

The Role of Social Competence in Job Interviews: Evidence of a Bias Against Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Celia Whisman Sarah Kingsley Cynthia May Chris Whelpley

Overview

Job interviews are the most common method of employment selection, and it is rare for individuals to be hired for any position without an interview at some point (Huffcutt, Culbertson, & Weyhrauch, 2013). Thus, an inability to perform well in an interview in comparison with a candidate pool reduces one's chances for employment significantly, even for candidates with otherwise strong credentials.

Success in a job interview depends in part on a candidate's ability to convey his or her qualifications for the position, and also on his or her ability to connect with the interviewer(s), build rapport, and appear likeable, agreeable, and collegial.



These social demands of a traditional job interview may significantly disadvantage individuals who are less adept in social settings, especially individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

To assess this possibility, we videotaped adults with and without ASD discussing their dream jobs. Naïve raters then evaluated the interview videos.

Materials

We video recorded college students with and without ASD as they discussed their dream jobs in a mock interview. Interviewees were all enrolled as full-time students at the College of Charleston and ranged in age from 18 – 24 yrs. Each participant described his or her dream job, along with personal strengths and qualifications in a five minute session.

Independent evaluators who were naive to the neurodiversity of our sample then viewed and rated each video.

Method

Participants watched and rated 10 interview videos:
5 of interviewees with ASD
5 of interviewees without ASD



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

likability trustworthiness attractiveness
awkwardness confidence qualifications

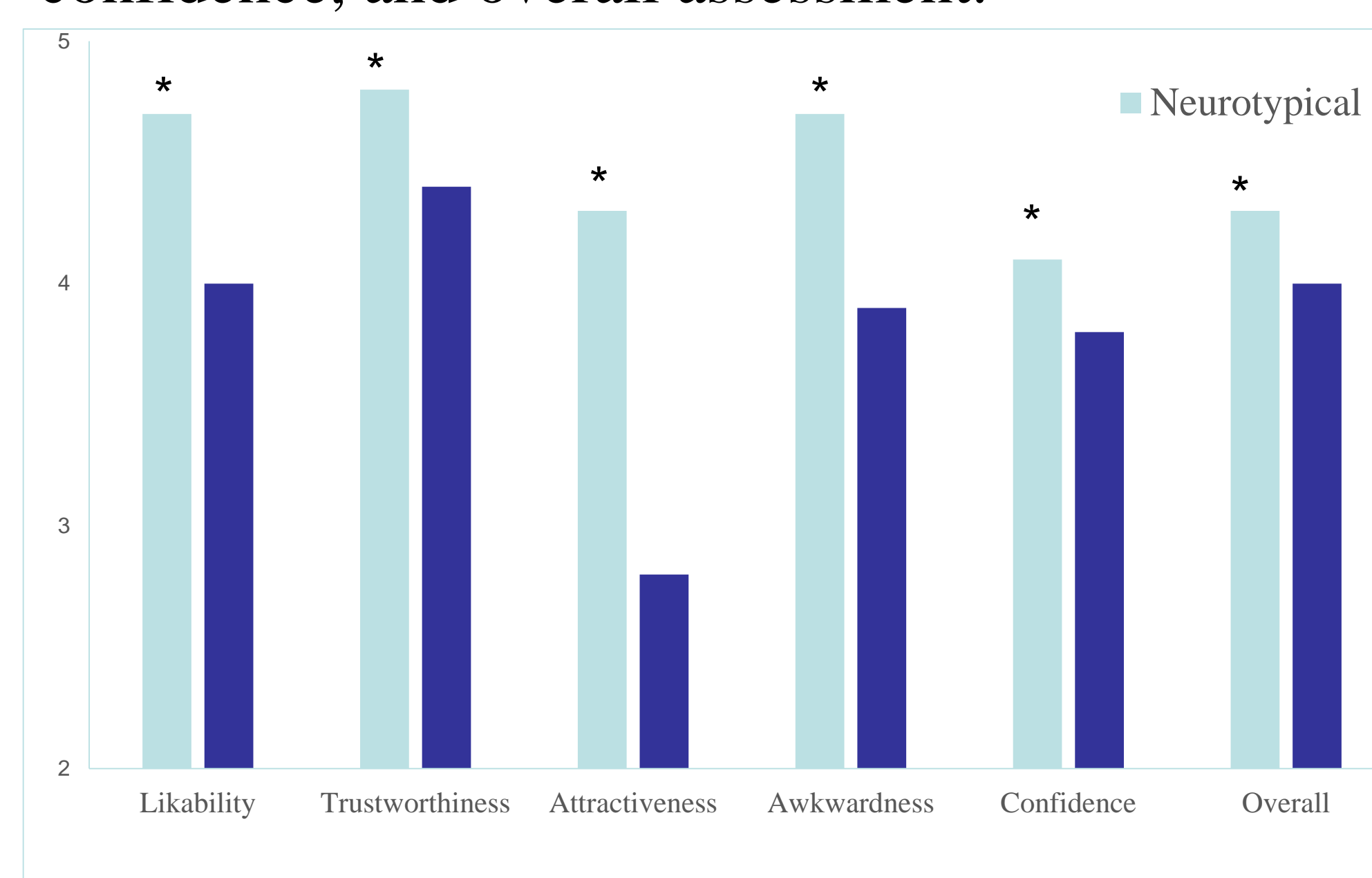
Additionally, participants rated:

