study. Additionally, these authors pointed out that a paradigm was just one tool used by

researchers to reflect on the relationships discovered through the process of analysis. They went on to state that “Although the paradigm is helpful . . . in and of itself, it is incomplete” (p. 182-183). However, some researchers (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Schram) underlined its utility in providing a basis for making decisions about what is valid to document.

Since the focal point of this study was to bring out the voices of the HFA employees and the supportive people who were helpful in assisting them on the path to meaningful employment or in their places of work which would, in turn, bring about a better understanding of this scenario, constructivism was consonant as the philosophical framework. Constructivism provided opportunities to discover the participants’ own meanings and perspectives that were socially constructed through their interactions related to their world (Creswell, 2003; Schwandt, 1998), in this case, one of meaningful employment. The constructivist researcher’s goal is to comprehend and reconstruct the participants’ realities in collaboration with the researcher’s own realities; the meanings of both are salient to the research (Charmaz, 2000). In fact, Snape and Spencer (2003) referred to constructivism as a “shared investigation” (p. 33). Rubin and Rubin (2005) added to this perspective even further when they stated, “Constructionists expect people to see somewhat different things, examine them through distinct lenses, and come to somewhat different conclusions. In this sense, multiple and even conflicting versions of the same event or object can be true at the same time” (p. 27).

Creswell (2003) expounded on what he labeled as alternate knowledge claims which included postpositivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism.

Though this study's framework was constructivism, as stated above, it contained some features of the advocacy knowledge claim. With a focus on successfully employed HFA adults, it was hopeful that the data that emerged offer inspiration and encouragement to other HFA adults who are struggling in their employment efforts. This aspect may lead to empowerment which may bring about change; both empowerment and change are listed as crucial elements of the advocacy knowledge claim (Creswell, p. 6). Therefore, this researcher viewed this study being constructivist with some leanings toward advocacy. This link is representative of "paradigmatic synthesis" (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999), when more than one paradigm applies to one's research design. Goding and Edwards (2001) supported this belief. In the literature, paradigmatic synthesis is used to indicate paradigm shifts in research and politics (Dunning, 2004).

#### *Philosophical Assumptions*

An integral part of the philosophical framework within qualitative research was the assumptions at play within a particular paradigm (Creswell, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schram, 2006). Schram considered it a researcher's "bottom line" (p. 40), and that shedding light on these assumptions would situate the research in a direction that was acutely evident. In one of Guba and Lincoln's explanations of a paradigm, they specified that it was a basic belief system that was based on ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions

The nature of reality or the ontological assumption was the first issue the researcher needed to address. Representative of qualitative research, reality is what is constructed by the participants, the researcher, and the readers, according to Creswell

(1998) and Schram (2006). This translated into multiple realities as related in the research through direct quotes, social contexts, and emerging themes. Dunning (2004) pointed out that social facts drawn from the research provided the ontological foundation for much constructivist work. Constructions can change, as the realities associated may change (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1999). The present research brought to light more than one reality as the HFA adults and the involved business people were interviewed. The researcher's reality was also a part of this as constructions of reality within this assumption were shared, affected, and divergent (Spencer, Ritchie, Lewis, & Dillon, 2003). Within these multiple realities, each one was considered equally legitimate (Isaac & Michael, 1997).

This brought us to the second assumption, epistemology, described by Schram (2006) and Creswell (1998) as the relationship between the researcher and what is researched. Within this line of thought, the question might be, "What is to be known?" The researcher wants the participants to feel comfortable so that they are willing to share their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions in regard to the interview and whatever came to light as the result of the research process. It was a collaborative exchange (Creswell), as well as interactive. When Shea (2005) referred to epistemology in reference to qualitative research in his study on student learning, he spoke of the learner's notion of reality as one that was constructed through the learner's interaction with the world and others in it. This related epistemology in terms of constructivism. In fact, what was to be known will be constructed through the interaction of the researcher and the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). White (2004) interpreted epistemology within the framework of



constructivism as related to truth and, in accordance, truth is what humans construct and is therefore subjective.

In the midst of this collaboration, the values of the participants were sure to be reflected. The philosophical assumption concerning the role of values is the axiological assumption. In qualitative research, “values are an explicit part of the analytic structure” (Isaac & Michael, 1997, p. 231). This spotlighted the researcher honestly articulating, along with making note of, his or her values and any biases (Creswell, 1998; Spencer et al., 2003) in terms of the research topic so that the participants were well aware of them. I would contend that by speaking of my bias(es), I allowed my participants to gain a better understanding of my beliefs, essentially, acting as a means of getting to know how I viewed the world. This is especially critical for HFA adults, as one of their weaknesses is knowing what another person may be thinking (Attwood, 1998). By bringing bias to the forefront, one is more capable of dealing with it within the realm of qualitative research practice (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1999). In the narrative, the writings and interpretations of the researcher and the participants will be fuller and richer. The salience of culture and its influence on values was highlighted in White’s (2004) discussion on constructivism. The author emphasized how the values that people internalize are determined by their specific culture and, in turn, impacted the choices they made in their lives.

This discussion leads quite naturally to the fourth assumption, rhetoric (Creswell, 1998). Very little was found in the literature that specified what rhetoric as a philosophical assumption entailed. In my search, Creswell gave the most comprehensive

information. Rhetoric concerns the language of the research and how the investigator writes about the study. In qualitative research, the style is informal and personal, as the writer is involved with the telling of stories which lends itself to more of a literary mode. Two specific examples are the use of first-person pronouns and metaphors. Ely, et al. (1999), in their book, "On Writing Qualitative Research: Living by Words," addressed rhetoric as an essential part of qualitative research. The authors described it having a natural flow and written to gain understanding within the text. Memoing is a critical part of the writing process (Ely, et al.; Schram, 2006). This consists of writing down ideas that usually lead to expanded thoughts or new ones. Braiding was a term used by Ely and her associates to connote the process that occurred when the researcher was writing or thinking about a participant's story and incorporated what comes to him or her as a result. An intuitive element was present, "to tap the subtleties of human interaction" (Isaac & Michael, 1997, p. 220).

How do we go about tapping the subtleties of human interaction? What process do we follow? Answers to these questions addressed the methodological assumption or the research process that was conceptualized and employed by the investigator (Creswell, 1998). Schram (2006) viewed this assumption as "the philosophical cornerstone" (p. 42) of how to proceed. What distinguishes grounded theory from other qualitative research designs is that the ultimate aim is to generate a theory that surfaces from the data, in this case, semi-structured interviews. Creswell specified that with grounded theory, the researcher begins the process using inductive reasoning, whereas at the point where a theory emerges, it becomes more of a deductive process. The basis for this is the

researcher will then look at extant and novel databases in order to see how the theory stands up against them. Within this research process, questions can change as new categories are formed through the interactive procedure that occurs between the researcher and the participants. More details regarding methodology were explained further in later sections of this chapter.

#### Rationale for a Qualitative Study

The task of scientific study is to lift the veils that cover the area of group life that one purposes to study. (Patton, 2002, p. 125)

#### *Differences between Quantitative and Qualitative Research*

Perhaps the most fitting way to set the stage for favoring qualitative research as the design of choice for the present study would be to begin delineating the disparities between quantitative and qualitative research designs. In one sense, presenting the manner that the two research methods vary within a comparative framework could be misleading. Heppner et al., (1999) and Pring (2000) caution their audiences about this, “that such dichotomies cannot capture the complexity of the topic” (Heppner et al., p. 241). The utility and appropriateness of either has frequently been the focus of a bitter and ongoing debate (Hammersly, 2004; Lather, 2004; Luttrell, 2005). However, by distinguishing the two designs, one can better understand the reasoning behind this investigator’s preference.

One way to begin this portion would be to contrast how each type of researcher may view the five philosophical assumptions presented earlier. Ontologically, there is one reality or truth that can be found by the quantitative researcher, whereas the

qualitative researcher discovers multiple realities arrived at by consensus between the researcher and the participants. These realities are the social constructions of the mind (Pring, 2000).

This easily leads to the epistemological assumption, the relationship between the researcher and that being researched (Creswell, 1998). The quantitative researcher keeps separate from what is researched, taking an objective stance. This is not the case with the qualitative researcher whose findings are created through the interactions that transpire with the participants, making the relationships more subjective. As Pring (2000) stated, “the contrast is drawn between the objective world (out there independently of our thinking about it) and the subjective world (in our heads, as it were, and individually constructed)” (p. 248). Rubin and Rubin (2005) spoke of the quantitative researcher’s neutral stance versus the qualitative researcher who is bound to affect the results.

In the same mode of difference, within the axiological assumption, quantitative is considered value-free (through the researcher’s objective position, keeping distance from the participants), whereas qualitative is value-laden, as values are ways of believing which are sought and come to light during the interview process.

Rhetoric, another philosophical assumption, addresses the language of the research (Creswell, 1998), and is demonstrated once again in a diverse fashion. The language of quantitative research is formal, requiring clear and precisely defined terms (Pring, 2000); its findings are expressed mathematically and statistically. The language of qualitative research is informal, expressed in a literary mode, and its findings are the result of the participants’ verbal input.

The fifth assumption is methodological and, according to Creswell (1998), the quantitative researcher utilizes deductive logic in order to test theory to discover general principles (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The researcher forms the hypotheses, chooses the variables, and implements the research through experiments, surveys, or other statistical studies. The instruments employed to take measurements are predetermined and random sampling is preferred. Rubin and Rubin described the methodological variations found in qualitative research. It employs inductive logic, and its purpose is for the investigator to collect and analyze the expressed data to identify major themes, possibly leading to an emergent theory. In contrast to the use of predetermined instruments which is a quantitative practice, in qualitative research the researcher is the actual data-gathering instrument (Watt, 2007). The research questions can change at any time throughout the qualitative process and are asked as a means of leading to thick description of the particular situation being studied.

Heppner et al. (1999) recognized a few other differences that were not touched upon in the assumptions. They were: (a) level of inquiry: quantitative is reductionistic, while qualitative is holistic; (b) control: quantitative entails controlling extraneous influences, manipulating variables, and identifying causal relationships; qualitative entails understanding the complexities of relationships among diverse factors; and (c) power structure: quantitative research is the prevailing view in the academic community as it relates to publication, funding, promotion, and tenure; qualitative research is gaining recognition, and this recognition is often sought from other sources outside the scientific community (p. 242).

To summarize this section which highlighted the diversity between quantitative research and qualitative research, this investigator recognized the clash of views revealed earlier. Hopefully, the conflict is lessening. Creswell (2003), in his more recent publication, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, remarked that researchers have more options at hand over the last twenty years than ever before. In fact, he imparted various ways one can implement a mixed method design which is a combination of the two. In addition, Pring (2000) voiced his criticism of the practice of rigidly dividing the two prevailing designs, and strongly emphasized the damage that can cause. He ended his journal article by saying, “The qualitative investigation can clear the ground for the quantitative—and the quantitative be suggestive of differences to be explored in a more interpretive mode” (p. 259).

#### Rationale for Choice

An increasing number of researchers were convinced of the salience of viewing and studying the social world of human interaction (Schram, 2006). These researchers were of the assumption that certain conditions were not right or fair at this moment in time. Not only that, they felt so strongly that they called for urgent action to be taken. “Change directed at improvement defines the agenda of such inquiry” (Schram, p. 43). As I read this sentence, it struck a chord of consonance within me. This was the purpose behind my choice of topic and research methodology. Through personal experiences, I have had the pleasure of seeing several HFA adults reach great heights in their careers. Also through experience, I have witnessed so many more that were struggling in their efforts to find a job that offered enjoyment and hope for the future, a job that allowed

them to utilize their talents and skills in a way that made their lives more meaningful. Strauss and Corbin (1998) so aptly emphasized, “The touchstone of one’s own experience might be a more valuable indicator of a potentially successful research endeavor than another abstract source” (p. 38).

My curiosity was aroused, and my desire to discover what factors related to the HFA adults who were achieving success was strong. In addition, I was curious if there were involved educators or business people who really made an effort to support and assist them in their efforts toward a better life and outcome. What were the key factors that arose from the interactions between the HFA individuals and these professionals? The knowledge that could come from an in-depth study of this complex and enigmatic situation may lead to guidelines or a blueprint for these groups of individuals to consider, follow, and use to improve their chances of sustaining a positive, supportive, and collaborative relationship.

Therefore, through the proposed research project, I collected data from several sides of this employment dilemma: The successful adults with autism spectrum disorder, the educators, and the business people. The next question to answer was, “Why qualitative?” The answer would be to investigate the effects of this mutually rewarding relationship. In addition, this researcher was encouraged to follow this path as a viable means of study due to the definitive statements found in the literature that illustrated the need to hear the voices of HFA adults (Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2002, 2004; Romoser, 2000). Knight (1999), in her dissertation on successful college students with disabilities, brought out that previous transition studies (employment being a major factor of

transition) relied heavily on quantitative research studies. She felt that this reliance presented, “a segmented and narrow perspective of the multitude of factors” (p. 4). Within the framework of these studies, the perspectives of the non-disabled were sought, which can be quite different from those of the disabled, in this case, high-functioning individuals with autism. It was very important for this research project to capture the dynamics of the relationships among employees of this population, the educators who prepared them, and the business people who supported them in the workplace, including the more subtle issues which qualitative research can seek to discover. Several researchers have highlighted the importance of gaining the perspectives based on the lived experiences of HFA adults (Connolly & Craig, 2002), as it related to their vocations (Hanley-Maxwell, Al Hano, & Skivington, 2007; Muller, Schuler, Burton, & Yates, 2003).

Hagner and Cooney (2005) added credence to my purpose by stressing the necessity of examining the perceptions and thoughts of employers as to what skills are essential for adults with autism spectrum disorders to experience success in their place of work. In addition, Unger (2002) supported the basis for the applicability of qualitative research in this case when he wrote about the limited number of HFA individuals who have attained meaningful jobs, as referenced in the Introduction of this proposal. The many facets of the proposed research inquiry lent itself clearly to the utilization of qualitative research methodology.



## Rationale for Grounded Theory

When researchers are describing what grounded theory entails, many include such phrases as:

- “the study of social situations” (Schram, 2006, p. 101),
- “for deeper knowledge of social phenomena” (Strauss, 1987, p. 6),
- “a description of how ideas can be generated from the practical and systematic engagement of the researcher with the social world at hand” (Atkinson, Coffey, & Delemont, 2003, p. 159), and
- “the process or trajectory of a social phenomenon” (Robledo, 2006, p. 43).

Given these descriptions, it is clear that many researchers consider grounded theory research design as a process of examining social phenomena, the social world, or social situations in order to gain a deeper understanding of their participants’ perspectives through their interactions with them. The ultimate purpose of this type of research is to go through the process of coding the data to form major themes that become evident as each case is studied, leading to a substantive theory.

The above-cited depictions related to aspects of grounded theory plainly demonstrated an emphasis on the study of one’s social world. As Clarke (2005) explained grounded theory, the situation itself is the ultimate unit of analysis. This is especially salient to the topic of this study. Three different journal articles that discussed adults with Asperger Syndrome and employment issues included a very relevant statistic: Jobs are 80% social and 20% work (Bovee, 2000; Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2002, 2004). In addition, the literature has stressed repeatedly these individuals’ social cognition deficits are a

major obstacle in their employment efforts (Bernard-Opitz, Sriram, Nakhod-Sapuan, 2001; Howlin, 1997). It was the aim of this researcher to look closely at the relationships that were formed being trained prior to graduation and in the workplace between adults with autism who were experiencing success in their jobs and the professionals who have assisted and supported them. Research backed the utilization of qualitative methodology in this essential area of one's existence, as explained in the previous section (Bernard-Opitz et al.; Howlin, 1997; Unger, 2002). Another encouraging facet, the idea of hearing the voices from each side of the employment arena, had also been recommended (Gilbride, Strensrud, Vandergoot, & Golden, 2003; Hagner & Cooney, 2005). In the particular case of this research project, where understanding of the perspectives of each set of participants may differ in more unique ways, it was critical to look at the full picture, not just one side of it.

A blueprint or guide is desperately called for as more and more high-functioning individuals with autism and Asperger Syndrome enter the workforce. The Asperger Foundation International reported a "crisis" facing high-functioning adults on the autism spectrum in terms of quality of life and related employment issues (Geller & Cavanagh, 2005). This critical situation cried out for a more profound understanding of the effective and collaborative workings in whatever form or variety of forms it took so the playing field (or, in this instance, working field) is leveled. Other investigators have seen grounded theory as an efficacious vehicle for this type of research study (Gilbride et al., 2003; Nolan, 2006).

## Research Questions

In grounded theory, the analyst is committed to comprehending the manner reality is socially constructed in terms of the situation of interest (Clarke, 2005; Schram, 2006). The research questions in a grounded theory study must reflect this and allow the researchers to stay close to their data so that categories are constructed in a systematic fashion from case to case. The importance of goodness of fit cannot be stressed enough. In fact, Schram considered it “the heart of your proposal” (p. 75). Creswell (2003) suggested that one may have up to a couple of central questions followed by several subquestions. The questions formed at the beginning for the study could very well change due to the need to remain close to the data. The research questions for this study were:

Relating to the HFA participants:

What factors are involved when high-functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome achieve and maintain meaningful employment?

- What makes their jobs meaningful for them?
- What happened during their time at school to prepare them for attaining meaningful employment?
- How did involved business people assist and support them in preparing for and achieving meaningful employment?

Relating to their professional circles of support:

How did the educators or business people become involved in their supportive roles with the individuals with autism and in what ways did they support them?

- What type of training or experience prepared them so they could offer support and assistance?

For all participants:

What kinds of relationships developed between the adults with autism and their circles of support?

What changes in perspective occurred as a result of these relationships?

## Methods

### *Role of the Researcher*

One salient feature of qualitative research is the researcher's role as the actual data-gathering instrument (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Watt, 2007) as brought out earlier in this chapter. Other pertinent points concerned the interview process as a collaboration of the participants' realities with that of the researcher's (Charmaz, 2000) which leads to the development of shared perceptions of possibly divergent views (Spencer et al., 2003). Guba and Lincoln (1998) interjected that the investigator takes the participants' lead and encourages a "multivoice" that the researcher constructs in concert with them. It is essential that through the researcher's efforts he or she attempts to depict and comprehend the participants' range of meanings, and this, in turn may expand the researcher's capacity to respond wisely and accurately (Piatanida, Tananis, & Grubs, 2004).

From this understanding, the researcher is better able to give voice to the interpretations arrived at in a previous interview and from this, being able to present productive ideas. The researcher would generate the ideas from the systematic

engagement with the social worlds of those who are the focus of the research study (Atkinson, Coffey, & Delamont, 2003). One's awareness of the nature of the researcher's continuing relationship with the participants presents a daunting challenge. Atkinson et al. addressed this issue and stressed the practice of memoing in journal form as an essential tool for the qualitative researcher. Memoing acts as a lens that maintains the inquirer's awareness of the intricacies and possible deviations that may occur.

The journal can also illuminate when the researcher's preconceptions or misconceptions may be clouding the topics of discussion or direction of the inquiry, something he or she must constantly guard against throughout the research process. Another problem mentioned in qualitative literature that related to the role of the researcher and possible "clouding" was what researchers referred to as being in a "muddle" or "out of alignment" (Chenail, 1997, p. 83). This can happen when the researcher begins to collect data and, in the midst of a great variety of data, may drift off course and away from the research project originally planned. Chenail suggested a method of "keeping things plumb" or a means of staying more in alignment. It is my opinion that this is another aspect concerning the role of the researcher and was a good reference tool for me as I began this study. The journal was another invaluable tool.

### *Researcher Bias*

Lincoln and Denzin (1998) pointed out that qualitative research is constantly criticized regarding the bias of the researcher. However, these recognized experts in the field believed bias could be changed to be considered as more of a resource. As a teacher in the field of autism for a period of 23 years with 17 of those years developing programs

for the higher-functioning end of the spectrum, I brought a wealth of knowledge, experience, and honing of techniques to this research project.

After retiring, I still remained in contact with several of my former students. It was through my interactions with these adults on the autism spectrum that led me to form a social organization in order to involve these individuals in their communities, add to their nearly non-existent social lives, widen their circle of friends, and provide more opportunities for them to grow as individuals and as active participants in their communities. Through my continuing interactions with the club members, I became increasingly more aware of what they considered as their largest obstacle toward personal growth, which was their lack of progress in the employment field. More aspects of this situation became particularly clear when my husband and I assisted one of the members improve the direction of his career. His educational background was impressive; he had earned two degrees from one of the most respected universities in the state. Despite this, he was working at one of the theme parks bouncing a ball to advertise the product sold at a gift shop. Through our efforts, we gained an enhanced comprehension of what assistance was necessary to ensure a positive transition to his new job at an engineering firm. I learned so much helpful information and deeper insight from this involvement that it led me to look further into other cases of HFA individuals who had achieved meaningful employment and, in addition, to better understand the types of support they received from educators prior to employment and the involved business people. Therefore, with the addition of increasing awareness and knowledge in this critical area, I embarked on this research journey.

Of course, there are many cautions and warnings that apply to researcher bias. Hanley-Maxwell et al. (2007) emphasized how qualitative researchers must constantly be cognizant of their place in the research project and how bias could affect possible outcomes. These authors termed these acts of reflection as reflexivity which demands that the views of both the researcher and participants be represented in the text utilized as data. Atkinson et al. (2003) advised against producing research that lacked utility due to bias and that being sympathetic could lead to invalid research.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) took a positive slant to biases, beliefs, and assumptions that may interfere with the process of analysis. They highlighted two crucial points: (a) these intrusions can come from not only the researcher's side, but also the participant's side; and (b) the importance of recognizing when this is happening. However, Strauss and Corbin were realistic when they stated that we are all affected by our cultures. They went on to emphatically stress that, "it is not possible to be completely free of bias" (p. 97). The authors suggested that when becoming aware of the possibility of intrusion of bias, we step back and ask, "What is going on here?" (p. 97).

Overall, researcher bias can be safeguarded through memoing, being upfront with the participants about the researcher's relevant background that may cause possible bias, incorporating such practices as member checking and peer review, and, very simply, keeping vigilant about the possibility of occurrence. I felt that my experience, understanding of, and rapport with this population would be a positive addition to this research project. High-functioning adults with autism are known to have difficulty interacting with others and, in particular, require the feeling of comfort in order to

express themselves more effectively. This researcher was more capable of providing this type of environment than a researcher with less experience in this field.

