

Background

- With an increase in the prevalence of individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in recent decades, more students with ASD are aging out of the educational system and entering adulthood.
- One of the evidence-based strategies to promote successful transition and adult outcomes in individuals with ASD is to foster self-determination (SD) (Chambers et al., 2007; Wood, Fowler, Uphold, & Test, 2005).
 - SD is defined as “volitional actions that enable one to act as the primary causal agent in one’s life and to maintain or improve one’s quality of life” (Wehmeyer, 2005, p.117).
- Since the concept of SD has its philosophical root in Western traditions, it may manifest and be understood differently across individuals from various cultural backgrounds and with different value systems (e.g., Frankland, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, & Blackmountain, 2004; Trainor, 2002).

Purpose

- To explore the experiences of and the contexts for SD during school-to-adulthood transition in young adults with ASD across American and Chinese cultures.

Research Questions

- How do young adults with ASD perceive their experiences with SD during their transition from school to adulthood...
 - in the United States?
 - in Hong Kong?
 - similarly or differently across the two cultures?

Method

- Individual semi-structured interviews conducted in English and Cantonese Chinese, respectively.
- Discussed participants’ experiences with SD since secondary school exit and their perceived meanings and importance of SD-related concepts.
- Topics of discussion included goals, decision making, control over life, independence, interests, self-confidence, strengths and weaknesses, responsibilities, and influences of others.
- Other data sources included participants’ artifacts and researcher’s interview observation notes and reflective journals.

Results

Experiences of SD

Autonomy

- Independence is freedom & ownership
- Intrinsic motivations & societal expectations for independence
- Independence is important
- Independence is doing things for/by oneself
- Parents help foster independence
- Autonomous acts based on different motivational factors
- Independence is also doing things for other people
- A need for independence driven by other people
- Autonomous acts based on considering others

Goal Attainment

- Career development can give self-worth
- Achieve goals using intrinsic motivation and personal effort
- Career development can increase financial assets
- Career development can increase social assets
- Achieve goals using cost-benefit analysis and seeking help from others

Psychological Empowerment

- Have control over life (e.g., emotions, thoughts, things at work/school)
- Empowered through learning
- Relinquish control
- Empowered by trust and support from others

Self-realization

- Realize one’s strengths & passions at work
- Aware of & accept one’s strengths & weaknesses
- Use this awareness as learning opportunities
- Adjust oneself to fit into the environment
- Actualize potentials outside work

Overall Perceptions of Post-school Transition

- More hopeful & determined
- Ambivalent towards adulthood
 - Positive changes
 - Uncertainties
- More directionless & worried
- Insecure environment



Contexts for SD



Family

- Living arrangement & physical proximity to family influence SD
- Active parent support & guidance that are welcomed by young adults
- Independence as a need & responsibility related to family
- Goals influenced by the values of parents & society

Vocational Experience

- Work as developing SD
- Acquire hands-on experience through prevocational activities
- Work as a responsibility
- High social demand at work

Postsecondary Education

- High demand for independence
- Individualized accommodations available
- Numerous opportunities for decision-making & learning
- Options largely depend on academic performance in school

Community-based Resources

- Customized transition programs
- Religious groups
- Government/non-government organizations

Early School-age Experience

- Opportunities for expressing preferences & interests
- Structured environments & activities
- Negative experiences in school

Participants

- Convenient sample recruited from local community-based organizations and programs serving individuals with ASD.

	American sample	Chinese sample
Location	Tampa, Florida	Hong Kong
Gender	4 males, 1 female	6 males, 1 female
Age	19 – 21 years old	19 – 26 years old
No. of years since secondary school exit	1 – 3	1 – 7

Data Analysis

- Interview recordings transcribed verbatim into English and Chinese, respectively.
- Conducted separate thematic analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2006) on the data from the American and Chinese samples using both deductive and inductive approaches.
- Discussed and compared themes derived from the two cultural groups using an ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Shogren, 2013).

Implications

- Cultural-responsive & neurodiverse understanding of SD.
- Provide ecologically-valid transition interventions and services to foster the development of SD (e.g., SD curriculum and instruction, teacher support, transition and vocational program, parent involvement).
- Acknowledge the voice and perspectives of individuals with ASD.
- Interview young adults for their strengths and resources for SD during post-school transition.

“I want to tell the field of education and counseling that actually many parents have done wrong, but they are very confused, and they don’t know what methods to use. No matter it is in the United States or Hong Kong, there are insufficient information in this area. Their knowledge are like staying at elementary school level, too basic of an understanding. ... I want the field to understand more about transition, especially from teenage to the twenties. ... To understand us, the first thing is to respect. Don’t just say we are doing something wrong. Don’t view us using the perspective of the majority in society.”