- (a) the overall quality of the interview
- (b) how likely they would be to hire the individual

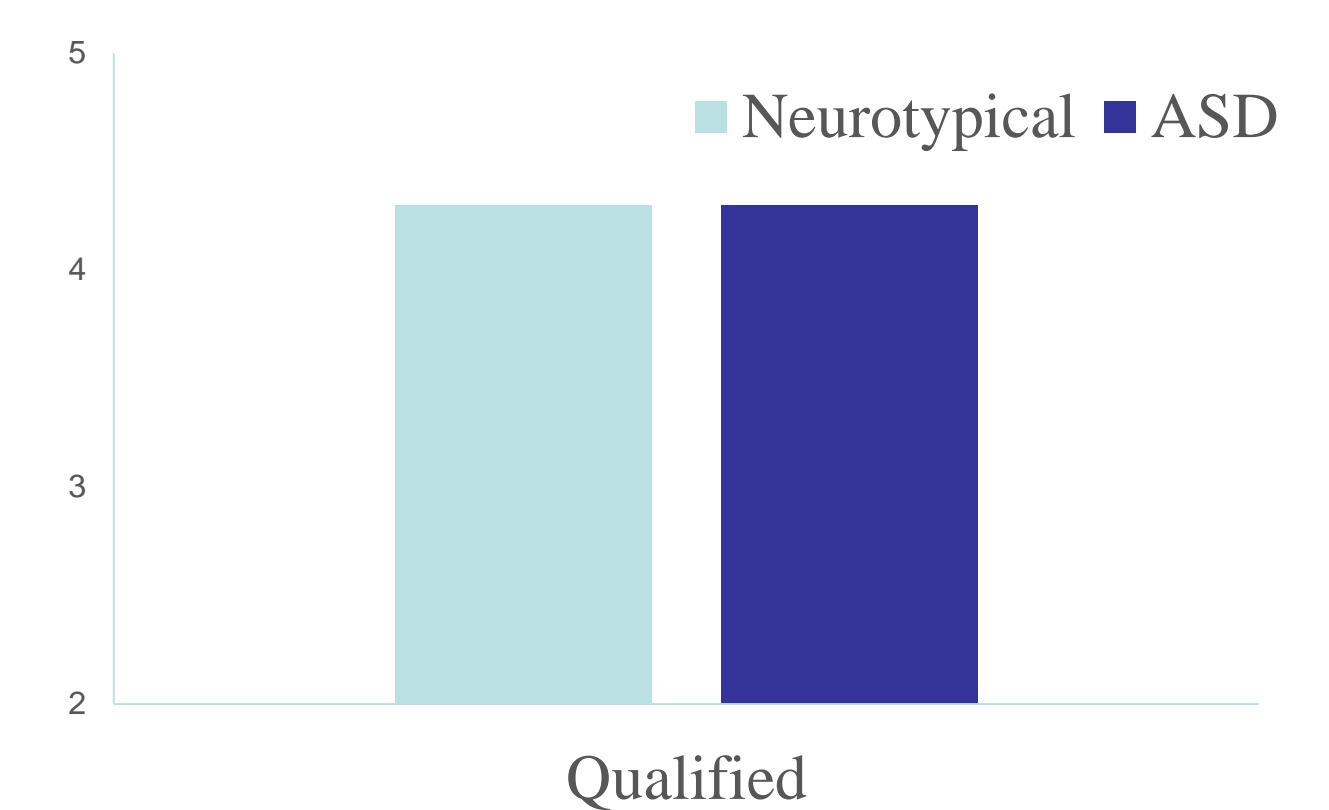
Finally, we asked each participant to complete an autism awareness survey to determine the extent of knowledge they had about individuals with ASD.