### *Sample*

An important feature of qualitative research is the utilization of purposeful sampling which means selecting one's participants with certain criteria in mind (Creswell, 1998). More specifically, for a grounded theory study, the researcher selects participants based on what they can offer to the development of the theory, what Creswell termed as a homogeneous sample.

This study's participants included three groups: The initial group was high-functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome who were presently employed in meaningful jobs, and the next two groups were the educators involved in transitioning efforts and the business people, both groups identified by the adults with autism as supporting them in their quest to achieve worthwhile employment. Individuals in the educational field could include teachers, transition specialists, or guidance counselors, to name a few. The business people could incorporate co-workers, supervisors, employers, job coaches, or rehabilitation counselors. The reasoning behind having a narrow focus when it comes to selection of participants had to do with the particular focus of this research study. This focus was to discover what elements come into play with the successful adults and, similarly, what educators or business people were considered by these individuals to be helpful in fulfilling their goal and the manner in which they assisted them. Gilbride et al. (2003) and Hagner and Cooney (2005) faced comparable sampling decisions. In addition, as Knight (1999) emphasized in her dissertation, a



significant amount of research has highlighted why individuals with disabilities *fail* [italics added] in their attempts at improving their circumstances. Knight continued by stressing the importance of a more positive focus with successful individuals as the experts. A salient feature emphasized in Hurlbutt and Chalmers' (2002, 2004) qualitative studies was how their participants cried out repeatedly that they wished to be considered the experts. This researcher agreed with this stance wholeheartedly.

### *Criteria*

As stated at the beginning of this section regarding purposeful sampling, this researcher explained that selection of participants took place with particular criteria in mind. The criteria presented were based to a certain extent on information gleaned from a similar study by Hagner and Cooney (2005). Therefore, the criteria for selection of HFA participants to include in this study were: (a) a diagnosis of autism on the higher end of the spectrum or a diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome, as reported for the HFA participant; (b) age to be past secondary schooling; and, for this study, will be defined as 19 to 55 years of age; (c) currently working at a place of employment that they considered "a good job" for a minimum of six months (Hagner & Cooney).

In addition to fulfilling these criteria, the researcher described the research project to the HFA individuals and gave them the opportunity to ask any questions they may have. I then asked them if they were willing to partake in the project. The criteria for the next two groups of participants, the educators and the business people, were: (a) being identified as helpful to the individual with autism at the place of employment or prior to being hired for the job the HFA participants considered to be meaningful; (b) verifying

their support in the particular case; and (c) agreeing to be a participant, after being given a clear explanation of what the project involved.

According to Creswell (1998), the number of participants in a grounded theory study is between 20-30 people. To begin with, this researcher endeavored to have between seven to ten HFA individuals as participants. This may take some time to find that number, due to the small percentage (approximately 22%) of individuals with high-functioning autism and Asperger Syndrome being reported as having very good to good outcomes in terms of living independently which includes holding down a job (Howlin, Goode, Hutton, & Rutter, 2004). How many of those individuals considered their jobs meaningful or a good job was not revealed in the study. One method of gaining more participants mentioned by Taylor and Bogdan (1998) is that of “snowballing” (p. 32). After the researcher got acquainted with some of the participants, this researcher asked them if they knew of any other individuals that meet the criteria that may be open to participating in the research project. If the number of participants has not reached the desired number, this may be a strategy to attempt. Another factor to keep in mind if the total of HFA participants was less than ten is that these participants name one or more supportive professionals; thus, the number of participants could reach 21 which is within the range given by Creswell.

More specifically, the ideal ratio between participants and participants’ circles of support were seven HFA participants identifying one educator and one business person; therefore, two circle of support participants identified for each HFA participant totaling 21 participants. However, this does not preclude some of the HFA participants

identifying, for example, one business person or one educator but not both. Should a HFA participant not identify any circle of support persons, they will be excluded from the study. Therefore, a combination such as 10 HFA participants, five business and six educator circle of support members would be just as acceptable for the study as the ideal ratio of seven HFA participants to 14 circles of support participants. Seven HFA participants was the minimum required for the study.

#### *The methods of recruitment*

The method of recruiting the individuals with autism was a multi-level process. This researcher contacted the various agencies or consultants who might have this type of individual as a client. The researcher followed a sample script (Appendix A). The contact people included local chapters of the Autism Society of America based in Florida, the Autism Society of Florida, Centers for Autism and Related Disorders (CARD) throughout the state, transition department heads at the various public and private educational/vocational institutions in the area, along with occupational therapists, speech and language clinicians, and autism support groups in the Central Florida area. Once contact was made, if needed, I made an appointment, bringing flyers that the point of contact person posted in common areas or made available to their constituents by email (Appendix A). Following this, the researcher sent the contact person a letter in which that person agreed to be the point-of-contact/intermediary (Appendix A). After signing and dating the letter, the point-of-contact returned the letter to the researcher, using the stamped, self-addressed envelope provided.

When meeting with the possible participants, especially individuals with autism, it was critical to do so at a place of their choosing where they felt comfortable (Muller et al., 2003). In addition, as Taylor and Bogdan (1998) suggested, it was helpful to start slow. The first meeting was quite informal, not to be considered an interview, rather a time for researcher and participant to become familiar with one another and to come to an agreement about the logistics of the interviews. The researcher had on hand an informed consent form (Appendix B) that was signed once the participant agreed to take part in the study. If the HFA participant indicates he or she would feel more comfortable having a parent or both parents there, their wishes would be respected. Through my 35 years of experience with this population encompassing individuals from preschool to postsecondary, I have seen that close ties with the parents were often the case. If this was the situation, the researcher would supply the HFA participant with a parent consent document (Appendix A).

During the first interview the gist of several questions was, “Was there a person or persons either prior to graduation, where you work, or involved with you in the job seeking process that you feel really helped you or continues to help you with your job? Would you tell me about them?” This would be the first step toward recruiting those supportive business people or educators to be a part of this research. Once the support people were identified by the HFA individuals, this researcher requested that they signed a permission form (Appendix A) which allowed the researcher to contact them. Following this, the researcher spoke to the referred support person by phone to inform them that the individual with autism nominated them as being supportive of his or her

employment efforts and arranged an appointment to present them with a description of the research titled Notice of Research Study for Circle of Support Participants (Appendix A). At the appointment this researcher shared the form which included the professional's criteria (Appendix A), the informed consent form (Appendix B), and the permission for referral form (Appendix A). This researcher followed up this meeting by phone and requested some basic feedback regarding participation in the project (Gilbride et al., 2003; Hagner & Cooney, 2005).

#### *Data Collection and Processing Procedures*

As Creswell (1998) described the data collection activities, he illustrated it in the form of a cyclical pattern. These activities included: (a) locating the sites and individuals, (b) gaining access and establishing rapport, (c) purposeful sampling, (d) collecting data, (e) recording information, (f) resolving any field issues, and (g) storing data. He continued by pointing out that though he started by locating the site(s) and individual(s), a researcher may initiate entry at other points. In a grounded theory study, there are often multiple sites, and this fact made it advantageous for offering salient contextual data during a later coding phase (Creswell). Gaining access to the job sites where some of the interviews may take place could present a problem in certain cases. If so, as Taylor and Bogdan (1998) recommended, "keep trying" (p. 27). Previously, under the section on sampling, this researcher made specific decisions regarding sampling, in this case, purposeful sampling. Once recruitment of all groups of participants was implemented and a reasonable sample attained, the sites were known.

The first meeting with the individuals with autism, as written earlier, was a means of establishing rapport, a very crucial step in the data collection process, according to Taylor and Bogdan (1998). Many significant guidelines were brought to light by these authors. They stated that there are “no hard-and-fast rules” (p. 48) for this segment of the process and offered some suggestions. These consisted of respecting the participants’ routines, sharing what the interviewer has in common with these individuals, and encouraging them to speak freely. In addition, Attwood (1998), Grandin and Duffy (2004) and Olney (2000) recommended that it is helpful as a communication strategy with high-functioning individuals with autism to be direct and precise. It will be additionally important to implement Taylor and Bogdan’s suggestions with the involved professionals. Finally, this researcher clearly expressed to all participants that the goal of meeting with them and interviewing them was to reach a mutual understanding in a collaborative manner. Other issues that needed to be included either at this time or at the first interview were that they may refuse to take part in or later withdraw from the study and in addition, during the interviews, to not answer a particular question.

Earlier under methods of recruitment, this researcher explained some access issues, such as informed consent. Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements came later in the data collection section. Due to the strong bonds between parents and their adult offspring mentioned before, this researcher was aware that the parents may be involved in access issues to a certain extent.

### *Data Collection Instruments*

*Documents.* Strauss and Corbin (1998) addressed the multitude of choices, decisions, and options a researcher must make regarding “the flow of work” involved in a research project (p. 29). For instance, what types of data collection would be utilized during this period of the study? Typically, grounded theory research employs interviews and memos (Creswell, 1998). However, due to the participant with autism’s difficulties with verbal communication (Grandin & Duffy, 2004; Olney, 2000), this researcher felt that the addition of documents as a collection device offered additional and, possibly, clearer input. More specifically, it was especially productive for the participants with autism to write an explanation about what made their job meaningful to them. Knight (1999), in her research on successful college students with disabilities, had her participants write a narrative in which they defined and described what a successful college experience meant to them. In fact, Creswell (2003) specified some advantages of the utilization of documents in qualitative research. These included: allowing a researcher the opportunity to become more aware of the language and the words of the participants, providing data in which the participant puts thought into before writing, saving the researcher the time and expense of transcribing, and offering written evidence. Several experts in the field of autism (Grandin & Duffy; Olney) emphasized the necessity of allowing written replies or statements as an alternative to verbal responses. Additionally, this alternative was offered to all HFA participants during the interview process for a portion of the questions or all questions, if that was what they wished. Frith (2004) noted that high functioning individuals with autism and Asperger Syndrome were frequently

more proficient with written responses. If the HFA participant identified that the supportive person he or she referred was also HFA, then this alternative will be offered to the Circle of Support participant.

*Interviews.* The instruments utilized for research studies are forged by the differing assumptions that pertain to each paradigm (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Constructivists want to discover whether the participants in their studies have varying understandings or shared ones. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) pronounced that, “The hallmark of in-depth interviewing is learning how people construct their realities—how they view, define, and experience the world” (p. 10). Miller and Glassner (1997) firmly believed that the information about the social worlds of the participants that was brought to light during the interviewing process was an achievable goal. The aim of the qualitative interviewer is to document and understand the point of view of his or her participants (Miller & Glassner).

The key to qualitative interviewing is understanding. Schwandt (1999), in his article, “On Understanding Understanding,” provided an enlightened view of what this entailed. Though he wrote of four conditions under which understanding unfolds, this researcher believed the third condition to be more pertinent to the present research study, outlining how we, as interpreters, can

Let them (the participants) really say something to us . . . . understanding requires an openness to experience, a willingness to engage in a dialogue with that which challenges our self-understanding. To be in a dialogue requires that we listen to



the Other and simultaneously risk confusion and uncertainty both about ourselves and the other person we seek to understand. (p. 458)

Rubin and Rubin (2005) echoed this belief when speaking about what they termed as responsive interviewing. These researchers offered an interviewing model based on their many years in the field and stressed that their goal was, “to generate depth of understanding, rather than breadth” (p. 30). When allowing people to express what is important to them, the interviewer’s role is to facilitate the flow of conversation (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

Rubin and Rubin (2005) along with Seidman (2006) offered a multitude of suggestions concerning fruitful methods of qualitative interviewing which this researcher actively put to use. However, due to the HFA population incorporating possibly half of the participant pool, many points regarding interview techniques that added to the effectiveness of this phase of the research need to be brought to light. Most had to do with the very unique and divergent ways individuals with autism understand, interpret, and communicate. Sinclair (1992), a high-functioning person with autism, wrote a personal essay in which he gave his “inside-out view of autism” (p. 294). He spoke clearly and eloquently on how the world of people with autism varied so much from those of others. Pertinent to the discussion earlier on understanding as a basic element of the qualitative interview is Sinclair’s description of what he understands: “I understand a lot about understanding. I usually understand when I don’t understand something, and I’m beginning to be able to recognize gaps between what I actually understand and what other people *assume* I understand” (p. 295).

Later in Sinclair's account (1992), he began by describing a situation where four "autistic people" met in an informal, unstructured setting, and he elaborated on how diverse each person communicated in a manner where no real interaction occurred (p. 299). Then, when several other non-autistic people joined them, they began asking questions that brought structure to the situation. This occurrence excited Sinclair, as he was able to observe the "bridges" that were being built (p. 299). This researcher felt encouraged by this depiction and really related to the bridges that Sinclair referred to in his description. As a teacher of students with autism of all ages, I often referred to my role as being less of a teacher and more of an interpreter/translator. In other words, I provided the bridge leading to better understanding by interpreting what the non-autistic person was saying or asking in terms the student could understand and, in turn, translating the student's response. I feel these years of experience greatly assisted me as an interviewer and researcher.

The major portion of data collection was through the use of one-on-one, semi-structured, open-ended interviews with all sets of participants of approximately 60 minutes in length. Another means of data collection was a Demographic Questionnaire which was a form for the participants to indicate important pieces of information such as age, years of schooling, living situation, marital status, etc. (Appendix C.). The interviews were semi-structured interviews, containing approximately 10 questions for each group (Appendix D). The researcher's own copy of the interview questions was an excellent means of noting non-verbal behaviors that are normally not provided by an audiotape. In addition, the idea behind this practice was not to provide a structure to

adamantly adhere to, but to act as a reminder of the list of areas to be covered (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). These authors added that this could be expanded or revised in any needed follow-up interviews. The individuals with autism were provided with a copy of their questions beforehand, a practice utilized in other similar studies with this population in order for them to feel more comfortable about the interview process (Knight, 1999; Muller et al., 2003). In fact, this researcher often gave the other participants the interview questions to peruse for a few minutes prior to the interview.

The interviews were digitally and audio tape recorded with an attached microphone for interviewer and interviewee. These interviews were then transcribed as a word document by this researcher using the Dragon Naturally Speaking 9, a speech recognition software program, along with other tapes transcribed by a transcriptionist, using her specific equipment and who was given the Confidentiality Agreement to sign (Appendix E). All data were stored in a locked case. The sites for the interviews were the choices of those interviewed, as long as it was a place free from distractions (Creswell, 1998). In order that there is no breach of confidentiality causing possible embarrassment with one's business, the interviews with the HFA participants did not take place at their worksites. There was at least one interview with each group not including the preliminary meeting with the individuals with autism. However, these specifics were not set in stone, especially with a grounded theory study. The number of participants or number of visits to the field can change, due to a major aspect of grounded theory data collection and analysis, theoretical sampling. A purpose of grounded theory is to collect and analyze data in a cyclical fashion; therefore, there may be the need to add to the number of

interviews or participants, “to help fill gaps in the data that are thrown up in the analysis” (Darlington & Scott, 2002, p. 52). According to Piantanida et al. (2004), the logic behind the utilization of theoretical sampling was, “one’s authentic commitment to attend as fully and completely as possible to the phenomena one is striving to understand” (p. 336).

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

Dipping into the theoretical sampling process is, in a sense, like wading into this section of this chapter, data analysis. Strauss (1987) wrote that theoretical sampling directed the data throughout data collection and analysis. This researcher along with Creswell (1998) and Taylor & Bogdan (1998) felt that it clearly illustrated how data collection and analysis basically begin together. This aspect is particularly pertinent to grounded theory research. As Strauss and Corbin (1998) pointed out, theoretical sampling was not devised prior to or at the onset of the research, but was one that “evolves during the process” (p. 202). The researcher begins this type of sampling based on concepts that are starting to come forward in the analysis process. Decisions regarding this type of sampling unfold during the process of research (Strauss & Corbin). According to Boychuk Duchscher and Morgan (2004) and Creswell (1998), the clearly detailed and persistent utilization of this sampling method is a distinctive feature that separates grounded theory from other types of qualitative research. Strauss and Corbin highlighted these concepts as (a) repeatedly being present or obviously absent, in some cases, in the data during the comparison process, and (b) acting as conditions that add variability to a key category.

Earlier in this proposal, I listed the data collection activities laid out by Creswell (1998). Purposeful sampling was one of seven Creswell listed. Cutcliffe (2000) shed light on the varying positions regarding the controversy among experts in the field about purposeful sampling versus theoretical sampling procedures in grounded theory research. After a fairly thorough review, Cutcliffe made a distinction between the two. He wrote that purposeful sampling was employed at the commencement of data collection. However, once analysis began, purposeful sampling was “superseded by theoretical sampling as the data/theory highlight the direction which further sampling needs to follow” (p. 1477). In this way, the additional sampling acted to strengthen the findings (Moghaddam, 2006).

Another strategy that goes hand-in-hand with theoretical sampling is the constant comparative method. This method is often thought of as one of the two major strategies in the use of grounded theory (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998), though other researchers considered it “the primary strategy in the integrated coding and analyzing stages” (Boychuk Duchscher & Morgan, 2004, p. 607). Under data collection processes, I referred to the “cyclical fashion” of grounded theory (See also Slevin & Sines, 2000). Haig (1995) considered constant comparison to be a “method of discovery” that occurred through the combination of a specific coding system, data analysis, and theoretical sampling procedures (p. 5). The researcher is involved in a process in which he or she simultaneously goes from coding and analyzing the data with the goal of developing and refining the concepts that form (Taylor & Bogdan). Further understanding of grounded theory methods of analysis continues past processes of theoretical sampling and constant

comparison, bringing us to the systematic coding system and microanalysis that are characteristic of grounded theory.

One of the first topics Strauss and Corbin (1998) addressed during their section on coding procedures was microanalysis. Their conception of the term was a very specific type of analysis that looked at each line of the data that occurs at the initial stage of generating categories. From this scrutiny, relationships connecting categories may come to the attention of the investigator. This process combines both open and axial coding. However, Moghaddam (2006) relayed his objections to Strauss and Corbin's technique of microanalysis: (a) that it was too time consuming, and (b) that it may lead to some confusion and, in turn, the researcher may end up with data overload. Moghaddam suggested identifying "key points" rather than individual words and from there, allow the concepts to emerge (p. 56). As this researcher began the coding process, I kept these words of caution in mind. Most researchers do favor microanalysis as an important feature of grounded theory (Boychuk Duchscher & Morgan, 2004; Strauss & Corbin).

The beginning of the grounded theory analysis process is open coding during which the researcher scrutinizes all the data coming from the interviews, and, in this case, the documents written by the first group of participants on what meaningful employment represents to them. The salience of pre-coding measures, such as listening to the tapes several times, along with reading the transcripts totally is a necessary step in the analysis procedure. This, in turn, allows the investigator to sense possible meanings of the interview in its entirety (Slevin & Sines, 2005).

The purpose behind open coding is basically to label and to conceptualize the data through constant comparison in order to form categories (Moghaddam, 2006). One point Patton (1980) clarified was the importance of using the participants' precise language with the wording indicative of how they organize their worlds. When researchers label the data, they proceed to ask questions about it, which leads them to envision the concepts involved and any relationships that seem to come into being. The questions the researcher asks normally relate to what the interviewee means or feels about the topic at hand (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). When proceeding with open coding and utilizing microanalysis and constant comparison, fracturing of the substantive data occurs and moves in the direction of conceptualization (Slevin & Sines; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The significance of this initial stage in the coding procedure cannot be stressed enough, as it provides the scaffolding for the remaining procedures of grounded theory analysis (Strauss & Corbin).

A vital part of the coding process that occurs throughout analysis is that of memo-writing or memoing (Boychuk Duchscher & Morgan, 2004; Goulding, 1999; Moghaddam, 2006; Slevin & Sines, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In fact, Boychuk Duchscher & Morgan emphasized its significance by including it as one of "three primary elements to theory building," (p. 608), citing Strauss and Corbin in addition to Charmaz. Initial and advanced coding along with theoretical sampling were listed as the other two elements. Memo-writing promotes reflexivity by the investigator and leads to identification of possible researcher bias, according to Slevin and Sines when they addressed ways of enhancing the overall rigor in their study.

Borgatti (1996) referred to the use of a codebook in which memos could be included as code notes. The researcher explained that these memos could become “fodder” later in theory development (p. 3). The researcher writes memos either during the research process or directly after collection of data. In this way, the researcher makes notes of impressions or descriptions that could be critical for reference purposes throughout the analysis and up to theory development (Hanley-Maxwell et al., 2007). As Goulding (1999) explained, “Essentially, memos are ideas which have been noted during the data collection process which help to reorientate the researcher at a later date” (p. 9). Whenever memoing takes place, throughout data collection (Goulding) or analysis (Boychuk Duchscher & Morgan, 2004; Moghaddam, 2006; Slevin & Sines, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), this researcher realized its value and significance. This recognition not only stems from my perusal of research books and journal articles, but through personal experience. As a teacher of a unique and relatively unknown population during the early 1980’s into the mid 1990’s, when curricular guidance was scarce and rarely offered, memos, observations, or notes to myself regarding the students’ interests and developmental needs were an invaluable tool that I employed. As a result, this led me to create and develop a specific and innovative curriculum, that overall seemed to work. It was important enough to me, other professionals, and many parents so that I was motivated and encouraged to write a book, *Working Together for a Brighter Future: Unique Approaches for Educating High Functioning Students with Autism* (Hays, 1997).

As spotlighted by Spiggle (1994), iteration is a relevant feature of data collection and analysis. Iteration is the process of “moving through data collection and analysis in



such a way that preceding operations shape subsequent ones” (p. 495). Iteration coincides with the flow between open and axial coding. Woods, Priest, and Roberts (2002) considered open and axial coding as iterative practices that act conjointly with data collection. These authors elaborated by saying that the movement between the two types of coding can occur in one coding session. In Part 1 of the same topic related to in the previous study, Priest, Roberts, and Wood (2002) added more to the understanding of shift between open and axial coding by stating that they act side by side during analysis (p. 34). When describing their grounded theory study, Slevin and Sines (2005) spoke of merging open coding with axial, and continued by pointing out that the latter aspect of coding data is reassembled from the concrete to the more abstract, including sub-categories to categories, and finally, major categories. This process could include flow charts or other visual displays that may assist in demonstrating connections and emerging patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Diagrams act as a visual tool that the researcher may utilize to envision the concepts revealed throughout the course of analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Moghaddam (2006) painted a picture of the coding process by comparing it to a pyramid with open coding at its base. Then, as the coding is reduced, one begins to see relationships which bring us to the axial coding stage where concepts are created and categories formed. Strauss and Corbin (1998) added dimension to the picture when they explained the purpose of axial coding as beginning “the process of reassembling data that were fractured during open coding” (p. 124). Once reassembled, one can scrutinize the concepts being formed as to having dynamic relationships. Pandit (1996) furthered one’s

understanding of axial coding's purpose by explaining that this type of coding refines the data in a novel manner which makes connections between a category and sub-categories that may be associated. Categories are given their significance by Pandit, who regarded them as the cornerstones of theory in its development. LaRocco (2007) gave greater clarification to the roles of categories and subcategories when she detailed that there are times when a category could become a sub-category. The rationale behind this was that by doing so, the main category had "greater explanatory power" (LaRocco, p. 123). Axial coding occurs through a combination of inductive and deductive thinking, according to Borgatti (1996).

An upper echelon to the pyramid representing the coding system at a more abstract level, is selective coding or as many authors agreed, the point of integrating and refining the categories (Goulding, 1999; Moghaddam, 2006; Pandit, 1996; Priest et al., 2002; Spiggle, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The integration process often requires devices that aid in this arduous endeavor (Priest et al.). Memoing, diagrams, charts, and conceptual maps are four specified in the grounded theory literature. Memoing as a useful technique was addressed before in the discussion of the beginning stages of coding. At this latter stage during selective coding, Strauss and Corbin referred to memos as "a running log of analytic sessions" (p. 153). As memos are employed further into coding, they are characterized by their more theoretical qualities. Boychuk Duchscher and Morgan (2004) cite Glaser as considering memoing of immeasurable significance and, if omitted, the investigator may not be implementing grounded theory research.

Several researchers (Goulding, 1999; Spiggle, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) highlighted the use of diagrams, charts, and conceptual maps during the selective coding phase of analysis. Strauss and Corbin emphasized the value of diagrams, stating that they allow the researcher to gain a more balanced perspective in order to view the concepts rather than focus on details of the data. Goulding's concern was to present a meaningful picture during selective coding through the employment of charts and diagrams as illustrations of the emerging theory. Lastly, Spiggle underscored conceptual maps as a means of detailing integration of relationships.

In the practice of integration during selective coding, the researcher is faced with the selection of one core or central (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) category, or in some cases, two categories, according to Priest et al. (2002). All sub-categories relate to the core category which is representative of the major theme of the study. As Borgatti (1996) described this sort of category, "Selective coding is about finding the driver that impels the story forward" (p. 4). The story line is the final tool this researcher will discuss in the data analysis section. A number of researchers illuminated this as a vehicle used during the selective coding phase (Borgatti; Moghaddam, 2006; Pandit, 1996; Slevin & Sines; 2005; Strauss & Corbin). When the researcher is beginning to formulate the core category, frequently an optimal way of doing so is by developing a story line that articulates "what seems to be going on here?" (Borgatti; Strauss & Corbin, p.148). Pandit described this as an abstraction of the research subject. The utility of writing the story is in preparation of establishing the core category and, in turn, presenting the theory

(Moghaddam). Strauss and Corbin (1990) stated so eloquently, “The core category must be the sun, standing in orderly systematic relationships to its planets” (p. 124).

A final step toward completion of the grounded theory method of analysis is what is termed theoretical saturation. As Rubin and Rubin (2005) explained, this transpires when further cases generate no change in the data. For instance, when the investigator is involved in coding an interview, he or she finds that the interview does not reveal novel information to the existent data (LaRocco, 2007). Theoretical sampling and the constant comparative approach facilitate reaching the saturation point (LaRocco; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A suggestion Strauss and Corbin offered was that the “theory that is grounded in the data should be recognizable to participants” (p. 161). At that point, essentially, the peak of the pyramid is reached.

#### Standards of Quality and Verification

There is an ongoing controversy between quantitative and qualitative researchers and theorists concerning the use of criteria and terminology when discussing standards of quality for qualitative research findings (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 1999). The more qualitative research is valued and recognized, the more there is the desire for its own set of terminology (Piantanida et al., 2004; Shenton, 2004). Creswell (1998) explained that many researchers and writers have searched to find comparable terms that coincide between quantitative and qualitative approaches. Though there is some variability overall, the majority (Creswell; Morrow, 2005; Shenton) entitled the standards under the title of trustworthiness. Creswell cited Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Shenton cited Guba (1981) for devising the four names generally accepted for use in qualitative research that

paralleled the quantitative names. They were: (a) credibility in place of internal validity, (b) transferability in place of external validity, (c) dependability in place of reliability, and (d) confirmability in place of objectivity. For this section of Chapter III, the researcher listed these four criteria along with the various procedures that applied to my study that were suggested for implementation by Shenton and Creswell. In addition, I described the manner I addressed them specifically within this proposal. The format followed will mostly be Shenton's, though when applicable, I added Creswell's verification methods, along with other researchers.

### *Credibility*

The provisions Shenton (2004) listed that investigators may utilize in order to ensure credibility or, as it is also called, accuracy included:

1. "The adoption of research methods well established" (p. 64). The methods of grounded theory research this researcher followed as exemplified throughout this chapter are those of Strauss and Corbin (1998), known experts in grounded theory research (Creswell, 1998; Gilbride, 2003; Slevin & Sines, 2005).
2. "The development of an early familiarity with the culture organizations before the first data collection dialogues take place" (p. 65). I have past connections with several of the organizations dealing with the autism populations due to this being my field of expertise for over 34 years. From time to time, I have done consulting work involved with clients with

autism and the involved business people; however, the amount of association was less.

It is within this section that Shenton (2004) mentioned, “prolonged engagement,” one of Creswell’s (1998) eight criteria. Creswell viewed prolonged engagement and persistent observation as advantageous for developing trust, understanding the culture, and becoming aware when information is incorrect. I believe all applied.

3. “Triangulation” (p. 65-66). This relates to the utilization of varying data collection procedures, for instance, observation, interviews, documents, and focus groups. Creswell (1998) and Gilbride (2003) included this as a standard, also. As discussed in the data collection section, this researcher employed interviews and documents. According to Cutcliffe and McKenna (1999), they considered triangulation to additionally include the constant comparative method, in the sense that if a concept is shown to appear in a repetitive fashion, then this verifies its existence, at least in the social world being explored. Shenton (2004) and Cutcliffe and McKenna also incorporated a varying range of participants as an aspect of triangulation. The involved business people in my study, as detailed before, could consist of employers, supervisors, coworkers, job coaches, and rehabilitation counselors. This would certainly be considered a variety of participants.

4. “Tactics to help ensure honesty in informants” (p. 66-67). Examples included allowing participants the right to refuse to be a participant in the study, encouraging honesty from the start, assuring the participants that there are no right answers, and clarifying that they have a right to withdraw from the study without needing an explanation. These are all up-front issues discussed earlier. As an aside, taken from my knowledge of individuals with autism and verification from some of the experts in the field (Attwood, 1998; Grandin & Duffy, 2004; Howlin, 2004), individuals with autism and Asperger Syndrome are known to be honest, and, at times, brutally so.
5. “frequent debriefing sessions” (p.67). Shenton (2004) explained that these meetings may be with the researcher’s supervisors or, what he termed, a “steering committee” (p. 67). Ely et al. (1999) called their groups, support groups, with writers gathering together to share their works and knowledge, providing emotional support to one another, and forming a sort of mentoring group. During these sessions, the ones involved in the debriefing can act “as a mirror, reflecting the investigator’s responses to the research process” (Morrow, 2005, p. 254).

Fortunately, these types of sessions were in place for me. My committee chair/faculty advisor had an open door policy. In addition, two other doctoral students who were basically at the same point in their proposal and I were either meeting, emailing, or having phone conversations regarding the various questions, dilemmas, or guidance we

wished to share and discuss. Shenton (2004) pointed out that a researcher's vision can be expanded in this way and can receive benefits from having a sounding board.

6. "peer scrutiny" (p. 67). This can come from colleagues, peers, and academics with the feedback they can offer. Creswell (1998) defined the peer debriefer as the "devil's advocate" (p. 202). This very much parallels the provision discussed above. Later in the research process, this researcher shared some of the lines of thought with a colleague who has a great amount of expertise supervising research projects to gain her input.
7. "the researcher's 'reflective commentary' " (p. 68). The manner in which Shenton (2004) described this provision coincided closely to memo-writing which is an on-going commentary of the observations, insights, ideas, and directions for the investigator to follow up on as referred to earlier. Shenton suggested this as a means of monitoring one's thoughts or conclusions, giving credence to the emerging theories. Shenton, along with Gilbride (2003), likened this practice as a means of providing an audit trail, a salient feature underscored throughout qualitative research literature.
8. "member checks" (p.68). This provision of credibility is one mentioned frequently in many writings of qualitative research studies (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 1999; Creswell, 1998; Gilbride, 2003; Morrow, 2005; Muller et al., 2003; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). In fact, Shenton (2004) cited Lincoln and Guba, explaining that these researchers deemed it the most vital way



to strengthen the credibility of a research project. This occurs when the researcher checks with a participant or several participants at an interview or at the end of data collection as to the accuracy of the transcripts or dialogues heard over the tape recorder. Morrow viewed member checks as the researcher's responsibility to understand how closely the interpretations reflected the participants' meanings. Another way this can happen is through sharing emerging patterns or visual displays. In particular, as I have stressed before, individuals with autism's perceptions are so different from ours, I felt it was critical that meaning educed from the interviews was shared and verified. Therefore, member checking was offered to the participants once their interviews were transcribed.

Other provisions were included in Shenton's list (2004), a total of 13, but I felt these 8 covered provisions critical to maintain this study's credibility. Some of the ones omitted overlapped those covered. The format for the remaining qualitative standards: transferability, dependability, and confirmability were not laid out by Shenton as was credibility; the rationale being there were not anywhere near as numerous as those above. For this reason, I went back to simple paragraph format.

#### *Transferability*

As stated previously, a qualitative study is not able to be applied to other or larger populations as quantitative studies do with the establishment of external validity. However, transferability can be established when certain facets are in place. Shenton (2004) again turned to Lincoln and Guba when he emphasized that the researcher needs

to be accountable in order to offer enough information about the context of the various settings involved with the specific research project so that “transferability inferences” can be made by another researcher (p. 70). Slevin and Sines (2005) considered multisite investigation to be one of two criteria that enhanced a study’s transferability. As mentioned before, this researcher carried out interviews at various locales.

Another way of providing transferability is through rich, thick description (Creswell, 1998, Ely et al, 1999; Morrow, 2005; Shenton). According to Creswell, this referred to the amount of essential details about the participants and the settings the researcher provides in the write-up of his or her research. In this way, if another investigator sees that the participants and setting that are the focus of the research study at hand are those that coincide closely, then the findings of the first are more transferable. Ely et al. added valid suggestions about how to attain thick description that is helpful. These authors pointed out that the best time to write down details is not during the interview or observation, but immediately thereafter. Their reasoning for this advice was that too much could be overlooked. These follow-up notes could include “loose ends, fragments that might jog needed memory at a later time” (Ely et al., p. 345).

Specificity of details is truly important to the transferability of a project. Shenton (2004) highlighted what he regarded as boundaries of a study consisting of: how many organizations participated, how many participants, criteria involved, methods utilized, how many and how long the data collection meetings were, and the time period involved. However, Shenton expressed doubt as to whether the idea of true transferability is a realistic goal within the context of a qualitative study. This researcher felt it was

important to write a study with clear details so that, at the very least, guidance as to further studies along the same lines were encouraged, if that was what was needed.

### *Dependability*

Dependability in qualitative research is the comparable term for reliability along more positivistic or quantitative lines. When dealing with reliability, the researcher utilizes techniques to demonstrate that if the study was replicated, employing as much of the details of the first study as possible, comparable results would occur. However, in qualitative research where the investigator follows where the data lead, exact replication would not be possible.

Detail is key to the production of dependability in qualitative research. In relation to this, Shenton (2004) suggested that the procedures of the study be detailed so that future researchers are able to replicate it. He looked at this as a type of “prototype model” that outlines the proper practices that come as a result (p. 71). Shenton elaborated on this when he laid out sections to incorporate: (a) the design and specifics regarding planning and execution “on a strategic level” (p. 71); (b) detail about the operation of how data were gathered when implementing collection; and (c) reflective evaluation as to the effectiveness of inquiry or, as Morrow (2005) termed it, reflexivity. This is often carried out by memos or a journal.

### *Confirmability*

As stated before, the standard for quantitative research of objectivity is likened to confirmability in qualitative research. Creswell (1998) reminded the reader that both dependability and confirmability are grounded by supplying an audit of the process of

research. Subsequently, one of two points in reference to confirmability underlined by Shenton (2004) was the critical issue of providing an audit trail. By inclusion of this provision, one is able to follow the course of the research according to “decisions made and procedures described” (p. 72). Shenton continued in this vein by recommending provision of such in the form of a diagram.

Another means of assuring the confirmability of a research project highlighted by Creswell (1998), Morrow (2005), and Shenton (2004) related to reduction of researcher bias, along with admission of the researcher’s predispositions or assumptions. Morrow wrote about being explicit about one’s bias, and Creswell emphasized the importance of reduction. Shenton added that triangulation was an effective way of combating this type of bias.

Memoing as a method of supplying an audit trail, admission of background and possible bias, in addition to guarding against its occurrence, along with employment of triangulation methods are all measures this researcher has addressed throughout this chapter. As a researcher, I was highly motivated to follow these standards of quality and verification in order to be fruitful in this endeavor to discover a blueprint to meaningful employment for the participants involved and those seeking assistance in this critical area of life.

### Ethical Considerations

Qualitative research presents a complex arena in the area of ethical considerations, especially as it applies to institutional review boards (IRB). It is now a common practice with universities that prior to the initiation of research, the IRB of that

university reviews the research proposal (Heppner et al., 1999). This can pose a problem as most IRB's are frequently not as conversant with qualitative research as they are of quantitative research (Darlington & Scott, 2002; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). In addition, Rubin and Rubin (2005) voiced their concern over the problems faced by qualitative researchers. A major predicament that they emphasized was the expectation of the board for specific descriptions of the participants. However, these requirements do not follow the premise behind qualitative research: the evolving nature of the participants and the questions the researcher asks.

Similarly, Darlington and Scott (2002) explained what they understood to cause problems for the ethics review boards. This included having a small sample size; the lack of specific hypotheses (research questions), control groups, and prearranged questions. These can all lead to the board feeling that the proposed study may seem lacking rigor or trustworthiness. Darlington and Scott recommended the importance of tackling these questionable areas directly in the proposal. Since a primary way of collecting data in this study was through interviews, it was crucial to deal with the difficulties stemming from the IRB stance of preconceived questions. Rubin and Rubin's (2005) suggestion was to provide the board with examples of questions to be used with the stipulation that as the study evolves, the questions may also (Appendix D). This suggestion was followed.

Creswell (2003) offered insight about sections of one's proposal where ethical issues are at hand and can be solved directly. The first area Creswell discussed was the research problem statement. The most significant aspect to Creswell was for the researcher to identify and address a problem that will lead to positive results for the

participants. I felt by looking at adults with autism who were meaningfully employed and the business people and educators who offered support and assistance would qualify my study for meeting that consideration. The purpose statement and the research questions are the next stage of the study that imposes ethical issues (Creswell). Very simply, these need to be clearly shared and described to the participants so that deception is not an issue. Other sections of the proposal that Creswell covered were data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Most specifics regarding the ethical issues involved in these sections will be attended to in the remaining discussion of this topic.

Berg (1998) wrote globally of the many ethical considerations facing qualitative researchers which came about as the result of the National Research Act that passed in 1974 which, in turn, brought about the formation of the institutional review boards. The purposes for these boards included making sure that risks and benefits are considered, that the studies imparted significant scientific research, they protected the rights and interests of the participants, and the researchers obtained legal informed consent.

The researcher writes his or her proposal so that these considerations are attended to conscientiously. One salient feature is the informed consent form. The purpose of this form is to recognize that the rights of the participants are protected through the process of data collection (Creswell, 2003). Creswell highlighted certain features to incorporate: (a) the participant is involved with the particular study on a voluntary basis and may choose to withdraw at any time; (b) the purpose statement is clearly written in a manner the participants will understand; (c) the procedures involved are detailed; (d) the participant has the right to bring up any questions regarding the study and receive a copy of the

results; and (e) the privacy of all participants is respected. This form was signed and dated by the researcher and the participant to indicate their agreement to these provisions. These were all features that were incorporated in the informed consent forms for this study (Appendix B).

According to Berg (1998), another type of consent that is an ethical consideration is implied consent. This refers to questions on a questionnaire or in an interview. Berg advised that prior to each interview, the researcher explains the nature of the research and its purpose, followed by the researcher asking if the participant understands. At the completion of the interview, this whole procedure is regarded as implied consent.

The collaborative nature of this research study was conveyed earlier. Accordingly, the interview questions were given to the HFA participants before the interview. This investigator encouraged feedback relating to the questions and, if a valid question is not present or has been overlooked, the participant may provide the question or suggestions regarding the formation of one. As Creswell (2003) stressed in the data collection section, it is essential that the investigator actively seek support from these individuals throughout the research.

Confidentiality is an additional area of consideration critical to ethics. Creswell (2003) and Taylor and Bogdan (1998) proposed that in order to overcome threats or concerns regarding this matter, use of pseudonyms or aliases and deletion of information that may identify the individuals should suffice. In this case, participants' names were coded, for example, the HFA individuals would be A1, A2, A3, etc. The involved business people would be B1, B2, B3, etc., the educators would be E1, E2, E3, etc. or a

more detailed code may be used with these participants so to indicate which participant with autism he or she supported. Confidentiality also deals with safeguarding the data in a secure location and destruction of recordings once transcribed and analyzed.

The many issues concerning ethical considerations for qualitative research are diverse and detailed, seemingly more so, in this researcher's opinion, than quantitative research. The rationale may be due to the depth and complexity inclusive in this type of research. However, its importance of ethics cannot be argued. As Heppner et al. (1999) summarized the goal of the ethical researcher, "to conduct an investigation that creates new knowledge, while preserving the dignity and welfare of the participants" (p. 98).

#### Chapter Summary

Chapter III detailed the qualitative research methods that were utilized in this grounded theory study of meaningfully employed high functioning adults with autism or Asperger Syndrome and the professionals who supported them in their quest. The factors involved with this type of situation were explored through the lens of a constructivist philosophical framework. The basis for this search was to understand the meanings behind this phenomenon in order to answer the research questions that eventually led toward the development of a substantive theory.

Specifically, the researcher delineated the strategies of data collection and analysis, following Strauss and Corbin's (1998) tutelage offered in the literature, adding salient factors regarding the role of the researcher, the sample and criteria set up for the recruitment process of the participants. Standards of quality and verification were explained in depth, in addition to the ethical considerations that applied to qualitative



research and this research project. Whenever possible, this investigator tied in specifics regarding the particulars of this research topic and the related literature with the various elements of this chapter, in hopes of creating a clearer picture for those who read this.

Chapter IV reveals the findings of this study.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### Introduction

The social phenomena of factors involving high functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome (HFA) finding success through the attainment of meaningful employment was examined closely in this grounded theory study. Additionally, the role their circles of support played in the attainment and maintenance of these jobs that the HFA individuals found meaningful was critical to discover. The grounded theory procedures of Strauss and Corbin (1998) acted as guiding posts that eventually led to the emergence of a theory.

#### Demographics of Participants

Strauss and Corbin (1998) sagely emphasized, “no matter how well thought out we think our project is at the beginning, there always are those unanticipated twists and turns along the way . . . .” (p. 55). This researcher found this to be true from the very beginning of the data collection/analysis process. The circles of support were originally planned to include professionals in the fields of business and education. When this investigator questioned Participant A1 about who supported him in his ventures into the employment field, his response was a business person and his mother. So the study had to change at that point to include parents in the circles of support. The second HFA participant that was interviewed also named his mother and declared that his present job was not the most meaningful one, but it was one he had several years back. However, he continues to work steadily and, at this point in his life, has enough confidence to move all

the way out to California so he will have a better chance to obtain meaningful employment in the acting/entertainment field.

Please also note that some of the information given in Table 4.1, *Participants' Demographics*, only has to do with the HFA participants, while other information has to do primarily with the circles of support. Another part of this Table essential to understanding the demographics is the meaning behind the use of the coded names. The A's represent the HFA participants, B's the business people, P's the parents, E's the educators, and lastly, the one F is a family member. Appendix C contains the Demographic Questionnaires.