Results

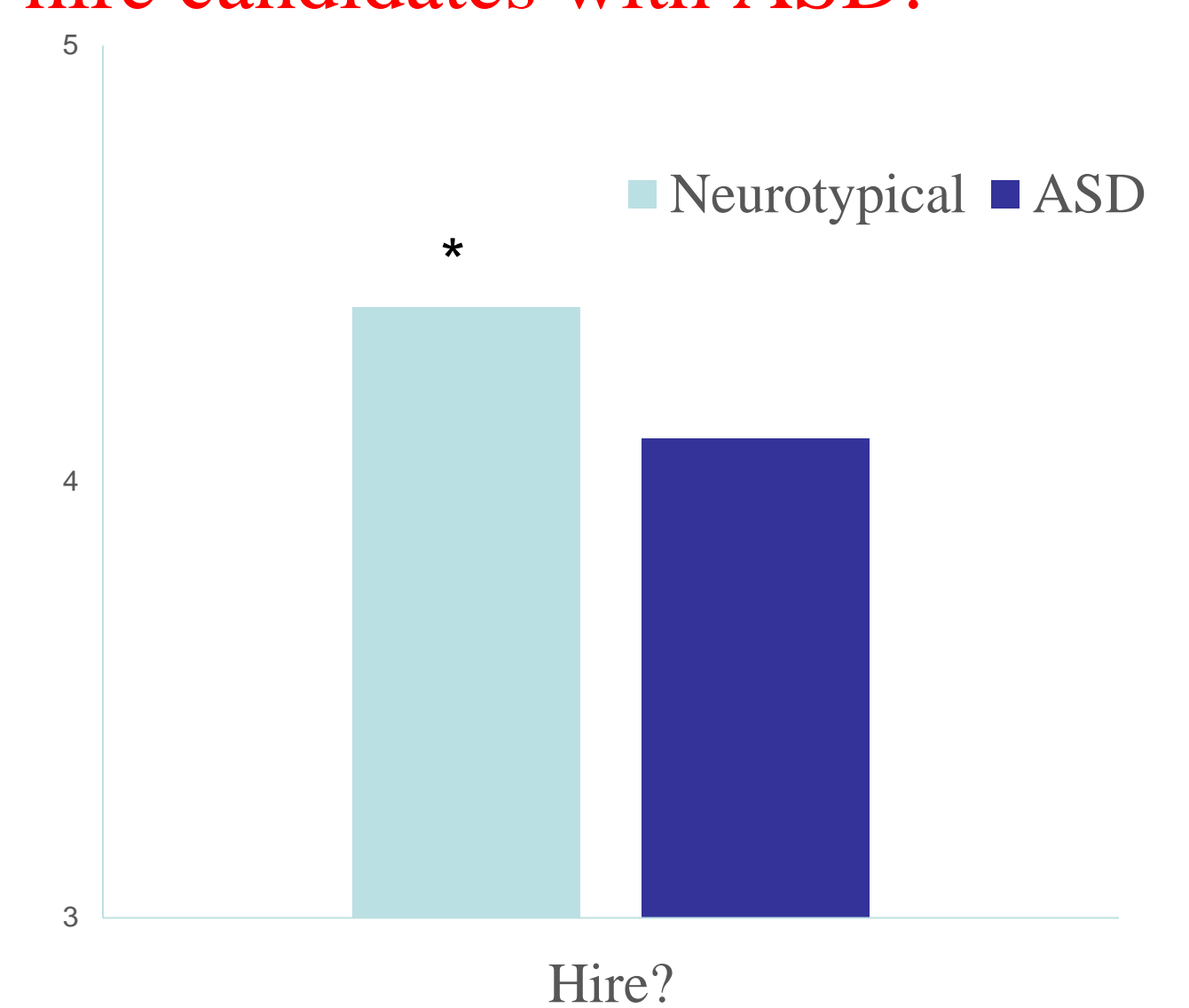
Ratings for individuals with ASD were significantly worse than ratings for individuals without ASD on most measures, including: likeability, trustworthiness, attractiveness, awkwardness, confidence, and overall assessment.



However, participants rated candidates with and without ASD as equally qualified:



Although participants rated individuals with and without ASD as equally qualified, they were less likely to hire candidates with ASD.



Finally, we found that raters who knew more about ASD showed *smaller* differences in their ratings for candidates with and without ASD, suggesting that knowledge and understanding of autism may mitigate some of these biases. Note that no rater was informed that any interviewee had autism.

Discussion

We replicated the findings that individuals with ASD are rated less favorably than neurotypical peers on many social measures, and found that these negative evaluations extend to hiring decisions. Individuals with ASD were significantly less likely to be hired, despite the fact that they were perceived as equally qualified.

Additionally, our data suggest a need for employer training about neurodiversity, as the gap in ratings across candidate groups was smaller when raters knew more about autism.