Table 4.1: Demographics

Participant	Description	Age Range	Gender	Race	How HFA Got Job	HFA Education	COS time Knowing HFA	HFA Area Of Interest	HFA's # of Jobs Held
A1	Individual w/ Asperger Syndrome	40-49	Male	Caucasian	Vocational Training	Some College		Sports, Office Work,	Two to four
B1	Job Coach	50-59	Female	Caucasian			1 to 3 years		
P1	Employment Specialist	60-69	Female	Caucasian			All his life		
A2	Mother	60-69	Female	Caucasian					
A2	Individual w/ H-F Autism	19-29	Male	Caucasian	On his own w/ Mom's Help	College Degree		Film Production, Editing, Theater	Four or more
E2	Drama Coach	50-59	Male	Caucasian			3 to 5 years		
P2	Mother	50-59	Female	Caucasian			All his life		
A3	Individual w/ Asperger Syndrome	40-49	Male	Caucasian	Internship	Graduate Degree		History, Creative Writing	Two to Four
B3	Supervisor	60-69	Male	Caucasian		Master's	1 to 3 years		
P3	Mother	60-69	Female	Caucasian			All his life		

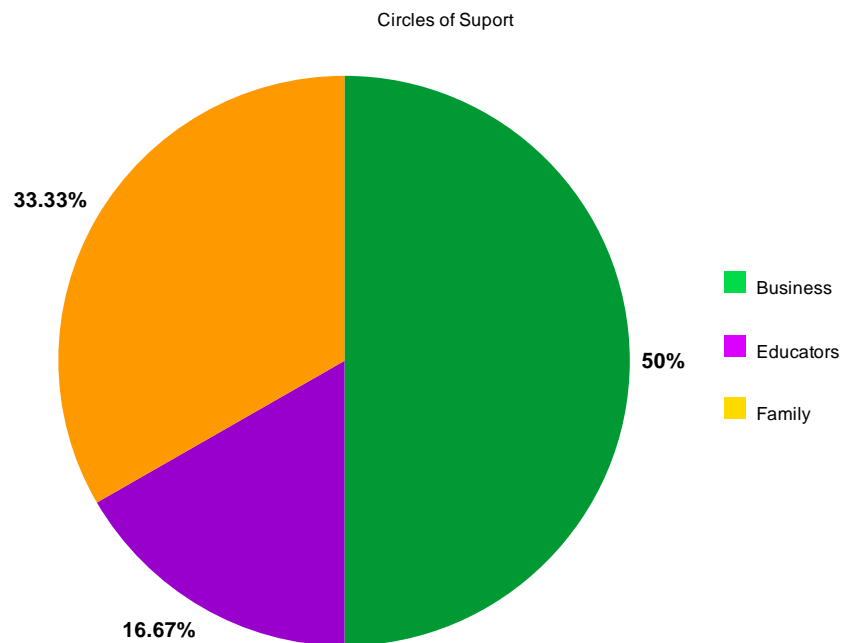
Table 4.1: Demographics

Participant	Description	Age Range	Gender	Race	How HFA Got Job	HFA Education	COS time Knowing HFA	HFA Area Of Interest	HFA's # of Jobs Held
A4	Individual w/ Asperger's	19-29	Male	Caucasian	FL State Employment Application	College Degree	1 to 3 years	Computer Engineering/ Programming, Business	Two to Four
B4a	Autism Consultant	30-39	Female	Caucasian					
B4b	Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor	50-59	Female	Caucasian					
A5	Individual w/ Asperger Syndrome	50-55	Male	Caucasian	Through Agency Director	Some College	6 to 10 years	Asperger's Research, Ethnic Flutes, Flutemaking	Four or more (Approx. Forty)
B5	Co-Worker Supervisor Coordinator	40-49	Female	Caucasian					
A6	Individual w/ Asperger Syndrome	40-49	Female	Caucasian	Newspaper Advertisement	College Degree	1 to 3 years	Horses, History, Computers	Four or more
E6	Curriculum Resource T./ Friend	50-59	Female	Caucasian					
F6	Family member, niece	30-39	Female	Caucasian			All her life		
B6	Manager	30-39	Female	Caucasian			1 to 3 years		

### *Demographics of Circles of Support*

Half, or 50%, of the support persons were business people. A third, or 33%, was either parents or family members. Finally, 17% were educators. The rationale behind this will be explained throughout this chapter.

Figure 4.1: Make-up of the Circles of Support



### *Demographics by Race*

The one outstanding commonality with all the participants was that they were 100% Caucasian. Since the participation of the HFA individuals was on a voluntary basis, this occurrence was happenstance. In addition, the HFA individuals identified their circles of support so the same rationale applies there.

### *Demographics by Age Range*

The age of the participant was attained by age range (nine years), rather than exact age, which acted as a means of protecting their anonymity. The only exceptions to the age range were with the HFA participants in the bottommost age range, 19-29 and uppermost age range, 50-55, as 19 was the starting point and 55 was the cut-off point decided earlier in the research. Half or 50% of the HFA participants were 40-49, 33% were 19-29, and 17% or one participant was in the 50-55 age range.

The age ranges of the circles of support were: 25% in the 30-39 age range, 8% in the 40-49 age range, 42% in the 50-59 age range, and 25% in the 60-69 age range. The two graphs below illustrate these percentages.

Figure 4.2: HFA Age Ranges

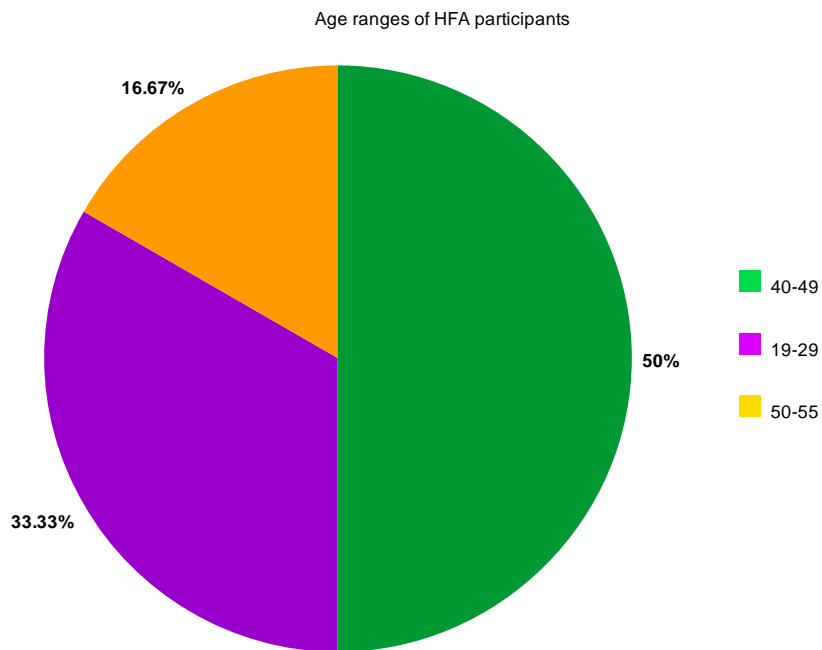
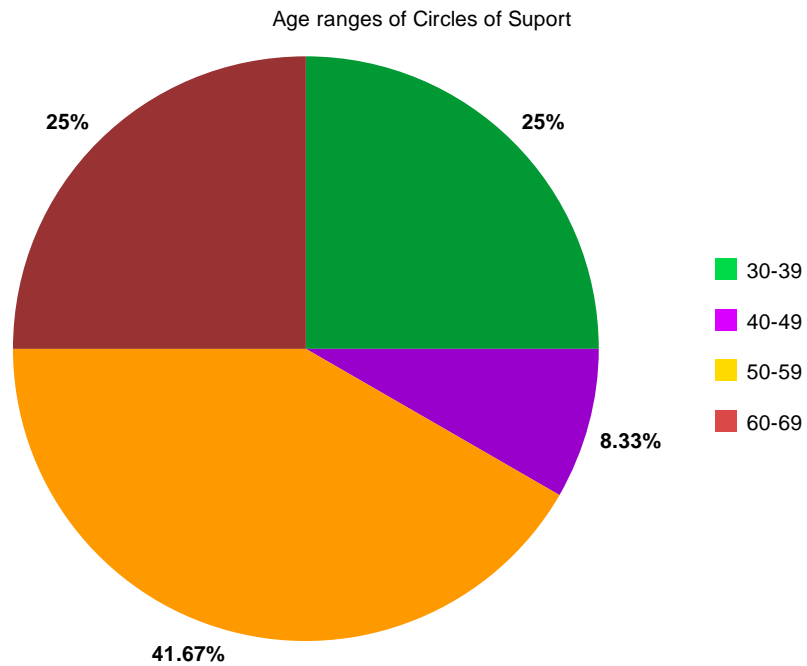


Figure 4.3: Circles of Support Age Ranges



#### *Participant Gender*

This facet of the demographics is especially of interest to the HFA participants. Attwood (1998) emphasized the ratio between males and females as being 4:1. This ratio is generally reported in the literature. Though the gender ratio of our HFA participants did not match the above generally accepted ratio, it did show a 5:1 ratio, which is really not too far off percentage-wise; 83.3% were male and 16.7% were female. Figure 4.3 demonstrates this information.

The reverse was true for the circles of support: Males were 16.7% and the females were 83.3%. One factor that could have influenced the larger percentage of females was



the inclusion of three mothers. It has been this researcher's experience that this is often the case; it is frequently the mother who is more involved.

Figure 4.4: HFA Gender

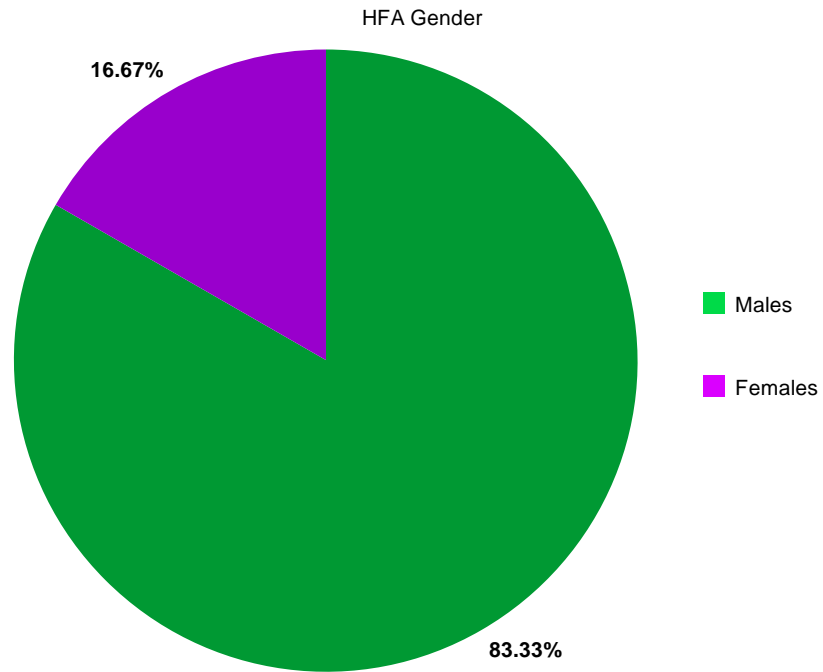
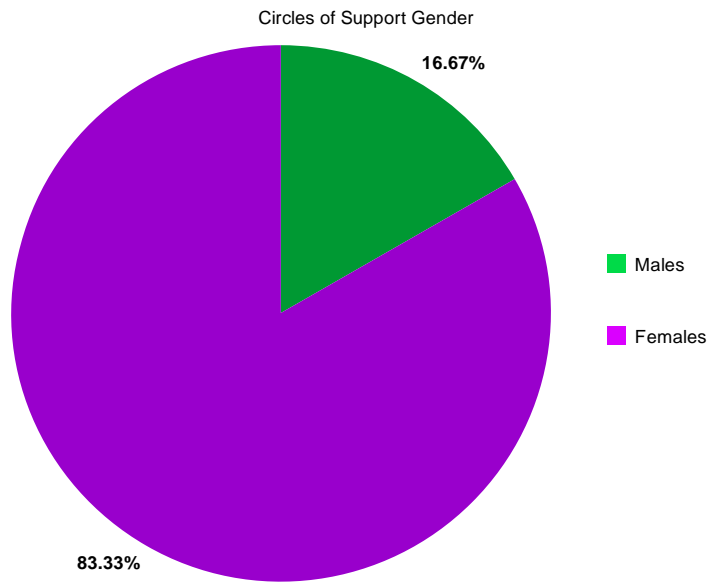


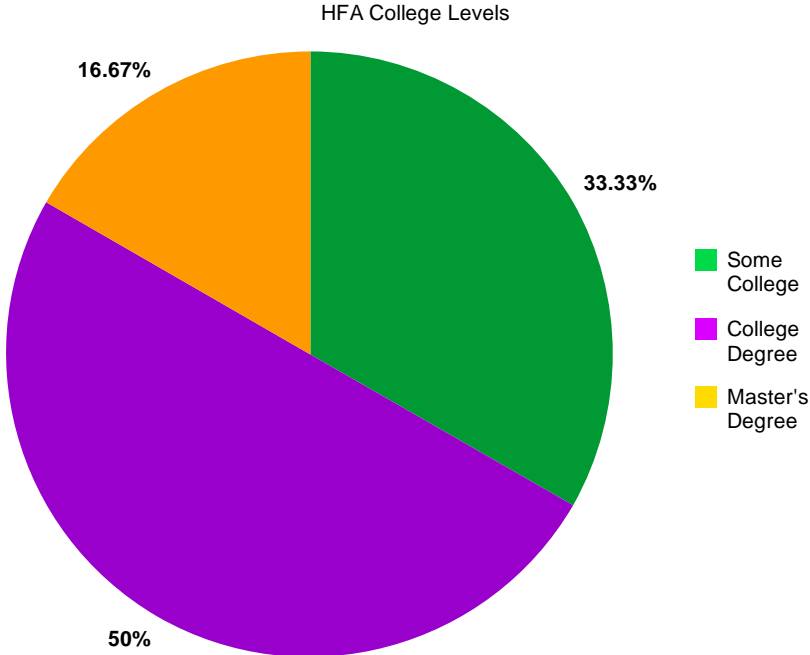
Figure 4.5: Circles of Support Gender



*Educational Levels for HFA Participants*

The demographics for this showed that all participants had the experience of attending college. Two, or 33%, attended some college; three, or 50%, had acquired a college degree; and, one, or 17%, went on for his Master's degree.

Figure 4.6: HFA Educational Levels

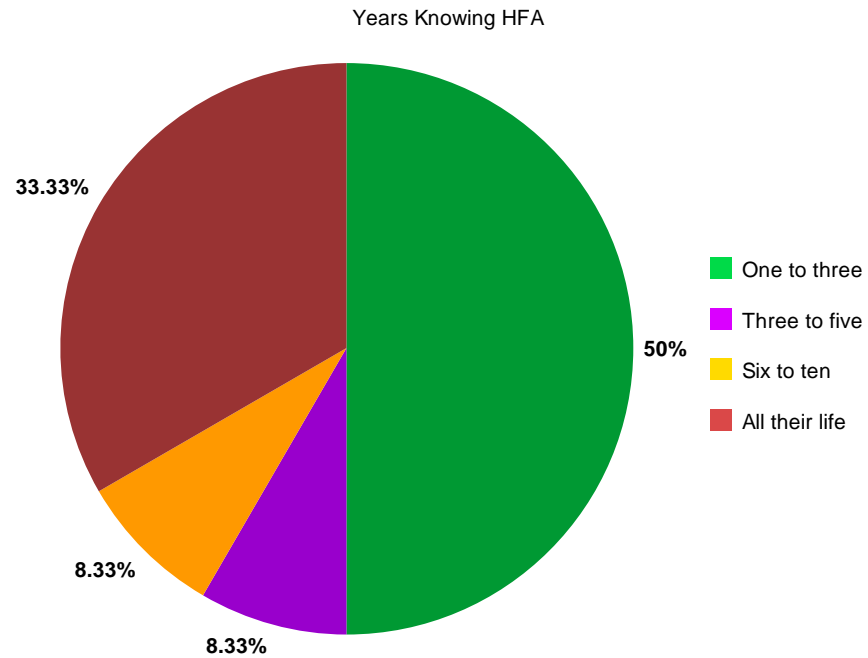


*Circles of Support Time Knowing the HFA Participants*

Half, or 50%, of the support members knew the HFA participants for a period between one to three years. Only one circle of support, or 8.3%, knew the HFA individual for a time period of three to five years, the same percentage, 8.3%, accounted for knowing the other HFA individual for six to ten years. Lastly, four circles of support, or 33.3%, knew the HFA individuals all their lives. B5 was the support person who knew A5 for six to ten years, as this time included two jobs that they were both a part of, with B5's position changing from Supervisor to that of Co-worker. The support, however, did not change with the positions; it is present to this day. The explanation concerning the

time period of “all their lives” is a simple one: Three were mothers of the participants and one was a family member.

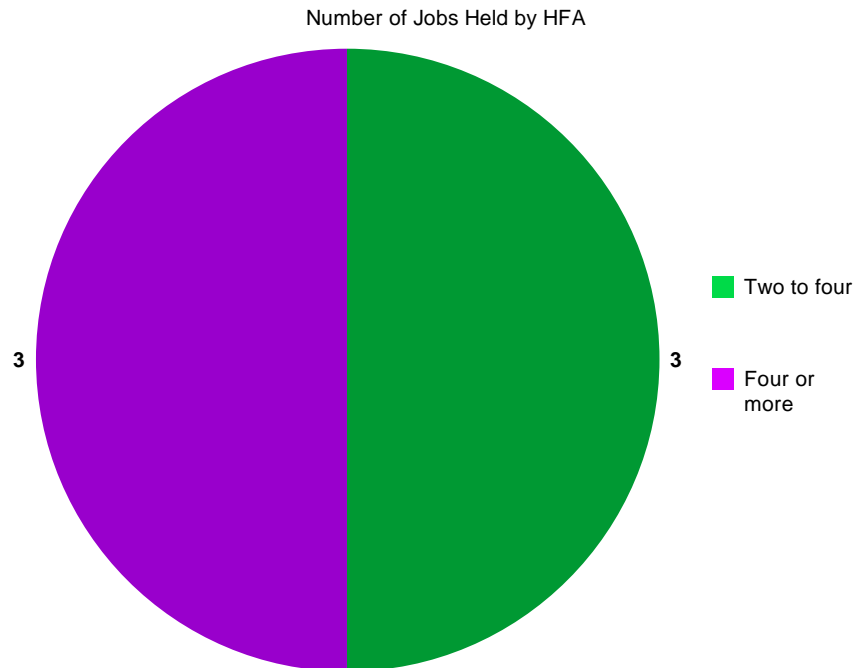
Figure 4.7: Circles of Support Years Knowing HFA Participant



*Number of Jobs Acquired by the HFA Participants*

Half, or 50%, of the participants held two to four jobs, while the other half worked at four or more jobs. A note of interest was that one participant who answered four or more added the comment of, “approximately 40.”

Figure 4.8: Number of Jobs Held by HFA Participants



### Findings

This researcher was able to comprehend more of what went into the HFA participants' achievement of meaningful employment by listening to the voices of the two essential groups of participants, making note of the particulars of each one, and coming to understand the bonds that developed through the HFA individuals' growing relationships with their circles of support. Strauss and Corbin's (1998) methods of coding, along with the process of constant comparison led this researcher to further probing so that a clearer picture could be formed. Some of these HFA individuals' journeys were long and arduous with glimpses of heaven and happiness, while others were not as difficult with continuing support along the way. All of this will be revealed as the relationships between categories are analyzed and explained. Strauss and Corbin stressed the

importance of contextualizing a phenomenon, “to locate it within a contextual structure . . .” so that “analysts are able to relate structure with process” (p. 127).

### Participant Response to Research Questions

The research questions were aimed toward the HFA participants, their circles of support, and some were directed toward all participants. These questions were more specifically stated in the interview questions (Appendix D). Through the process of addressing each group of participants, the flavor of each group could be savored. The shared questions for both groups offered a mingling of tastes.

### *Explanation of Meaningful Employment*

In order for this researcher to understand what dynamics were involved when the HFA participants achieved and maintained meaningful employment, these participants were questioned about what made their jobs meaningful, in addition to submitting a written document about what meaningful employment meant to them. During this time, they decided which job was the most meaningful (a few had more than one to choose from), and all participants were employed on a fairly regular basis. A1, A3, and A5 referred to being able to help others. A1 added that by helping his customers, he was able to, “make their own job easier . . . help them do what they need to do.” A3 mentioned, when remarking about his present job, that, “It’s meaningful in that I have some role in providing Medicaid-funded services to people in my state.” A5 included, “I get a lot of satisfaction out of serving people with disabilities.” This participant, along with having Asperger Syndrome, is physically handicapped which inferred that he was capable of feeling empathy for others similar to himself.

A2 considered a job to be meaningful when he was able to overcome what could be stressful and, instead, turned it into a positive situation where, “I got to be an entertainer!” This blended well with his major area of interest, the theater or acting, therefore, utilizing his talent in a job that paid well. In his words, “So in a way it’s as if you’ll make more by having fun with other people.” In his document he mentioned that, “To me, a meaningful job is a place where you would want to be—not only as an employee, but also as a customer, visitor, etc.”

A4’s response really emphasized the value these individuals give to having the ability to utilize their talents and interests. “It’s a chance for me to use some of my assets and talents. It’s a chance to do something that I like doing. To really harness my potential and to use it to make a difference.”

Lastly, under this research question, I would like to illustrate the impact of isolation and lack of human contact had on two of the HFA individuals. A5’s most meaningful job (out of three) was when he was a back country ranger in the high country. He was basically alone with little human contact paired with, “a lifelong desire to get as far away from a human scent as I possibly could!” When describing his surroundings, he said glowingly,

below me everything was encased in clouds a couple of thousand feet farther down. So it was like being in heaven looking down on earth! It was the only time in my life that I was truly happy.

A6 reiterated her happiness that came from, “Very little human contact . . .” Another facet of what made her job meaningful was, “and more computer contact.” She expanded

on this by saying, “I now work with logical and efficient computers, where I don’t have to try to second guess what the computer means when it says something.”

*Preparation at School for Attainment of Meaningful Employment*

The table previously shown displaying the demographics demonstrates that only two educators were circles of support (Table 4.1). In both cases, they were not educators whose major task was to prepare the HFA individuals for a vocation.

Once A2 had decided during our interview what his most meaningful job was, it took a bit of probing for him to align taking drama classes in his high school days with the enjoyment he received at the restaurant where he was able to utilize his acting skills. His original answer to the question, “Was there someone at school to prepare you for gainful employment at your job at the fondue restaurant?” was. “No, that pretty much came about as my idea.” He mainly discussed the support his mother provided throughout his working experiences. So the connection with E2 came across as tenuous.

A2’s interest in theater was sparked during his high school drama experiences. However, he was on the academic track so vocational training was not part of his coursework. As his Mom, P2, informed this researcher, he was diagnosed with autism by the time he was five years old, and it was evident by the first or second grade that he was on the high functioning end of the spectrum. By the time he attended high school, he personally chose not to receive any special education services. His drama coach, E2, considered his academic skills not as high as his comedic talent. In his interview, A2 commented about how he continued this interest in community college and at the university he attended.



In the other case of A6 and E6, the HFA participant was not diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome prior to two years ago. During her years at school she was in regular classes throughout that time. She started noticing how different she was in about the third grade when the other students began socializing more. A6 met E6 at church during the time A6 received her diagnosis. Since they had bonded as friends, E6 then took on the role of educator which has continued, especially because it coincides with her career of many years. E6 not only educates A6, but also does so with the people at A6's work.

To summarize, due to A2's being on an academic track with minimal characteristics of autism, and A6's lack of a diagnosis until recently, this absence of knowledge did interfere with them obtaining vocational help during their years at school. The other four HFA participants, A1, A3, A4, and A5, were not diagnosed until late in their lives, after their school years. In addition, they acquired little educational support with the exception of A3, who during his college internship, received a great deal of support from his supervisor, B3, on the project A3 was involved with at the time. A3's major was history, and he "was working at the State Historic Preservation office" under the supervision of B3 whose occupation was that of a historian. A3 admitted that this job made him happy as, "it was right at the level where I could do the work; it was research and writing reports without being too overwhelming, with too many tasks." A3 did so well with this project that E3 asked him to continue working with him on other similar projects. When A3 applied for a fellowship in the same field of interest, E3 was more than happy to write a very supportive and complimentary letter of reference (Appendix F).

*Assistance and Support from Business People and Educators for the  
HFA Participants in Preparing for and Achieving Meaningful Employment*

Half, or 50% of the circles of support, as shown in the demographics displayed earlier, were business people, with some, but not all being aware that the HFA individuals were, in fact, high functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome. Since this research question was directed at the HFA participants, this will be mainly answered by their responses.

A1 brought up a business person during his interview who supported him over 20 years ago. Yet he still remembered having an “absolutely” nice relationship with her, and that she “was definitely an important influence.” Due to her assistance, A1 “was able to take the ball and run with it.” He scored a touchdown by getting a job with the State Department and has continued working for them for 22 years. A record like that speaks for itself! When this researcher probed further about more specifics about her support, he replied, “She would try to learn about my special vocational interests and the things I could do.”

It was mentioned in the previous section that after some probing on this investigator’s part, A2 did converse about the interest his drama coach in high school originally maintained with A2 through his active participation in the various facets of theater production (verified by the interview with E2). This interest broadened further when he majored in theater at his community college and continued by taking courses in film and video editing at the university he attended.

The assistance and support received by A3 from a business person, B3, was addressed earlier. However, more information on the types of support A3 acquired could be taken from the transcript of B3's interview. A3 researched various battlefields by reading "through official records, but also books on battles, as well as articles . . . ." What followed this would be a discussion between the two, with guidance from B3 as to what further direction to take with the research. B3 did express his pleasure about working with A3, "I was always overjoyed when I had someone like (A3) whom I could supervise without having to stand over him!"

Both of A4's supports were business people. In addition, he spoke of obtaining support from a woman in the University's Career Studies department, who helped him, "put my resume together and also helped me organize a notebook as part of my career search." This notebook "contained my transcripts, interview advice, a set of basic interview questions, a list of my best assets . . ." and more. After A4 graduated from the university, he received more support from a friend of his father's primarily to update and add more needed specifics to the materials he already possessed. He ended his discussion about circles of support by referring to B4a, the autism consultant who taught "an interview course . . . that I think really helped my communication skills greatly." When this investigator interviewed B4a, this business person brought up how accommodating the vocational rehabilitation counselor who worked with A4 was. I had already hit a roadblock in contacting the family friend who acted as a support to A4, so through what is called "theoretical sampling," I approached him later to inquire whether he felt the vocational rehabilitation counselor provided him with support in his career efforts, and he

agreed. So from there I arranged an interview with this additional support person, B4b, who I felt was an important piece of the pie. She was delighted to allow me to interview her.

A5 identified a business person who supported him in his 7 years in the field of social services. A5 is the same HFA individual who spoke in glowing terms of his most meaningful job being one being characterized by the lack of human contact. And now he is in social services. Quite a leap, but one he chose to take due to a serious fall during his park ranger job and his lack of ability to move around as he did in the past. He was fortunate to have a person he worked under in social services who,

has been very helpful in mentoring me and coaching me. . . . In guiding me and helping me learn about social services. In the past, I really didn't have any people like that help, but she is, she's definitely been someone who helped me out!

There is a tremendous support system at A6's present place of employment. Assistance was offered from the beginning when she started out at the call center of the company which she described as "a nightmare." A6 was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome during that time, and when she shared this information with her boss, "She said this is why you can't do this job; we'll find you another job with the phones where you will be successful!" After the boss researched other positions, she found the position of benefits counselor to be the one most suitable. A6 is now supported by her new boss, B6. As mentioned earlier, E6 comes in at times to help educate the staff. A6 educates the staff in addition. On her desk is the book, "All Cats have Asperger Syndrome" (Hooperman, 2006) and,

it's required reading when anybody transfers into our group. The boss takes it into them and tells them they have to read it by the end of their first week. Then I also have a little sign on my desk that says, "Autism spoken here" so everyone knows I'm the one with Asperger's.

A6 spoke with great detail about several coping mechanisms E6 has helped her put in place at her work setting. She went into great length about the ingenious color coded "blueprint" that allows her to organize and prioritize the activities of her work week. E6 and A5 worked together to develop this, and its utility is much appreciated and recognized by the staff. Also, by A6 calling E6 when troubles arise, they are later able to sort through what happened and devise a solution which they share with B6, A6's operations manager. She, in turn ensures that the procedure is then utilized.

*Assistance and Support from Family Members in Preparation  
and Maintenance of Meaningful Employment*

Even though parents and family members were not included in the research questions specified in the proposal of this dissertation, the topic of a parent's assistance during an HFA's employment history came up during the first interview with A1. Strauss and Corbin (1998) addressed a practical consideration for the researcher to gain distance, "is to obtain multiple viewpoints of an event that is to determine how the various actors in a situation view it" (p. 44). When these researchers discussed theoretical sampling, one aspect they spoke about going to people "that will maximize opportunities" (p. 201) toward the evolution of a theory. A parent is able to paint a broader picture of this part of

their child's life. So once this was introduced in the first interview, it was one included in the remaining interviews with the HFA participants.

During A1's interview, he talked about both his parents. Due to the fact that his father had a stroke and only has limited communication skills, A1 and I decided that his mother would be a good support person to interview. When A1 conversed about his parents' influence, a good amount of what he said revolved around his parents instilling a solid work ethic, "You have to get up in the morning even though you may not want to go to work . . . . put your best effort forward and do the right thing." Mom helped him with math skills and "how to put your best face forward." Also, his work history represented getting involved with work from an early age. His Dad got him engrossed with the family lock and key business. His Mom worked many years at the State Department, so she set a good example in that way.

In the second interview, with A2, his Mom was the first person he mentioned in terms of support starting when he was still in high school and was hired at a popular video store after applying at several different locations. He had focused on this particular franchise because he loved movies (this is the same person with the interest in acting). "She helped me filling out forms." When transitioning from school to work, "It was pretty much my Mom backing me up on what I needed to do to prepare, like applying to jobs in general." He was open and honest with her, "I would tell her everything that was going on about the jobs. . . . if everything wasn't going very well, I'd let her know about it." They would problem solve together and even talked about "what would be the good moral decision? . . . . she would help me to the best of her knowledge."

A3 was eager to elaborate on the help his mother provided, “she obviously was the one supporting me from the earliest and has continued to support me in a variety of ways.” She offers assistance to him with things he finds difficult or cannot do. His last statement regarding his Mom was very impressive, “She’s always been able to give me the right balance of practical help and independence.”

The last HFA participant, A6, identified her niece, F6, as being insightful and supportive. They have been friends for a long time. When F6 was little she would, at times, tell her, “you’re so weird, you’re such a moron.” Her niece is now grown up and received her Master’s degree in Human Resources. Due to A6’s diagnosis, she wrote a research paper on Asperger Syndrome in the workplace. When she was carrying out her research, she called A6 and commented that the family was mean to A6 when she was younger and A6 agreed. The research for her class really opened the niece’s eyes, and she gained more awareness about the disorder. From that, she was more able to recognize the characteristics of the syndrome in other family members.

#### *The Circles of Support’s Involvement in Their Supportive Roles*

Next we turn to answering the research questions pertaining to the circles of support’s feedback. The first question that will be addressed is, “How did the educators or business people become involved in their supportive roles with the individuals with autism and in what ways did they support them?” Also included in this section will be the type of training or experience that prepared them, as the two questions seem very connected. As far as the parents and family member who came to be a part of the research

during data collection is, on the surface, fairly obvious. Quotes or statements that broaden or add to that will be included.

At the time B1 met A1, she was a rehabilitation counselor employed by Goodwill Industries with primarily a mental health caseload. A1 was referred to her basically due to his anxiety disorder. B1 was not aware of A1's autism and neither was A1, but she did have another client with autism. When B1 reflected upon her two clients, she remembered them being very different and different from each other. A1 was, "actually kind of personable . . . very pleasant to be around. He got along with other people well; he was polite, and interesting." A1 expressed that he wished to work in an office. B1 related,

So because of his appearance and his personality and stuff, and he was intelligent.

I was like, okay, I think that we can do that. So because he wanted to go in that direction, that's what I looked for, and I was able to place him in the kind of position that he wanted to do.

Her job description did not specify going back to check on A1, but she did anyway. She claimed there were no problems, "he just needed help getting into something that fit him where he didn't have a lot of contact with the public . . . so he did pretty well." B1 went on to state that, "the most interesting part of my job, finding an environment that worked for people physically, mentally, and emotionally." This researcher felt that A1 was very fortunate to have a rehabilitation counselor with such a holistic philosophy.



B1 discussed that her background was in rehabilitation counseling and that she counseled A1 to a certain degree about his parents. He relayed that they were very protective, and he wished to be more independent. Therefore, B1 worked with him on how to be assertive without being aggressive and to speak up more for himself and not be passive, which was his tendency.

Both A1's parents were involved in encouraging him to work, from sometime after four years of age. His pediatrician suggested that A1 spend more time with his Dad and, since his Dad had his own business, he took him there. There were times in P1's interview that she indicated that their encouragement to work was not totally appreciated. P1 pointed out that they, "mainly wanted him to get the idea that you know that you have to work in life, and you're going to have jobs that you're not going to like, this is the world, this is the real world." She supported him in his job efforts and in basic living skills throughout his life; for example, she presently helps him with his finances due to his inability to handle them. In addition, she was the one to bring him to the doctor last year when he finally received the diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome.

E2's support came from being A2's drama coach and teacher, and clearly A2's interest was strong in this field so he was involved throughout high school. E2 had a substantial background in theater through obtaining his degree at a private college in town, becoming involved in other extracurricular activities, in addition to being a professional ringmaster! This researcher is convinced that E2 really inspired A2 because of the passion E2 has for his job. He still remains the drama coach at the same high school after many years of holding the position. In addition, the fact that A2 had gone on in his

schooling with that same focus is proof of that sustaining interest. E2 believed in A2's talent, "he was above average in his talent on stage! Absolutely!"

A2 elaborated rather specifically how his Mom, P2, supported him; however, P2 was even more specific than her son as far as how she supported him. The ways she helped him with his job application included prompting her son to write down all the information on a piece of paper that he would bring with him to the interview.

Additionally, they would role play what interview questions A2 might be asked. At the time he was looking for the job at a popular video chain, he was too young for driving,

so I (P2) would go with him and sit out in the car, and then he would come back and tell me all the things that were easy or he didn't understand, and we would go over it.

P2 also taught him a good amount about social skills such as, eye contact, looking at people when you are talking to them, asking relevant questions, how to shake someone's hand in a firm manner, and how to introduce himself. It sounded like P2 covered all bases for supporting a high functioning individual person with autism. To top it all, P2 did it because,

That was just kind of came with my job description . . . . It was just part of what my husband and I felt like we needed to do to help make him successful, so whatever it took, that's what we did.

It was explained earlier in this chapter that A3 was B3's intern from years back. B3 did not select A3 as an intern; that was not the way it worked. He related, "you never know what you're going to get obviously, but A3 certainly was interested in the war

(Civil War). It wasn't always reading and research, he would talk to me about it which helped me with what I was into."

As to what prepared him to offer support, B3 had been a supervisor for many years. He worked in the state library, the Park Historic Sources, and the State Records Unit as the person in charge. When he was at the State Department of Historic Resources, A3 became his intern. As a historian, he had great knowledge in his field, and it was obvious that A3 shared the same interests as B3. So this was why B3 as A3's supervisor did not have the need to always be there to supervise. B3 commented that he "needed people to work there that were self-starting, and didn't need a lot of supervision . . . . So (A3) was good for working there." This researcher agreed about A3 being a self-starter and relayed that he has begun a support group for HFA individuals.

After A3 had graduated from the university and lived with his Dad for several years, his Mom, P3, got involved in "pushing him to go out and apply for jobs and making suggestions in terms of, you know, I don't think the issue was so much meaningful as it was just helping him get a job." P3 was aware of her son's interest in history since he was young (five or six years old). A3 had trouble at community college due to difficulties with entry-level math, so she found a non-traditional program at the university where she was teaching. This program allowed A3 to take other courses to substitute for math. P3 was very aware of her son's deficit areas at the time, which included short term memory loss and "disabilities which impacted his ability to do math." P3 assisted him in those areas. At the time A3 was looking for a job, she would oversee that his job application looked good and made sure he would type up his resumes. In fact,

Vocational Education was her background when she taught at high school and at the university, so helping her son in this area was “pretty automatic.”

A4’s involvement differs from those previously described due to the fact that he received the majority of his support from business people after he had the diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome. Therefore, B4a and B4b’s help and assistance could be more specific to his needs in the area of employment skills, which was really a plus! B4a is an autism consultant at a center that specifically supports the needs of individuals with autism and other related disorders and their families. In addition, B4a had 11 years of experience as a job coach. So when A4 was first referred to B4a, the family was unsure of his diagnosis, but knew that, “He had a hard time with socialization and making friends and things like that, and problems with employment; he was unemployed at the time, and he desperately needed a job.” So B4a referred them to someone who could diagnose him, and that is what happened. Then, B4a referred him to the Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, B4b, so she could initiate A4’s preliminary paperwork.

It was through this researcher’s series of interviews with the two business people that this researcher became aware of the continuum of services that the city he lived in offered. His Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, B4b, was specifically well-versed in the characteristics and needs of adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome in the employment field or on the road to employment. The autism consultant, B4a, made me aware of this counselor, saying she gets all her referrals from her. B4a went on to explain, “She’s become kind of the appointed autism expert at Voc Rehab there, the Asperger expert. She also seems to have the temperament, the personality, or the persona to

communicate with these individuals in a way that they understand. It's very clear and concrete and they understand." B4a remarked what a good working relationship they have and how much easier it is to work with just one V.R. counselor rather than ten different ones. B4a went on to develop a grant to teach her clients interviewing skills and making a portfolio which has proven to be successful and very utilitarian.

B4a and B4b often worked together as a team with shared clients, and it was through this teamwork that they realized more was necessary for assistance toward attaining and maintaining meaningful employment. Therefore, B4b approached the university's communication department to make a plea for a weekly communication group for this specific population. This is now in place, and A4 regularly attends it along with other such clients.

B4b explained further her "keener" interest and work with those with Asperger Syndrome: "because our agency in the past has not worked well with this particular disability group, and I took it upon myself to gain the knowledge and expertise to try to begin to do that (work successfully) for this population." B4b made a "calculated decision" of what his needs primarily were from her meetings with A4. She felt his needs were in the area of pragmatic communication (the social use of language). B4b worked with a local provider and A4 to search for possible jobs. B4b understood the need to provide specific training with the local provider to increase his understanding of the syndrome. On A4's third or fourth attempt at getting a job, he realized the need to speak up about his having Asperger Syndrome. B4b also provided assistance by educating the

employer on what would help A4 to become more capable of following directions required by the job.

B5 was A5's one named circle of support, and she has been so over a period of seven years, two agencies, and in three positions. The first position was Program Director, after which both A5 and B5 moved on to another agency where she has acted as both Financial Coordinator and as a co-worker. As Program Coordinator she, "made sure he had the tools and the training he needed." Under that position, she was to offer support to persons with disabilities, but "we also hired individuals with disabilities" which was where A5 came into the picture (with his physical disability, as he was not yet diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome). B5 relayed that there were "specific things that she picked up pretty quick" about A5's needs.

B5 saw A5 had "good attention to detail" and felt confident that "he was going to be able to handle it (the job)." However, B5 was aware in large group meetings that (A5) was struggling initially. She felt that he had the social skills, but "they were rusty" because of his past purposeful period of isolation. B5 did add that his past experiences being a part of a musical group probably helped him socially. On the other hand, he had a tendency to be oversensitive, and that was where she offered support. She would explain to A5 the parts of the situation that he did not seem to be aware of at the time. For example, if a fellow worker said he would have a job finished the next day and he did not, A5 would get very upset and frustrated. People without Asperger Syndrome, which they term as "Neurotypicals," would be more likely to accept this situation or, at least, not overreact to it as A5 tended to do. B5's support was typified as more of reassurance

like, “that’s what happens.” She also offered suggestions on what he might say the next time he’s in a similar situation, so he gets the more specific information that he needed.

The last HFA participant, A6, had three circles of support: B6, E6, and F6. A6’s Operations Manager helps her,

do problem solving . . .to ensure that her day-to-day projects are handled . . . . I help her prioritize and manage what she has on her plate and help by giving her advice on communication issues regarding the contact she is having with our clients.

A6 will approach B6 for help, as B6 has an open door policy and feels A6 is comfortable seeking her out and walking her through whatever is on A6’s mind.

Much has been written about A6 and E6, Suffice it to say their relationship covers lots of ground. E6 began as a friend and member in the bell choir that A6 was the leader. As their relationship grew, E6 and her husband became like her mother and father. E6’s husband gave A6 needed financial help, and E6 continued in her close role of friend, Mom, and educator in life, socialization, and work skills. An example of life skills was when she noticed A6 always walked behind her with her head down and not communicating. She told A6 that, “you walk with someone and you carry on communication.” A6 didn’t understand socialization skills, about walking with someone and talking to that person, so they would practice, often. In her family background, which was a military one with no sisters, she had never learned basics about dressing in a flattering way, having an attractive haircut, the basics of makeup, etc. E6 took these tasks on as she had others. Now A6 is receiving more social attention at work and being

included in more social activities that take place there. It was brought out in the proposal that work is often 80% social and 20% work. This may not be the percentage for A6, but the social aspect is growing quite a bit! This is an important influence that E6 has on A6's life: helping her acquire social skills that, in turn, engenders more success for A6 at work.

Finally, we have F6 who is A6's family member, her niece. A6 was already working when her niece was born. However, they are relatives who are also friends. They became especially supportive of one another when F6 reached her working years. A6 was a manager at a popular department store, and F6 became an employee also through her aunt's recommendation. As F6 phrased it, "she knew she could count on me . . . . So by my being a good employee made her look good for referring me." After F6 went to college, she would refer her friends to work for her aunt, which was a positive situation for A6. Now F6 works in an area similar to A6, and they have remained close and often discuss work and "bounce stuff back and forth." After listening closely to A6, F6 will "sometimes give suggestions." A6 does the same thing with her niece, when F6's job gets stressful. So their relationship is mutually supportive.

The research questions that follow this section are to be answered by all participants. The first question contains the following information.

*The Kinds of Relationships between the  
HFA Participants and Their Circles of Support*

As this writer has done in the past, the relationships will be detailed in sequential order, starting with A1 and his circles of support all the way to A6. A1 has already



described his relationship with B1. It was a positive experience, one with influence that was critical for his growth and attainment of a job that would lead to further jobs with the State Department and give him the confidence to proceed forward in obtaining other jobs with the State.

B1 used the term, “positive” to describe her relationship with A1; in fact, she stated that, “I liked him . . . he was definitely one of my higher functioning clients, and it was a joy to work with somebody like him that was physically, mentally, and emotionally able.” When she thinks of him, she always remembers him smiling.

A1’s Mom, P1, felt like her relationship with her son is now “great.” She elaborated,

I think, compared to our past relationship, it’s wonderful, and I think it’s really good for both of us. I learn more about him and admire him more all the time. I think he’s found out that I’m not the terrible person that I know he thought I was. She, rather sadly, said, “I just wish somebody could see him for what he is and appreciate him.” She was referring to a companion or a friend that he could enjoy social activities with regularly. P1’s always wished her son was happy. It seems to be her nature to worry about him and his future.

A2’s openness with his Mom, P2, and his ability to talk to her about any problem may have really seems to demonstrate his feeling of closeness and appreciation about her being a part of his life. This has given him a sense of security; she would always be there for him.

During the interview, when asked about P2's relationship with her son, she answered,

Oh, I think we're very close. I think in a lot of ways we're a lot alike. We're both very sensitive to other people's feelings . . . we just don't think badly of anyone and just don't think anyone's going to take advantage of us. We're a little naïve, maybe?

P2 saw the value of keeping the lines of communication open so he could get, "feedback on how other kids were treating him, or things he wasn't sure of, or girlfriends . . . . I just felt there was so much he didn't really grasp and know that a lot of kids would just automatically know."

E2 verbalized briefly about his relationship with A2, "there was a lightheartedness about him and I probably was never irritated by (A2), never would be because (A2) was just so easy to get along with, so that was basically our relationship."

The relationship with A3's Mom, P3, was referred to earlier in more detail, but one more aspect of their relationship needs to be added and that is A3's first statement about his Mom when questioned about their relationship, "love and affection." P3 related that her relationship with A3 has changed over the years, most of it coming from their lack of knowledge of why A3 acted as he did. What she said was,

One of the things he and I had to struggle with because neither one of us understood; you knew there was a problem, but you didn't know what the problem was . . . . So we probably had lots of tension, lots of back and forth kind

of stuff, and at the same time we're very close, if that makes sense . . . but we always tried to survive!

It was very interesting when this interviewer asked A4 about his relationship with any of the three support people we had discussed. He really was unsure of what to say and, after some further probing, his answer was, "There was some interaction, but it was purely professional." He was only able to relate from his own perspective, a characteristic representative of a HFA individual. They find it hard to think about others, especially in terms of personal relationships.

In fact, some of that response being "purely professional" was reflected in B4a's response, "It's a professional relationship where there's mutual admiration. I admire the effort that he has put into improving himself . . . he had some extra hurdles to go over, and he was able to do it quickly." B4a stressed that once he was diagnosed, he understood more about himself, and why certain things had occurred in his life, and from there he comprehended how to work on it.

B4a highlighted an occurrence that revealed that even before the diagnosis, A4 understood what type of activity would help him with his people skills. "He was already doing the ballroom dancing . . . because he thought, 'Hey, this is something that is going to help me meet people, meet girls.' " At some point in our talk about their relationship, B4a expressed that she hopes he had the same feelings toward her and shared that he attended all her classes and seems to feel free to turn to her.

In my interactions with A4, I always interpreted his relationship to me as one of respect, cooperation, and, at times, thoughtfulness when he informed me of a get together

where Dr. Stephen Shore was speaking. Dr. Shore is a well known person with Asperger Syndrome, who is also an author of three published books and was a former board member for the Autism Society of America. One of his main topics during his speech was employment issues for HFA individuals.

In B4b's description of her relationship with A4, she talked more about his characteristics and needs versus talking about a two-way relationship. One example was, "He was able to communicate a little more effectively than some of the others I had been working with. He knew what he wanted to do, and he understood the job because he had done it before." On the other hand, my interpretation taken from our conversation was that she felt respect, pride, and enthusiasm about him and, in addition, that she had a good working relationship with A4.

It took some time to get A5 to recognize and discuss his support person, but, as stated before, it was a lady, B5, who he had worked with over seven years (up to the present time). He stated that she was and still is a mentor to him. "I still look up to her . . . for excellent advice." Overall, he is very grateful to her.

B5 was very informative about her relationship with A5. She related, "I would say that's a biggie because I would say it's a very close relationship, especially right now. When we first met . . . we got along very well. As well as most people get along with their boss!" B5 added later, "There was a period of time there that I and (A5) had very little contact, and I would say our relationship was next to nothing. It was very frustrating, and I think he kind of felt abandoned." B5 stated that they work well together and are "compatible."

A6 primarily discussed her relationship with E6 who she considers as an educator and as a friend, one that has helped her a lot. “When I get stuck on something at work that happens and I don’t understand the communication, I can print it out and take it home and she helps me to understand!” A6 explained that the help and support she receives from E6 is because, “she does it as a friend.”

At the time E6 was asked about her relationship with A6, she immediately responded that she is like a daughter to both she and her husband. E6 went on to discuss how A6’s family life had not been ideal (both parents are dead, and her relationship with her brothers was less than ideal). In addition, E6 classified herself as a “liaison at church, her liaison at work, her liaison with people.” Later in the interview, she expressed “I was very fortunate to have her! She has taught us amazing things!”

F6 viewed A6 as “kind of like the older sister . . . I was always really close with her. She’s always, she took a special liking to me, and I’m not sure why!” F6 continued by saying that A6 took her everywhere and spoiled her and, later in life, even lived with her at various times.

Her boss at work, B6, also had good things to say about A6 and their relationship. They are,

comfortable at work and outside of work. She’s very open and interacts and participates in things well. With (A6), it’s knowing how to react to her because she is so direct with her Aspergers . . . it’s a good relationship overall.

The last research question, “What changes in perspective occurred as a result of these relationships?” seemed to cause some confusion with several participants. Possibly,

it was not concrete enough. When this interviewer sensed confusion, rephrasing or breaking the question down was attempted.

*Changes in Perspective as a Result of the Relationships  
between the HFA Participants and Their Circles of Support*

When reporting about the changes in perspective, this researcher will also be adding how the HFA participants' feelings about themselves changed. This question was not posed to the circles of support.

A1 responded at first that he did not think his perspective had changed, but then added he felt fortunate to have B1 helping him. He also appreciated that, "She knew of the fact that I've been dealing with depression for years and receiving counseling for that. And she could understand where I was coming from." He really believed that she cared, and that made him happy.

When discussing how he changed, he commented that, "I feel I can change with the conditions with different things on the spot . . . . also being able to deal with different people . . . . do a better job of dealing with people. Not let myself get mad and stressed out by it." He learned at the time this happens to, "keep a low profile and do the best I can at the job."

B1 claimed her perspective had not changed since she was not aware of A1's autism. However, other individuals she knew that had autism altered her perspective. For example, as previously mentioned, the woman she worked with who had autism, when she ran into her recently, she found out she was a homeowner. So the independence that this former client of hers gained altered her perspective.

A1's mother, P1, when speaking about her change in perspective, said, "I went from thinking he would never get a job . . . to being proud as punch that he got 22 years in toward a 30-year retirement." Now she says she is happy.

At the time A2 was asked about a change in perspective, he answered very fluently,

Mainly just a better look at reality. Some things I needed to prepare for, some things I need to get. Pretty much, to get my priorities straight. I needed that before I moved on, for the long haul (California), which is what I'm currently doing. Starting from scratch in new places.

As he said at another point in the interview, he is going "to the entertainment center of the world!"

The topic of how A2 has changed since having meaningful jobs brought about a very meaningful answer,

These jobs that I had after college made me more of a wholesome individual which I would rather be than someone who just knows the things he doesn't know. You have no idea of what it's like to start from scratch rather than being placed at the top. It's good experience to work from the bottom up . . . . You have more understanding about the people you meet, the helpers and the workers. I think it's very important.

P2 did not "remember any light bulbs moments." However, with A2's most meaningful job she "felt good in that he was able to get a job that was very different from anything that he had ever done before." She was proud of the learning he accomplished

and the fact that he” could actually make a living off of that and support himself . . . . It was a big step.”

A3 spoke of his perspective transforming, “as being more capable than I used to think I was . . . . able to do more things. I also think I’ve developed greater self-respect and self-esteem, because of the people and their obviously high opinion of me.” The change he saw within himself was that, “I became more outwardly focused, more interested in what was going on in the world because I had this increasing concern for preserving historic sites . . . so you kind of go outside yourself more.”

A3’s Mom remarked that as he’s learned more about his Asperger Syndrome and researched it, “he’s better able to cope with it . . . . I think of how strong and brave he is . . . that he’s getting up and going out into a world that isn’t always so nice to him.” She said this even though she said her perspective had not changed.

As far as B3’s perspective changing, since he did not know about A3’s Asperger Syndrome, it was more in general terms. He admitted being “apprehensive” about what kind of intern he would get. Once B3 met A3, this apprehension disappeared.

Independence was key to A4’s change in perspective since the support people helped him along and, he added, “I’ve kind of broken free and gone out on my own from there . . . . I’m more in control of my life and it made me more aware of my decisions.” Before, in school, he was always told what to do, “and for an Aspie (short for Asperger Syndrome), that can be a real problem.” How A4 feels about himself now is, “proud of all the stuff I’ve accomplished . . . the reputation in the work environment I’ve developed . . . . I’ve made in developing my social skills.”



B4a was aware of A4's change toward more independence also: "he's been doing so well that he doesn't need those supports so much . . . . My perspective with him in that case, I think he's successful." B4a also added, "Maybe (A4) will see it in himself that he can give back to those individuals younger than him who are struggling."

If there was any perspective change with B4b, it was seeing the need for more support for these individuals—on the job, "because they need to learn how to socially communicate . . . by taking the general skills that they've learned, say, in a college setting, and be able to transfer that into real work activity." She then turned her focus on employers,

We're going to have to get employers out of the community who are going to be willing to be involved with maybe a university system and finding those employers who may be willing to train . . . train the employers to help us teach them how to work in a more professional environment.

Although A5 did not specifically address a perspective change, throughout his interview he spoke at length about going from being mostly isolated from human contact to ending up with a job where he had to learn social skills and "improve on them to be a professional in this field." A5 is at the point now where he joins a psychologist's support group with youth with Asperger Syndrome to inspire them through meeting an adult on the spectrum who is "gainfully employed . . . and who's more or less making it." He wants to go into the schools to educate, inspire, and offer encouragement. He stated that, "I am very proud of the fact that I have survived for all this time!"

This question about perspective change really stumped several people, as pointed out earlier, and that included B5. At first she said no, but as she talked, B5 brought out that once A5 was diagnosed, she “became more curious about the disability . . . about when he was a child . . . a little more curious about him and, you know, how he was before I knew him.”

How A6 viewed the world differently since receiving support was that she is now able to “ask when you don’t understand,” an ability that most people with Asperger Syndrome do not possess. She continued, “Now even when I’m in social settings, if I don’t understand something, I’ll ask, and I have particular people that I can go to that I know will answer that question for me.” Further on A6 exclaimed, “To learn to ask was huge!”

A6 feels that she is more social now because of my job, and it’s because of my support center. I feel probably better about myself, because I can actually do the job, and I’m happy here. The work environment has been made so comfortable for me that it makes getting up and going to work not a problem. Before I used to hate the idea of getting up and going to work, but I did it because everybody has to work. Now I look forward to going in!

Who could ask for more for an HFA individual?

B6’s response to perspective change was predicated by her having a son that has Attention Deficit Disorder. This experience in itself changed her perspective, so there was not a big shift in perspective with A6. How B6 expressed it was, “my perspective

was probably already there, and it didn't change a lot." But B6 also added to this statement by saying that it did change with the specific way to "know . . . how to react to her."

Once again, when asking E6 about her change in perspective, she replied, "No." However, then she continued to talk about how she has changed by being, "a little more careful (about how she reacts) and I try to help her do more things. I don't assume she knows how to do something." E6 gives the example of teaching A6 how to mop the floor, a basic chore that one might assume someone her age (40's) might know.

This marks the end of the research questions, but in the interviews with the HFA participants, this researcher included a very revealing question toward the end of the interview, and that was, "What advice would you give to others like yourself who are either unemployed or are not happy with their jobs?"

*HFA's Advice to Others that are Unemployed  
or Not Happy with Their Jobs*

**A1:** "I would say that they would have to talk to people, their family or friends, or people at work and ask them if there are jobs opening up in something they might like to do, or they should look online and websites and stuff and try to go on from there."

**A3:** "For those unemployed, I would say if they aren't looking, they should be looking. If they're looking, of course, they should continue and persevere. It can be very difficult. Obviously, it's very difficult at this time with the economy and everything. That, if possible, they shouldn't settle for the first thing that they get. Look for something that is

more suitable to them, what they feel more comfortable with. If they are already employed but they're not happy, I would suggest try, if possible, to keep looking; find something they would be happy with. And, if that doesn't happen or in the meantime even, find something outside of work that gives your life meaning and a sense of purpose." (This is the participant who experienced having meaningful employment around the time he was going to college, and now has a steady job that is not anywhere near as meaningful, but has started the HFA support group which gives him meaning and purpose.)

**A4:** "I guess for the unemployed, this really isn't the job market for now, so don't let the fact that you get turned down for one or two offers, I'm sure there are probably a lot of people who get turned down all the time during these days . . . . you could try taking your spare time to make a list and keep it on hand of just assets, what you feel your best qualities are and keep them down on a list or keep it in a notebook, where you can always access it, or your best accomplishments . . . . Not just to help you with job interviews, but kind of, as a self-motivator." A4 also added something very helpful in many ways: "if you do take a course in interviewing, probably the best thing you could ever do, the most effective thing I ever did was, at the start of the class, record myself in an interview, or a kind of fake interview or like a skit almost, and then watch yourself, over and over again. If you come across as someone who is not the best communicator, the image of yourself doing that really burns it in your mind. The majority of the time, not all the time, this will motivate you to change that, to improve your communication skills, to improve your

dialogue, body posture, body language, everything. Not just during an interview, but it will trickle down into other areas of your life as well. So your general communication will improve too.

**A5:** “In the words of the late Joseph Campbell, ‘Follow your bliss!’ Find out what you like, get the training, get the schooling, and do whatever you can to find a job that’s suitable for you as an Aspie. Something where your skills will be appreciated, but you’re not expected to be the life of the party all the time!”

**A6:** “Anyplace they can do what they’re good at, and what they like to do, and then they can tell the people around them (about your disorder). You need to educate the people around you! If I hadn’t had the courage to take the book in, and if I didn’t have the managerial support; where they’ve gone to websites and done their own research because I pushed them with the Asperger’s book.”

## Summary of Findings

### *Meaningful Employment for HFA Participants and*

#### *Their Circles of Support: An Explanation*

The main crux of this grounded theory qualitative research project was to learn what factors came into play when high functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome (HFA) attained and maintained what they considered meaningful employment. It was the main interview question for the HFA participants from which all other questions grew, in addition to being the topic of a written document in which these same participants explained its significance to them.

The support they received through educators and business people was another noteworthy aspect of this inquiry. After the interviews began, the HFA participants volunteered what circles of support to include, not only business people and educators, but parents and a family member, in addition.

As one will see, the section that follows contains the core categories and themes that are related to each. Brief statements that summarize the role each play will be offered so the theory that evolves will be clearly understood.

#### *Core Categories and Related Themes*

There were three core categories that were discovered and examined through coding, constant comparison, and theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These categories were People Skills, Support, and Abilities/Interests. Below is a bulleted outline of how they are interwoven.

## Core Category: People Skills

### Themes:

- Altruism/Empathy – Altruism was shown by the HFA participants wanting to help others, eagerly sharing what worked with those less fortunate. Altruism was also demonstrated by the circles of support when they willingly helped the HFA individuals grow toward success.
- Empathy was unveiled by being able to relate to others similar to them.
- Relationships were revealed through the appreciation between the HFA participants and their circles of support that grew over their time together, even relationships from the past; feelings of fondness and positivity were still in place.
- Leadership was illustrated by the HFA participants wanting to share their knowledge and good experiences with others so that they could have a chance to experience the same type of growth. The formation of support groups for others with two HFA participants (A3, A5) especially represented this theme.
- Personal Growth was expressed by the HFA participants' desire to move forward in a positive direction through the learning of people skills, including social skills that did not come easily. It also included the readiness to let go of what was limiting their progress.
- Ethics was exhibited by the awareness of what was right and wrong, the desire to make good moral decisions, and the circles of support's

willingness to help the HFA participants see more of what was right in their interactions with others.

Core Category Summary: People Skills were ● developed by caring, interacting, and relating to others, ● formed by relationships with others that consisted of appreciation and positive feelings, ● grown toward being leaders who share knowledge and experience for the benefit of others, ● experienced personal growth by learning how to move in a social world, ● unfolded by letting go of barricades to this growth, and ● displayed by deciding to act in a way that was right and moral.

Core Category: Support

Themes:

- Coping Skills were learned through the HFA and circles of support participants coming together to find ways of creating techniques that helped or alleviated difficult situations.
- Problem Solving was frequently utilized on the road to developing coping skills by either the HFA individuals or through the joint efforts of the HFA and circles of support individuals.
- Practical Help/Skills – Practical Help was often offered by support people in an attempt toward HFA participants' success in activity and the HFA participants learning how to employ the skills.
- Collaboration was exhibited by the teaming of more than one support person in order to implement successful strategies with the HFA



individual's input. In one instance this was initiated by a HFA individual (A6).

- Flexibility was a process of letting go of rigidity in action to reach a more open mind toward helpful responses frequently encouraged by the circles of support.

Core Category Summary: Support was ● given through the teamwork of the HFA

individuals and their circles of support devising ways to deal with the intricate situations, ● shown by the ways these HFA individuals solved difficult dilemmas most often with the assistance of their circles of support, ● help given by support people in order that necessary skills that work together to ensure success in becoming a part of the workplace and everyday life were attained, ● produced by the working in conjunction with all involved individuals to create winning solutions in their work lives, and ● how the individuals' minds became more open in order that more coherence was experienced.

Core Category: Abilities/Interest

- Confidence/Pride was felt by the HFA participants when obstacles were overcome or they were proven capable due to the utilization of their talents and areas of interest.
- Work Ethic was the determination to have a good work history through principles often instilled by family values and personal beliefs.
- Knowledge/Understanding was learning or skills that came naturally to HFA individuals through their focus on interests leading to better

comprehension of a fuller picture. At times, these interests were shared by their circles of support.

- Independence was experienced through feeling confident enough with their abilities to work on their own with decreasing support.

Core Category summary: Abilities/Interest were not only demonstrated when the work made use of skills and knowledge that were ingrained, but when the work required an ability waiting to be tapped, were • the feelings that arose from work well done, • supported by the strong feelings of the basics of employment, • what came to the surface when natural skills were broadened, • feeling free to work on one's own.

### Theory Building

The particular theory that evolved from this grounded theory qualitative research study was based on the in-depth analysis of coding that emerged from the data that later formed three core categories and their related themes. The investigation of meaningful employment as it pertained to high functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome (HFA) and the types of assistance they gained from their circles of support were found essentially through the use of methods recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1998). The emerging core categories and related themes that were refined and discovered led to the evolution of the following theory:

Meaningful employment can be acquired by HFA individuals who either possess people skills or are willing to learn people skills. Meaningful employment is further enhanced through support the individuals obtain from involved business

people, educators, parents, and family members. Another critical factor is the development of the HFA individuals' abilities through the alignment of their interests.

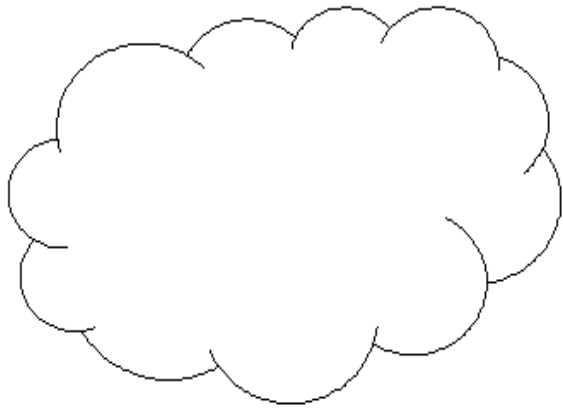
*Model of Meaningful Employment*

As Creswell (1998) extrapolated, in grounded theory the researcher will often present a visual model of the substantive theory. It was this investigator's belief that this model would further interpret the findings in a manner particular to this study.

Figure 4.9: Model of Meaningful Employment

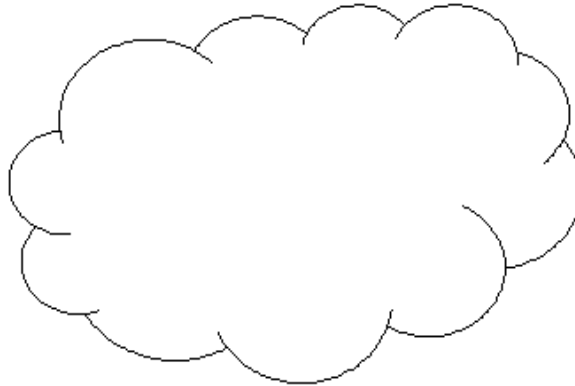
# *Meaningful Employment*

**People Skills**



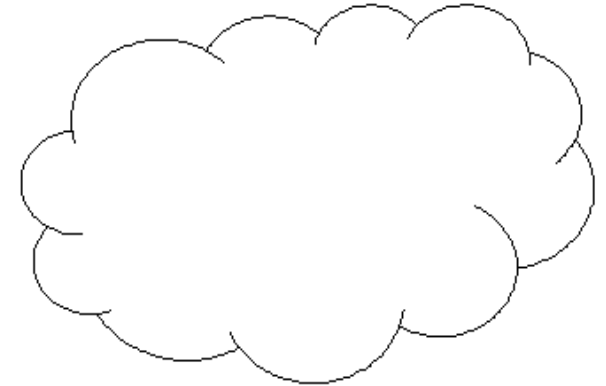
*Altruism/Empathy*  
*Relationships*  
*Leadership, Personal Growth,*  
*Ethics*

**Support**



*Coping, Problem Solving*  
*Practical Help/Skills*  
*Collaboration*  
*Flexibility*

**Ability/Interest**



*Confidence/Pride*  
*Work Ethic*  
*Knowledge/Understanding*  
*Independence*

The model of meaningful employment displays the three core categories that emerged in this investigation: People Skills, Support, and Abilities/Interests. The metaphorical use of clouds has two rationales. First, the clouds symbolize a cushioning effect of the categories that keep meaningful employment in place. Secondly, the imagery of the clouds came from A5's description of his most meaningful job. He was a ranger in the high country looking down and seeing the clouds and feeling as if he was in heaven. The related themes are what "ground" the core categories.

### Chapter Summary

The foremost substance of this chapter was the revelation of the findings which surfaced from, for the most part, the techniques of Strauss and Corbin (1998). The demographics taken from the questionnaires were summarized and exhibited in the form of graphic representations.

The findings were revealed by relating participants' statements following the script of the research questions. Relevant twists to the original proposal were explained as they unfolded. All participants were given a voice so a well rounded understanding which offered a blueprint for meaningful employment for these critical times could adequately be elucidated. Through the method of constant comparative analysis of what both the HFA and circles of support participants relayed in their interviews, three core categories were brought to light, along with four to five related themes for each. These were reported in the *Summary of Findings* section.

CHAPTER V  
SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

Introduction

During the time this researcher was involved in investigating meaningful employment for high functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome (HFA) and the people who supported them, the topic of employment reached critical levels of concern throughout our nation. Nevertheless, that does not de-emphasize the necessity of focusing on HFA adults finding and sustaining employment due largely to two factors. They are, first the incidence rates of children with autism spectrum disorders (CDC, 2007) are growing at epidemic proportions (Steuernagel, 2005), and, second that before we know it, they will be adults in search of employment. *Now* [emphasis added] is the time to discover what dynamics are at play when the HFA participants achieved and maintained meaningful employment, who their circles of support were at this fulfilling time in their lives, and what were the ways this support was offered? By finding out this vital information, it can then be eagerly shared with other HFA adults who have not been as successful in their employment history or are struggling to become one of the employed and are unsure of where to turn or who to turn to for help.

And what about the educators who are there to prepare them, the business people that are there to help them on their way, or the employers, supervisors, managers, and co-workers that are at the workplace, but unsure of how to deal with this population of adults that possess a different way of perceiving their environment and those within it. This is a quandary that needs more guidance than it is receiving.

### *Purpose*

HFA adults are very outspoken regarding their concerns about their quality of life and, more predominantly, the issues of employment that emphatically must be addressed. Here you have a group of work-oriented individuals who are bright (normal to above normal IQ's, for the most part), with in-depth knowledge and skills in their specific areas of interest. Can they attain becoming successfully employed by themselves? The answer is: Most of the time, no. It takes the care of people in their lives to encourage them, train them in the areas of communication and social skills, along with the more analytic skills of problem solving, broadening one's knowledge to encompass more than one's narrow focus, increasing their awareness to look out into the world around them, and "building bridges" (Sinclair, 1992, p. 299) toward more understanding of others' perspectives, different as they may be.

This was my quest, the purpose behind this qualitative research study: To take a close look at HFA individuals who had the experience of meaningful employment and go beyond that to inquire where their support to reach these heights came from and what was the essence of that support. There were surprises along the way, my perspective expanded, and my inner being grew to be excited about what could lie ahead.

### *Significance*

The research up to now was varied and, due to this, it presented an enigma. Several studies gave evidence that HFA individuals could experience success (Fullerton & Coyne, 1999; Grandin & Duffy, 2004; Hagner & Cooney, 2005), while others demonstrated the obstacles these individuals faced (Gerhardt, 2007; Hurlbutt &

Chalmers, 2002, 2004). Hurlbutt and Chalmers gave voice to the individuals, whereas Hagner and Cooney examined the perspectives of the employers of the HFA employees. This researcher felt the tug of examining the full picture via grounded theory research. Not only do we need to listen to the voices of the HFA individuals who have achieved meaningful employment, but we additionally need to learn the perspectives of those professionals who played supportive roles assisting the HFA individuals. This in-depth analysis would hopefully lead to a theory or blueprint for others facing roadblocks along the path.

### *Method*

Through this researcher's personal experience of assisting an individual with Asperger Syndrome to move from a menial, much less, demeaning job for a person with two college degrees to a position that would tap his potential, I became clearly aware of the whole picture. This awareness led to the understanding of the work and education required on the other side: Preparation prior to traveling down the employment road, from there, receiving the help to reach the point of employment and, beyond that, additional assistance there at the workplace.

In order to implement a research project that could accomplish these tasks, this investigator realized that a "deeper knowledge of a social phenomena" (Strauss, 1987, p. 6) played an important part, in addition to having "a description of how ideas can be generated from the practical and systematic engagement of the researcher at hand" (Atkinson, Coffey, & Delemont, 2003, p. 159). This was a clear indication that the type



of research conducive to achieving such goals was through that of a qualitative grounded theory research design.

What grounded theory methods would be best to follow? Strauss and Corbin (1998) wrote the book on it which detailed the coding procedures, the constant comparative process, and the use of theoretical sampling until theoretical saturation is reached. From there, this researcher explained the findings in terms of core categories, a term not utilized in Strauss and Corbin's research manual, but one generally employed by some researchers (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). Under each core category were related themes that expanded and enriched one's comprehension of the three categories (Creswell, 1998).

The most intriguing feature of grounded theory in this researcher's mind was the flexibility one must maintain to "follow the data." One never knew what was around the corner in the process of interviewing, and, as a result of that, one had to be ready to make the necessary adjustments. This aspect of grounded theory kept the mind active and limited the researcher from getting mired in any ruts.

### *Limitations*

Limitations refer to the section of the dissertation where weaknesses inherent to the study are aired (Creswell, 2003), and circumstances that may confine the particular study beyond the investigator's control are brought to light (Best & Kahn, 1998). As those familiar with qualitative research know, the investigator must understand the data from a subjective viewpoint, at the same time as guarding against personal bias. Another

limitation that has to do with qualitative research is the small number of participants required.

## DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

### Discussion

#### *Following the Data*

When speaking of utilization of grounded theory as the method followed in this investigation, it was highlighted that one significant facet to this type of research is “following the data.” Interestingly enough, this practice began occurring in the midst of the first interview with participant A1, who was my first HFA participant. (For clarification’s sake, the participants’ coded names were devised in this manner: A’s stood for HFA participants, B’s were the business people, E’s were the educators, P’s were the parents, and F stood for the one family member in the circles of support. The numbers coincide with the order of HFA participants that I interviewed; the circles of support received the same number as the HFA participant who they helped.) Two changes in the study took place at that initial interview. First, parents became a part of the circles of support, and, secondly, I was interviewing a participant who had just been diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome a few months before. So, following that first interview, I knew I was involved in an ever-changing experience.

And, to my surprise, each one of the HFA participants with the exception of A2 had all received their diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome within a period of between a few months to a few years. As far as receiving any transition plans prior to leaving high school, that was not to be the case. A2 was diagnosed at an early age with high

functioning autism. With the exceptional support and training that his mother supplied for attainment of steady employment, along with his positive and lighthearted personality, by his high school years, A2 was the recipient of no special services (at his own choosing), therefore, no vocational training for employment after high school. The other circle of support for A2 was his drama coach who did spark or rekindle his interest in the theater and acting and also provided training in that area. However, no transition plans were made through the school for any follow-up after high school. The only other educator that was a circle of support was E6 who first became A6's friend and, through this venue, became her educator as a result of their friendship. Teaching was E6's profession, and A6 was in need of education both in her personal life and at her workplace.

Much information was gleaned about the roles the various business people provided at different times of the HFA participants' lives. This was another variation that came about while following the data. The HFA participants' most meaningful job was not always their current job. Those that had that experience in the past, had gained and matured from the occurrence of this in their lives and were presently moving forward and making adaptations so their lives were viewed from a more positive standpoint.

Parents and the family member offered valuable information in a detailed manner regarding their ways of support. A great deal of that could fill a step-by-step manual of how to support your young adults' employment efforts.

This researcher felt it was interesting to see where a grounded theory study can lead you in your collection and analysis of data. Suddenly, your plans outlined in your

original proposal can turn out quite differently. Such is the mystique of this type of research.

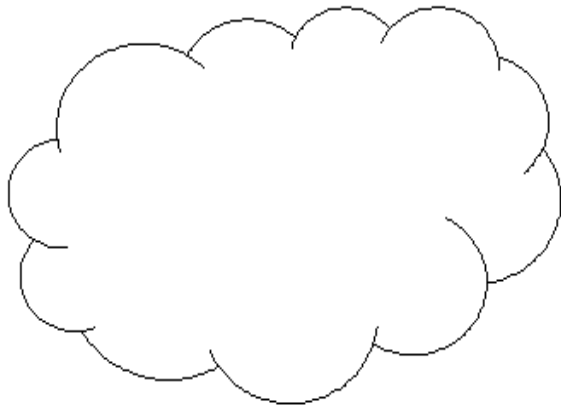
### *The Findings*

From careful collection of data, along with analyzing as the study proceeded, seeking further probing when needed, and following the methods of Strauss and Corbin (1998), this researcher formed and revealed the findings. They were represented by the emergence of three core categories: People Skills, Support, and Abilities/Interest, in addition to four to five themes associated with each category. Figure 4.9 displays a model of these findings.

Figure 4.9: Model of Meaningful Employment

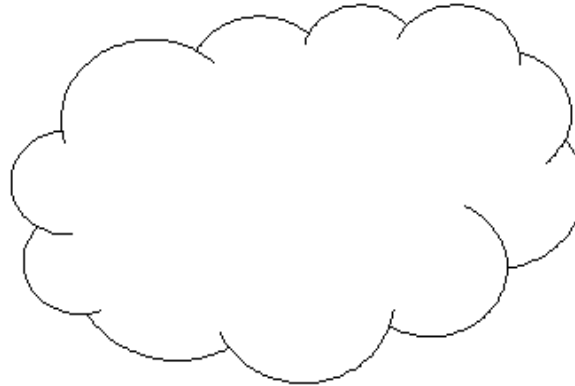
# *Meaningful Employment*

**People Skills**



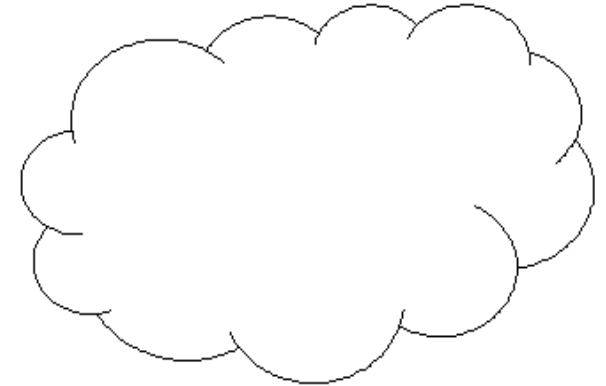
*Altruism/Empathy*  
*Relationships*  
*Leadership, Personal Growth,*  
*Ethics*

**Support**



*Coping, Problem Solving*  
*Practical Help/Skills*  
*Collaboration*  
*Flexibility*

**Ability/Interest**



*Confidence/Pride*  
*Work Ethic*  
*Knowledge/Understanding*  
*Independence*

### *People Skills*

As one can see, these three categories keep meaningful employment in place. The predominant core category is the first shown, people skills which were vital to the HFA participants to either have or eventually possess. People skills are the HFA participants saying, “Yes, there are people out there to know, care about, help lead, grow with, and treat in the way I would like to be treated.”

How these skills were portrayed is explained by the five related themes which are displayed beneath the cloud that cushions the occurrence of meaningful employment. They include: (a) Altruism or caring for others through helping or volunteering, along with empathy or relating to others due to awareness of similarities; (b) Relationships or the feelings and bonds that grew between HFA participants and their circles of support; (c) Leadership or taking charge with the intention of sharing knowledge with others; (d) Personal Growth or the desire to experience more by developing in a positive direction; (e) Ethics or awareness of right and wrong and the desire to make moral decisions. These all worked together to allow the HFA participants’ people skills to play a critical role in acquiring and maintaining meaningful employment.

### *Support*

Overall, support was a crucial part of the incidence of meaningful employment, especially during the first few laps of the HFA participants’ journeys toward the achievement of their goals. Support was a hand reaching toward the HFA participants that said, “Come with me and we will learn how to survive out there, figure out the way, learn the basics, work together for a common purpose, and take life as it comes.”

The related themes for support allow us to understand more fully how support was exhibited and how it cushioned the maintenance of meaningful employment. They include: (a) Coping skills or the two groups of participants finding ways to make it through what was normally difficult; (b) Problem Solving or conferring with one's support people to better understand possible solutions; (c) Practical Help/Skills or learning the basics of life on the job or in the world that transfer into more effective abilities to make one's way; (d) Collaboration or the ability to work together as a team to create a positive environment; and (e) Flexibility or the growing desire through one's support team or person to let go of some of the limitations the HFA participants impose on themselves.

#### *Abilities/Interests*

Lastly, and a critical facet for the HFA individuals to excel at their jobs that became so meaningful, are abilities aligned with interests. In the review of literature this factor was emphasized over and over (Attwood, 1998; Frith, 2004; Grandin & Duffy, 2004). What the HFA participants may say about this is, "Pay attention to what I can do and integrate it with my job in some way. It will bring us (circles of support included) pride in our accomplishments so that what we can do, will expand; it will rekindle that strong desire to work so that our knowledge increases, and, eventually, we can carry out our jobs with less assistance."

These statements typify the four related themes under this core category of abilities/interests. When HFA individuals are allowed to work where their abilities are utilized with some interest of theirs involved, and they have a support person that

recognizes this and appreciates it, it brings the four related themes to the surface. They include: (a) Confidence/Pride or the feelings that come to fruition through being able to implement a job well done; (b) Work Ethic or the knowledge that it is good to be in the workplace, “putting your best face forward” (A2); (c) Knowledge/Understanding or the stimulation one acquires from the use of one’s abilities/interests, so that knowledge and understanding increase, and (d) Independence or the point these individuals can reach through quality support and the chance to utilize the abilities and talents bestowed upon them.

All of the core categories with their related themes are the essence of what makes the combination of HFA participants and their circles of support sustain the dreams of meaningful employment. And, before closing this section, this researcher would like to share two quotes from the HFA participants to bring more understanding of what meaningful employment can signify to them.

The quote that more fully explains the metaphor of the inspiration to use the clouds and the earth in the model, Figure 4.8, was given by A5 describing his most meaningful job,

below me everything was encased in clouds a couple of thousand feet farther down. So it was like being in heaven looking down on earth! It was the only time I was truly happy!

A4 gave a quote regarding what makes a job meaningful that says so much, It’s a chance for me to use some of my assets and talents. It’s a chance to do something that I like doing. To really harness my potential and to use it to make a



difference. That I find it challenging some of the time and also intriguing that the work actually gets rather addictive, like you don't want to stop, and I like that.

I would like to end this section with another quote from A6 which characterizes her world since she has received support at a job she finds meaningful. A6 feels that she is,

more social now because of my job, and it's because of my support center. I feel probably better about myself, because I can actually do the job, and I'm happy here. The work environment has been made so comfortable for me that it makes getting up and going to work not a problem. Before I used to hate the idea of getting up and going to work, but I did it because everybody has to work. Now I look forward to going in!

### *Theory Building*

The theory emerges from the constant comparative process, paired with the coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) which was then analyzed and integrated into core categories and their related themes as the basis of theory building. More importantly, theory building signifies the essence of grounded theory research. The model of meaningful employment (Figure 4.8) acts as a display of the pertinent theory. This grounded theory research study examined the factors involved with high functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome (HFA) attaining and maintaining meaningful employment in conjunction with the types of support gained from the circles of support which led to the evolution of the following theory:

Meaningful employment can be acquired by HFA individuals who either possess people skills or are willing to learn people skills. Meaningful employment is further enhanced through support the individuals obtain from involved business people, educators, parents, and family members. Another critical factor is the development of the HFA individuals' abilities through the alignment of their interests.

## Recommendations

### *Further Research*

Some of the consistencies and inconsistencies, especially demonstrated in the demographics, give direction to further research that would be helpful to expand the findings of this study or add more variety of knowledge for future research. One consistency that totally lacked diversity were the demographics about race; all participants were Caucasian—both HFA and circles of support. This makes one question what findings would be revealed if the participant pool included a more diverse sample. This may cause an investigator to take additional time finding a more diverse sample, but this endeavor would be valuable to investigate.

Another area found in the demographics that begs for further research pertains to the make-up of the HFA sample: five participants with Asperger Syndrome and one participant with high functioning autism. Even though the research indicated that the difference between the two is too close to differentiate (Ozonoff, Dawson, and McPartland, 2002), one of the circles of support (A4a) did remark that her strategies for her interviewing class had to vary in order to teach the material in a manner suited to

either type of individual. So she was aware of the difference between them. An intriguing study could incorporate participants from each group, possibly in a classroom setting, and explore the possible outcomes and any variations.

The HFA participants with Asperger Syndrome were all diagnosed after high school, a few in their 40's and 50's. Yet another interesting bent would be to structure research that purposely sampled individuals who received their diagnosis prior to their high school years in order to understand what type of transition plans would be in place for them.

Lastly, on a more personal note, I would like to see a survey of programs that serve HFA students before high school and determine whether they attempt to integrate these students' interests into their curriculum and, if so, what the results are. This was a practice that I personally followed in the development of curriculum for educating high functioning students with autism and Asperger Syndrome during my teaching career. Information of how that was accomplished is contained in the book I authored, "Working Together for a Brighter Future: Unique Approaches for Educating High Functioning with Autism" (Hays, 1997). Needless to say, I do feel it is beneficial preparation for later employment efforts.

### *Implications*

As far as the employment field goes, this study offers food for thought in the practical and beneficial use of support people to team with HFA individuals that have beginning people skills, have a solid work ethic, are open to personal growth, and have some interests and talents that may apply to the work setting, which are waiting to be

tapped. A mentor/support person should be one eager to help, ready to establish a working relationship, including help with social nuances that are beyond the HFA individual's understanding, and willing to be educated about high functioning autism and Asperger Syndrome. There are autism consultants that could be a beginning part of the team and possibly be on call on a temporary basis until problems are solved, coping mechanisms are put in place, or the environment is organized for maximum functioning. In return, employers will have employees who are dependable, have a good work ethic, will follow the rules of the organization, and are eager to grow toward more independence in the work situation.

Another aspect that came out of the findings of this study was how involved and helpful parents or family members can be with their children who want to find a job and would love to find one with meaning and purpose. I think it would benefit the school system and other service agencies past the high school or college years to utilize parents and family members to give input about training and materials that would benefit and add to their skills so the work they do with their HFA individuals also benefit. The parents that excel at this would be good to add to a support or training team.

What about the educators of the higher functioning students with autism who are not on a vocational track, but are not necessarily ready to deal with working toward or being a part of a work environment? This area still needs to be addressed as part of the academic track. In addition, I'm hoping I am seeing a trend toward earlier diagnosis for this end of the spectrum or, at the very least, more awareness of their characteristics so that educators can work together with the parents to receive that diagnosis for their

teenagers and young adults. Then, they can move forward with a clearer and fuller picture!

One of my most exciting experiences during the time I was collecting data was the time spent in one Florida city that really seemed to have a continuum of services in place for HFA individuals. I had the pleasure of meeting and interviewing two HFA participants, one who was still somewhat involved with a part of that continuum and the other, who had added his own offering to aid in the services provided, a support group for HFA individuals that met monthly and met also in a more social type of setting on a regular basis. I spoke at this meeting about my research and remember one of the members came up to me afterwards to say rather wistfully that he wished he was meaningfully employed. He really tugged at my heartstrings!

Another fortunate happenstance was meeting and interviewing two of the circles of support who were actively involved in that continuum of services, A4a and A4b. As explained earlier, A4a is an autism consultant with one of the autism centers there who specifically helps the adolescents and adults with autism, and she taught the interviewing class referred to a few times in this dissertation. She actually works in conjunction with another of the circles of support, A4b, the Vocational Rehabilitation counselor who has, on her own, studied the HFA population to the extent that she is somewhat of an expert in this particular field. She was the one to add to this continuum by arranging a weekly communications group that these types of individuals are welcome to attend to discuss any communication problems they may run into in their lives or at their workplaces. When A4b and I were discussing what was in place, we were brainstorming some ideas

of how the services could be expanded. These ideas included training of employers so they could be involved with training other employers, supervisors, etc. There were other ideas discussed, in addition.

The point being made here is this is actually what is ideal for the HFA individuals. They are eager to receive the help and support they can, so their performance at work continues to improve and sets an example for others like them. And they want to give back, to share their knowledge and skills with others like themselves only they're not as fortunate to have acquired employment that allows them to grow. And I was so impressed with their response to me. They truly wanted to share whatever they could in regard to my project. There was a feeling of excitement in the air of possibilities that lie ahead of us! There need to be more cities that have this passion and commitment to collaborate in this way.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter painted the whole picture of a qualitative grounded theory design's examination of meaningful employment as it pertained to the HFA individuals who savored this experience as the culmination of education and training provided by their circles of support. The purpose, significance, method, and limitations were abridged so that what this researcher proposed was clear, and the stage was set for a report and discussion of the findings.

An often-used term in the land of grounded theory research, "following the data," was the first topic to detail at this point due to this researcher's belief in its significance. This represented one of the most intriguing aspects of this particular type of qualitative

research. One could be traveling along, implementing the proposed study through data collection and analysis, and, “Whoa!” something would fly in through the window to cause a change in travel plans.

The findings were then displayed by the theoretical model that was a depiction of what was discovered. The three core categories that carried the most meaning relating to this study were: People Skills, Support, and Abilities/Interests. Along with that, the related themes to each category were also part of the display, and these themes naturally seemed to specifically explain what each category meant in terms of this unique study. Some of the most relevant and inspiring quotes given by HFA participants were subsequently highlighted. Following these insightful passages, came the revelation of the theory that evolved as a result of this journey into the lives of this unique and enigmatic population, and the people who surrounded them with an aura of hope, help, and perseverance.

What came from the findings very naturally led to the recommendations for further research and the implications that this study and its findings hold for others interested in adding more options to a critical situation in need of improvement. In the words of the great Albert Schweitzer, “Success is not the key to happiness; happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful” (Khurana, 2009).

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### **Sample Script of Contact with Agency about Referral of HFA Participants:**

“ Hello. My name is Marilyn Hays and I am a doctoral student in the school of education at Barry University. My dissertation topic is meaningful employment for high functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome. Therefore, I am interested in recruiting individuals that meet the following criteria: (a) A diagnosis of autism on the higher end of the spectrum or a diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome, as reported by the HFA participant; (b) Age to be past secondary schooling; and, for this study, will be defined as 19 to 55 years of age; (c) Currently working at a place of employment that they consider “a good job” for a minimum of six months. If you think that one or more of your clients, members, or former students in the school system (whichever applies) may be a potential participant(s) for this study, could we make an appointment so that I may answer any questions you may have. When we meet, I will provide you with a flyer that you could post in a common area so that all may see and be made aware of the parameters of my study.”

## *Doctoral Research Study*

**Ms. Marilyn` Hays, Ed. S., and doctoral candidate from Barry University, wishes to recruit participants for her study who meet the following criteria:**

1. A diagnosis of autism with indications of being on the higher end of the spectrum or a diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome, as reported by participant.
2. Age to be past secondary schooling; and for this study will be defined as 19 years to 55 years.
3. Currently working at a place of employment that they consider "a good job" for at least six months, with a confirmed positive work performance evaluation.

**The participants will be asked to describe aspects of their meaningful employment and the supports they may have received.**

***If you are interested, please contact Ms. Marilyn Hays, home phone: (407)-889-8721—may call collect—or cell phone: (407) 463-4829***

APPENDIX A

**Point-of-Contact Person Agreement Letter**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_, contact person for \_\_\_\_\_,  
(agency or support group),

Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me and offering your assistance by placing a flyer about the research project, “A Blueprint to Meaningful Employment: Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Their Circles of Support” in a common area. The information gained from this research should be useful in the field of educational leadership and business. The aims of the research are to discover what factors are involved so that these adults with autism have attained and maintained meaningful employment and how the educators and business people supported them. The research will benefit the high functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome (HFA) along with educators and business people in the position to support them. By adding information to the literature available about this critical situation, it is hopeful that more adults like these HFA adults will be able to reach these heights. In addition, it should offer much needed information as to beneficial hiring and support practices for education and business.

Your role of point-of-contact/intermediary person is important to this research study. Would you verify this role by signing below, dating it, and return this to me in the stamped, self-addressed envelope that I have provided? It will be kept in a file that will be kept in a locked file box.

If you have any further questions, the contact information of the researcher and supervisor are listed below. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Researcher: Marilyn F. Hays (H) and fax 407-889-8721 (C) 407-463-4829  
[mmh4katz@embarqmail.com](mailto:mmh4katz@embarqmail.com) [You may call 407-889-8721 collect]

Supervisor: Dr. Joseph S. Maddox (W) 321-235-8422 (C) 727-430-7325  
[jmaddox@mail.barry.edu](mailto:jmaddox@mail.barry.edu)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of point-of-contact person

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX A

### Barry University Notice of Research Study for Circle of Support Participants

Dear Prospective Circle of Support member:

Your participation in a research project would be greatly appreciated. The title of the study is “Blueprint to Meaningful Employment: Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Their Circles of Support.” The research is being conducted by Marilyn F. Hays, Ed. S., a doctoral student in the School of Education at Barry University in Florida. She is seeking information that will be especially useful in the field of educational leadership and business. The aims of the research are to discover what factors are involved so that these adults with autism have attained and maintained meaningful employment and how the educators and business people (circle of support participants) supported them. The research will benefit the high functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome (HFA) along with educators and business people in the position to support them. By adding information to the literature available about this critical situation, it is hopeful that more adults like these HFA adults will be able to reach these heights. In addition, it should offer much needed information as to beneficial practices to the worlds of education and business. The anticipated number of participants is 21, 7-10 HFA participants and 11-14 professional circles of support (educators and business people).

In accordance with this aim, if you volunteer to participate in this research, you will be asked to do the following:

Participate in an hour-long interview at your convenience which will be done confidentially, individually, and separately from any other participant; preferably in a place you feel comfortable to discuss your experiences either as an employee or professional in the educational or business field. Also, you will be asked to complete a 1-2 minute demographic questionnaire. Although the interview will be audio taped, strict procedures will be followed to ensure the confidentiality of your identity and the place you work or your school. Coded names will be assigned by the researcher prior to the interview. The tapes will be destroyed following transcription.

Your consent to participate in the research is entirely voluntary. Should you decline at any time, even during the interview, or wish to drop out of the study, your decision will be honored without question and there will be no adverse effects due to this occurring. There are no known risks to you as a participant. Although there are no direct benefits to you, your participation may help our understanding of how HFA individuals can achieve success in their job efforts and accomplishments. This research should also benefit those professionals in the fields of education and business who could provide more positive support.

As a research participant, information you provide will be kept confidential, that is, no names or other identifiers will be collected on any instruments used. Any published results of the research will only refer to group averages, alphabetical, or numerical listings only (the coded names) and no, repeat no, real names or schools or businesses will be used or mentioned in the study. Data will be kept in a locked file in the researcher's office and later destroyed.



Please feel free to ask any questions you may have. Phone numbers of the researcher and supervisor are listed below. If you wish to take part in this study of meaningful employment for HFA adults, please call or email any of the following:

Researcher: Marilyn F. Hays (H) and fax 407-889-8721 (C) 407-463-4829  
[mmh4katz@embarqmail.com](mailto:mmh4katz@embarqmail.com) [You may call 407-889-8721 collect]

Supervisor: Dr. Joseph S. Maddox (W) 321-235-8422 (C) 727-430-7325  
[jmaddox@mail.barry.edu](mailto:jmaddox@mail.barry.edu)

Institutional Review Board point of contact: Barbara Cook, at (305) 899-3020.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Marilyn F. Hays, B. S., M. S., Ed. S.

## APPENDIX A

### **Criteria for selection for being a participant with high functioning autism or Asperger Syndrome, both referred to as HFA:**

1. A diagnosis of autism on the higher end of the spectrum or a diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome, as reported by the HFA participant
2. Age to be past secondary schooling; and, for this study, will be defined as 19 to 55 years of age.
3. Currently working at a place of employment that they consider “a good job” for a minimum of six months.

## APPENDIX A

### **Criteria for selection of the educators or the business people:**

1. Being identified as helpful to the individual with autism at the place of employment or prior to being hired for the job the HFA participants consider meaningful.
2. Verifying their support in the particular case.
3. Agreeing to be a participant, after being given a clear explanation of what the project will involve.

APPENDIX A  
**Permission Form for Referral of Support Person(s)**

This is to indicate that \_\_\_\_\_ (name of HFA participant) gives the researcher, Marilyn F. Hays, permission to contact \_\_\_\_\_ (support person referred) in order to request this support person to be a participant in the research study, “Blueprint for Meaningful Employment: Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Their Circles of Support.” The criteria for the support person or, as named in this study, Circle of Support, will be: (a) being identified as helpful to the individual with autism at the place of employment or prior to being hired for the job the HFA participants consider to be meaningful; (b) verifying their support in the particular case; and (c) agreeing to be a participant, after being given a clear explanation of what the project will involve.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature of HFA participant*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

## APPENDIX B

### **Barry University Informed Consent Form For HFA Participants**

Your participation in a research project is hereby requested. The title of the study is “Blueprint to Meaningful Employment: Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Their Circles of Support Share What Works.” The research is being conducted by Marilyn F. Hays, Ed. S., a doctoral student in the School of Education at Barry University, who is seeking information that will be useful in the educational leadership and business. The aim of the research is to discover what factors are involved so that these adults with autism have attained and maintained meaningful employment and how the educators and business people supported them. In accordance with this aim, the following procedures will be used: a short questionnaire followed by an interview session. I anticipate the number of participants to be 21, 7-10 HFA participants and 11-14 professional circles of support (educators and business people).

Those interested HFA participants will have an informal meeting prior to data collection to establish rapport between the researcher and participant, to choose a convenient and comfortable location for the interview, and to be provided a notebook to write down their thoughts about what makes their job meaningful to turn in at the interview. If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to do the following: sign this consent form, choose a coded name, answer a short questionnaire, about 1-2 minutes, and participate in an audio taped interview, lasting approximately one hour. Interviews for each of the participants (business individuals, educators, and HFA individuals) will be conducted confidentially and individually, thereby separate from each other.

Your consent to be a research participant is strictly voluntary and should you decline to participate or should you choose to drop out at any time during the study, there will be no adverse effects due to this occurring. If you would feel more comfortable with a parent or parents to give consent and possibly attend the interview that will be an option. You have the right to refuse to answer any or all questions or to provide a written response to interview questions. You may also request that the tape be paused and may resume taping at your discretion. There are no known risks to the participants. Although there are no direct benefits to you, your participation may help our understanding of how HFA individuals can achieve success in their job efforts and accomplishments.

As a research participant, information you provide will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Any published results of the research will refer to group averages, coded names, alphabetical, or numerical listings only and no, repeat no, names or individual schools or places of work will be used or mentioned in the study. Data will be kept in a locked file in the researcher's office. The tapes will be held in a secure case

and be available only to me. If you desire, transcriptions will be sent to you for review and modification. Upon completion of the transcription, the audio tapes will be destroyed. Your signed consent form will be kept separate from the data. This consent form and the data will be kept under separate lock for five years and then destroyed.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or your participation in the study, you may contact me, Marilyn Hays at (407) 889-8721 or C: (407) 463-4829 (mmh4katz@embarqmail.com), my Doctoral Committee Chairman, Dr. Joe Maddox at (321) 235-8422, or the Barry University Institutional Review Board point of contact, Barbara Cook, at (305) 899-3020. If you are satisfied with the information provided and are willing to participate in this research, please signify your consent by signing this consent form.

**Voluntary Consent**

I acknowledge that I have been informed of the nature and purposes of this research by Marilyn F. Hays and that I have read and understand the information presented above, and that I have received a copy of this form for my records. I give my voluntary consent to participate in this research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature of Participant*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Researcher*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Witness*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

## APPENDIX B

### **Barry University Informed Consent Form For Circle of Support Participants**

Your participation in a research project is hereby requested. The title of the study is “Blueprint to Meaningful Employment: Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Their Circles of Support.” The research is being conducted by Marilyn F. Hays, Ed. S., a doctoral student in the School of Education at Barry University, who is seeking information that will be useful in the educational leadership and business fields. The aims of the research are to discover what factors are involved so that these adults with autism have attained and maintained meaningful employment and how the educators and business people supported them. In accordance with these aims, the following procedures will be used: a short questionnaire followed by an interview session. I anticipate the number of participants to be 21, 7-10 HFA participants and 11-14 professional circles of support (educators, business people, parents, and family members).

As an educator, business person, parent, or family member who was identified by a HFA participant as being supportive in his or her efforts to attain and/or maintain the meaningful employment at this present time, you were contacted by the researcher who requested your participation. If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to do the following: sign this consent form, choose a coded name, answer a short questionnaire, about 1-2 minutes, and participate in an audio taped interview, lasting approximately one hour. Interviews for each of the participants (business individuals, educators, parents, family members, and HFA individuals) will be conducted confidentially and individually, thereby separate from each other.

Your consent to be a research participant is strictly voluntary and should you decline to participate or should you choose to drop out at any time during the study, there will be no adverse effects due to this occurring. You have the right to refuse to answer any or all questions and to pause and resume taping at your discretion. There are no known risks to the participants. Although there are no direct benefits to you, your participation may help our understanding of how educators, business people, parents, and can support HFA individuals so that these individuals can achieve success in their job efforts and accomplishments. Your contribution can offer professionals in the education or business field valuable information on useful support strategies.

As a research participant, information you provide will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Any published results of the research will refer to group averages, coded names, alphabetical, or numerical listings only and no, repeat no, names or individual schools or places of work will be used or mentioned in the study. Data will be kept in a locked file in the researcher's office. The tapes will be held in a secure case and be available only to me. If you desire, transcriptions will be sent to you for review.

Upon completion of the transcription, the audio tapes will be destroyed. Your signed consent form will be kept separate from the data. This consent form and the data will be kept under separate lock for five years and then destroyed.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or your participation in the study, you may contact me, Marilyn Hays at (407) 889-8721 or C: (407) 463-4829 (mmh4katz@embarqmail.com), my Doctoral Committee Chairman, Dr. Joe Maddox at (321) 235-8422, or the Barry University Institutional Review Board point of contact, Barbara Cook, at (305) 899-3020. If you are satisfied with the information provided and are willing to participate in this research, please signify your consent by signing this consent form.

**Voluntary Consent**

I acknowledge that I have been informed of the nature and purposes of this research by Marilyn F. Hays and that I have read and understand the information presented above, and that I have received a copy of this form for my records. I give my voluntary consent to participate in this research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature of Participant*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Researcher*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*



APPENDIX B

**Parent (s) Consent Document**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ [Name(s) of parent(s)], give my consent for \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of participant) to participate in the research study, “Blueprint for Meaningful Employment: Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Their Circles of Support” that will be implemented by researcher, Marilyn F. Hays, in my presence or not in my presence (circle one) at this specified place \_\_\_\_\_ . The aims of the research are to discover what factors are involved so that these adults with autism have attained and maintained meaningful employment and how the educators and business people supported them. The research will benefit the high functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome (HFA) along with educators and business people in the position to support them. By adding information to the literature available about this critical situation, it is hopeful that more adults like these will be able to reach these heights. In addition, it should offer much needed information as to beneficial practices to the worlds of education and business.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature of Parent(s)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Researcher*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

APPENDIX C

**Demographic Questionnaire Form**  
For HFA Participants

Please fill out this demographic survey so that I may obtain some general information about you. Your responses are confidential.

Please write in (where appropriate) or circle the number of your response.

1. Your age:
  1. 19-29
  2. 30-39
  3. 40-49
  4. 50-55
  
2. Your gender:
  1. Male
  2. Female
  
3. Your race:
  1. White/Caucasian
  2. African American
  3. Hispanic
  4. Asian
  
4. How did you get your present job?
  1. Through high school
  2. Vocational training program
  3. Vocational Rehabilitation counselor
  4. Family member or friend
  5. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. What is your educational level?
  1. GED
  2. High School diploma
  3. Some college
  4. Vocational technological college
  5. College degree
  6. Graduate degree (Master's Degree, Ph.D., J.D., M.D., etc.)
  7. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. What is your special interest area?
  1. Major interest area \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Other interest area(s) \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_

7. How many jobs have you held prior to this one?
  1. None
  2. One
  3. Two to four
  4. Four or more
  
8. How many years have you been working (include all employment)?
  1. One year or less
  2. More than one to three years
  3. Three to six years
  4. Six to ten years
  5. Ten years or more

APPENDIX C

**Demographic Questionnaire Form**  
For Educators

Please fill out this demographic survey so that I may obtain some general information about you. Your responses are confidential.

Please write in (where appropriate) or circle the number of your response.

1. Your age:
  1. 20-29
  2. 30-39
  3. 40-49
  4. 50-59
  5. 60-69
  
2. Your gender:
  1. Male
  2. Female
  
3. Your race:
  1. White/Caucasian
  2. African American
  3. Hispanic
  4. Asian
  
4. Your job:
  1. Exceptional Education Teacher
  2. Regular Education Teacher
  3. Guidance Counselor
  4. Transition Specialist
  5. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. How long have you known this high functioning individual with autism or Asperger Syndrome?
  1. One to three years
  2. Three to six years
  3. Six to ten years
  4. Ten years or more (please write how many) \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C

**Demographic Questionnaire Form**  
For Business People

Please fill out this demographic survey so that I may obtain some general information about you. Your responses are confidential.

Please write in (where appropriate) or circle the number of your response.

1. Your age:
  1. 20-29
  2. 30-39
  3. 40-49
  4. 50-59
  5. 60-69
  
2. Your gender:
  1. Male
  2. Female
  
3. Your race:
  1. White/Caucasian
  2. African American
  3. Hispanic
  4. Asian
  
4. Your job:
  1. Employer
  2. Supervisor
  3. Manager
  4. Co-worker
  5. Job Coach
  6. Employment or Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (circle which one)
  7. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. How long have you known this high functioning individual with autism or Asperger Syndrome?
  1. One to three years
  2. Three to six years
  3. Six to ten years
  4. Ten years or more (please write how many) \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C

**Demographic Questionnaire Form**  
For Parents

Please fill out this demographic survey so that I may obtain some general information about you. Your responses are confidential.

Please write in (where appropriate) or circle the number of your response.

1. Your age:
  1. 30-39
  2. 40-49
  3. 50-59
  4. 60-69
  5. 70-79
  
2. Your gender:
  1. Male
  2. Female
  
3. Your race
  1. White/Caucasian
  2. African American
  3. Hispanic
  4. Asian
  
4. Your job:
  1. Stay-at-home Mom or Dad
  2. Active advocate for son/daughter
  3. Employed part-time
  4. Employed Full-time
  5. If employed, name job: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. How long have you known that that your son/daughter was a high functioning individual with autism or Asperger Syndrome?
  1. One to three years
  2. Three to six years
  3. Six to ten years
  4. Ten years or more (please write how many) \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. At what age was your son/daughter considered to be on the autism spectrum?
  1. 0-3 years old
  2. 3-5 years old
  3. 6-10 years old
  4. 11-20 years old
  5. 20-29 years old

6. 30-39 years old
7. 40-49 years old
8. 50-55 years old

APPENDIX C

**Demographic Questionnaire Form**  
For Family Member

Please fill out this demographic survey so that I may obtain some general information about you. Your responses are confidential.

Please write in (where appropriate) or circle the number of your response.

1. Your age:
  1. 20-29
  2. 30-39
  3. 40-49
  4. 50-59
  5. 60-69
  
2. Your gender:
  1. Male
  2. Female
  
3. Your race:
  1. White/Caucasian
  2. African American
  3. Hispanic
  4. Asian
  
4. Your job:
  1. Self employed
  2. Active Advocate
  3. Employed part-time
  4. Employed full-time
  5. If employed, name job: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. How long have you known that that your family member/friend was a high functioning individual with autism or Asperger Syndrome?
  1. One to three years
  2. Three to six years
  3. Six to ten years
  4. Ten years or more (please write how many) \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. At what age was your family member/friend considered to be on the autism spectrum?
  1. 0-3 years old
  2. 3-5 years old
  3. 6-10 years old
  4. 11-20 years old



5. 20-29 years old
6. 30-39 years old
7. 40-49 years old
8. 50-55 years old

## APPENDIX D

### **Interview Questions**

For the HFA participants

Guiding the research as it pertains to the participants with autism will be the question, “What factors are involved when high functioning adults with autism and Asperger Syndrome achieve and maintain meaningful employment?”

#### Questions

1. Tell me what your job is and describe what your job duties are.
2. What about this job makes it meaningful for you or makes you happy?
3. Was there someone during your time at school to prepare you for gaining employment at your present job?
4. If there was someone or some people at school prior to graduation that really helped you in this area, please tell me about them and how they helped you

5. Was there someone during your time after school to prepare you for gaining and/or maintaining employment at your present job?
  
6. If there was someone or some people after your high school years that really helped you in this area, please tell me about them and how they helped you.
  
7. Tell me about the relationship you have or had with this person(s) who supported you so much.
  
8. Did you experience some obstacles during your present job? Please explain.
  
9. Do you have a different way of looking at your life or the world since you have had this supportive relationship? Please explain.
  
10. How do you feel about yourself since you have attained this meaningful job? Have you changed and, if so, in what ways.

11. What advice would you give others like yourself that are either unemployed or are not happy with their jobs?

12. Is there anything else you would like to add?

## APPENDIX D

### **Interview Questions**

#### For the Educators

Guiding the research as it pertains to the educators will be the question, “How did the educators become involved in their supportive roles with the individuals with autism and in what ways did they support them?”

#### Questions

1. Tell me what your job is and describe what your job duties are.
2. How is your job related to the individual with autism’s job career efforts?
3. What were the circumstances that were in place that you became involved in assisting this individual in his or her quest for meaningful employment?
4. Were you aware of any special interest areas of this individual that might be helpful in his or her job efforts? If so, what did you do about that?

5. What type of training or experience prepared you so you could offer support and assistance?
  
6. Describe your relationship with this individual.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. Describe the positive qualities that have helped this individual acquire meaningful employment.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. Were there some difficulties involved when working with this individual? Please explain.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. As you helped support this individual in his or her career preparation, did your perspective change? Please explain.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. What advice would you give others like yourself that are in the position of working with this type of individual, such as optimal ways of giving support or needed knowledge or skills?

11. Do you have anything to add?

## APPENDIX D

### **Interview Questions**

#### For the Business People

Guiding the research as it pertains to the business people will be the question, “How did the business people become involved in their supportive roles with the individuals with autism and in what ways did they support them?”

#### Questions

1. Tell me what your job is and describe what your job duties are.
2. How is your job related to the individual with autism’s job?
3. What were the circumstances that were in place that you became involved in assisting this individual in his or her quest for meaningful employment and/or maintaining that job?
4. Were you aware of any special interest areas of this individual that might be helpful in his or her job efforts? If so, what did you do about that?



5. What type of training or experience prepared you so you could offer support and assistance?
  
6. Describe your relationship with this individual.
  
7. Describe the positive qualities that have helped this individual acquire and maintain meaningful employment.
  
8. Were there some difficulties involved when working with this individual? Please explain.
  
9. As you helped support this individual in his or her career, did your perspective change? Please explain.
  
10. What advice would you give others like yourself that are in the position of working with this type of individual, such as optimal ways of giving support or needed knowledge or skills?

11. Do you have anything to add?

## APPENDIX D

### **Interview Questions**

#### For the Parents

Guiding the research as it pertains to the parents will be the question, “How did the educators become involved in their supportive roles with the individuals with autism and in what ways did they support them?”

#### Questions

1. Tell me how you were involved in your son/daughter’s job efforts, both before leaving high school or after.
2. What were the circumstances that were in place that you became involved in assisting this individual in his or her quest for meaningful employment?
3. Were you aware of any special interest areas of this individual that might be helpful in his or her job efforts? If so, what did you do about that?
4. What type of training or experience prepared you so you could offer support and assistance?

5. Describe your relationship with this individual.
  
6. Describe the positive qualities that have helped this individual acquire meaningful employment.
  
7. Were there some difficulties involved when working with this individual? Please explain.
  
8. As you helped support this individual in his or her career preparation, did your perspective change? Please explain.
  
9. What advice would you give others like yourself that are in the position of working with this type of individual, such as optimal ways of giving support or needed knowledge or skills?
  
10. Do you have anything to add?

## APPENDIX D

### **Interview Questions**

#### For the Family

Guiding the research as it pertains to the family members will be the question, “How did the family become involved in their supportive roles with the individuals with autism and in what ways did they support them?”

#### Questions

1. Tell me how you were involved in this individual’s job efforts, both before he or she left high school or after.
2. What were the circumstances that were in place that you became involved in assisting this individual in his or her quest for meaningful employment?
3. Were you aware of any special interest areas of this individual that might be helpful in his or her job efforts? If so, what did you do about that?
4. What type of training or experience prepared you so you could offer support and assistance?

5. Describe your relationship with this individual.
  
6. Describe the positive qualities that have helped this individual acquire meaningful employment.
  
7. Were there some difficulties involved when working with this individual? Please explain.
  
8. As you helped support this individual in his or her career preparation/job, did your perspective change? Please explain.
  
9. What advice would you give others like yourself that are in the position of working with this type of individual, such as optimal ways of giving support or needed knowledge or skills?
  
10. Do you have anything to add?

## APPENDIX E

### Confidentiality Agreement

As a member of the research team investigating “Blueprint for Meaningful Employment: Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Their Circles of Support Share What Works,” I understand that I will have access to confidential information about study participants. By signing this statement, I am indicating my understanding of my obligation to maintain confidentiality and agree to the following:

- I understand that names and any other identifying information about study participants are completely confidential.
- I agree not to divulge, publish, or otherwise make known to unauthorized persons or to the public any information obtained in the course of this research project that could identify the persons who participated in the study.
- I understand that all information about study participants obtained or accessed by me in the course of my work is confidential. I agree not to divulge or otherwise make known to unauthorized persons any of this information unless specifically authorized to do so by office protocol or by a supervisor acting in response to applicable protocol or court order, or public health or clinical need.
- I understand that I am not to read information and records concerning study participants, or any other confidential documents, nor ask questions of study participants for my own personal information but only to the extent and for the purpose of performing my assigned duties on this research project.
- I understand that a breach of confidentiality may be grounds for disciplinary action, and may include termination of employment.
- I agree to notify my supervisor immediately should I become aware of an actual breach of confidentiality or situation which could potentially result in a breach, whether this be on my part or on the part of another person.

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Signature	Date	Printed Name
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Signature	Date	Printed Name
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APPENDIX F

Recommendation Letter for A3 by B3

15 March 1999

[REDACTED]

Dear Ms. [REDACTED]:

Thank you for your letter of 12 March regarding the application of (A3) for a fellowship at the International Center for [REDACTED]. I am very pleased to recommend (A3) for this fellowship.

In 1992, on behalf of the Department of Historic Resources, I worked with the National Park Service to survey and describe significant Civil War battlefields in [REDACTED]. (A3) served as my research assistant for about eight months. His duties involved locating primary and secondary sources relating to various battles and writing accounts of each one. I found him to be a conscientious and determined researcher and a capable writer. He operated independently with very little supervision from me, and I was always pleased with the quality of his work.

(A3), who was a student at the time, continued to work for me in various capacities after my project ended. In 1995, he wrote the National Register of Historic Places nomination for [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]. A student strike at this all-black school in the early 1950s led to a lawsuit over inadequate facilities that soon was incorporated into what became the *Brown* case. The school was listed on the National Register and the [REDACTED] Landmarks Register, and in 1998 was designated a National Historic Landmark by the Secretary of the Interior. As the staff historian, I edited the nomination draft that (A3) wrote; it was so well researched and written that I changed very little. It is fair to say that the successful listing of the school and its designation as a National Historic Landmark is due in part to the high quality of (A3)'s work on the nomination.

I am not familiar with (A3)'s course of study while in graduate school in [REDACTED], although we have been in contact periodically. I have no doubt, however, that if he has applied himself to his studies as conscientiously as he did to his work here, he will be well qualified for the fellowship. I recommend him wholeheartedly.

Sincerely,



(B3)  
Historian