AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER IN THE CLASSROOM

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OBJECTIVES

- Identify characteristics of individuals with HFA/Asperger’s Syndrome
- Identify barriers that may inhibit learning for students with HFA/Asperger’s Syndrome
- Identify strategies that promote learning for young adults with HFA/Asperger’s Syndrome
AUTISM: WHAT IS IT?

AUTISM IS NOT RETARDED
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“After all, the really social people did not invent the first stone spear. It was probably invented by an Aspie who chipped away at rocks while the other people socialized around the campfire. Without autism traits we might still be living in caves.”

Temple Grandin
Autism Society of America reports an increased frequency and is reporting that autism is the fastest growing developmental disability with estimates of:

- **1 in 68 live births** (CDC, March 2014)
- The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry estimates the incidence of AS at between 0.024 and 0.36 percent
- Primarily seen in males (4 out of 5)
Where are the students in Michigan?

Number of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder by Age - 2010

Source: Annual Special Education Child Count
WHERE ARE ALL THE YOUNG ADULTS WITH ASD? (NLTS-2)

- Attend a postsecondary school: vocational, business, technical (46%)
- Attend a 2-year school (35%)
- Attend a 4-year university (18%)
- Not in school (1%)
- Not in school (1%)

35% attend a 2-year school
18% attend a postsecondary school: vocational, business, technical
35% attend a 2-year school
1% not in school
1% not in school
“STEM” PARTICIPATION OF COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH ASD

- NLTS-2 (Wei, Yu, Sattuck, McCracken, Blackorby, 2013)
- Science, Technology, Engineering, Math
- Students with ASD have the highest STEM participation rates
- At the same time, their college enrollment rate was the third lowest among 11 disability categories and students in general population
- What are the educational implications?
Complete 2 yr. college
  Definitely will   24%
  Probably will    37%

Complete 4 yr. college
  Definitely will   20%
  Probably will    33%

(NLTS-2)
PERCENTAGE EXPECTED TO…

Be financially self supported...
  Definitely will be 34%
  Probably will be 43%

Live independently without supervision...
  Definitely will 45%
  Probably will 31%
  Probably won’t 22%

(NLTS-2)
There are no clear statistics on the number of people attending college who have been diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of students with AS continues to grow rapidly.

It is clear that many students with AS have been present on college campuses but their disorders simply went unrecognized.

Despite the ADA, many students with AS are falling through the cracks (many decide NOT to self-disclose!)
PREVIOUS DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA

DSM-IV

Pervasive Developmental Disorder

Autistic disorder
Asperger disorder
Childhood disintegrative disorder
Rett’s disorder
PDD-NOS
Present Diagnostic Criteria

DSM-V

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
TRIAD OF CORE DEFICITS IN ASD

SOCIALIZATION

COMMUNICATION

INTERESTS & ACTIVITIES
What have you seen in the college classroom?

What have you seen on campus?
CHALLENGES: SOCIAL ISSUES (BELLIINI, 2006)

- Social initiation
- Terminating conversations
- Topic changes
- Social anxiety
- Social withdrawal
- As a college student: wants friends/close relationships with others but does not recognize how to build them
- Unable to speak with Instructors/ lack of eye contact
- The “culture” of autism
CO-MORBIDITY WITH MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

- Anxiety disorders
- Mood disorders (depression)
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Tourette's syndrome
- Eating disorders

(Mohammad Ghaziuddin, 2005)
Social Phobias
Depression
Anxiety
OCD
ADHD
Learning Disability

Co-Morbid Conditions.....
CHALLENGES: SENSORY ISSUES...
ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES IN ASD (FOR YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN): COGNITION

CENTRAL COHERENCE
(not seeing the whole; they have attention to detail but fail to see the big picture)

THEORY OF MIND/PERSPECTIVE TAKING

GENERALIZATION
(unable to move past special interests)

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING
(taking in information, organizing it; multi-step tasks; unable to set goals)
WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE STUDENT?

- Deciding whether or not to self-disclose
- It is their responsibility
- Who needs to know?
  - My roommate?
  - DSS personnel?
  - Professors?
  - Career Counseling Office?
  - Academic Advisor?

Knowing what supports are available
Knowing the conduct rules still apply to you!!
WHAT MAY I SEE IN THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM?

A student who...
- Doesn’t understand nonverbal/social cues
- Avoids eye contact
- Has a flat affect
- Exhibits poor reciprocal conversational skills
- Has unusual prosody
- Has sensory sensitivity/sensory integration problems
- Exhibits an unusual, awkward gait
- Is a loner
- Has concrete thinking
- Is verbose on focused issues
- Has central coherence difficulties
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific Behaviors</th>
<th>Underlying Characteristics</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mimics or recites back what instructor says</td>
<td>Needs time and repetition to process information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lays head on desk</td>
<td>Sensory Overload</td>
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WHAT YOU MAY ALSO SEE: SOMEONE WHO IS DEPENDENT ON PROMPTS/OTHERS
WHAT TO DO: REMEMBER THEIR STRENGTHS AND SKILLS

- Reliability
- Punctuality
- Attention to detail
- Good memory
- Staying on task
- Unique perspectives
- Devoted interest and curiosity
- Intelligent humor
- Use of reason & logic
- Resilience & courage
Classroom accommodations:

- 1. Priority seating
- 2. Use of audio recorders
- 3. Use of volunteer note taker
- 4. Access to power point presentations or instructor’s notes (preferably in advance)
- 5. Lab chairs without backs (postural tone)
Behavioral guidance (not code of conduct issues)

- Non-verbal cues from the teacher
- Subtle signals
- If becoming overwhelmed, allow for a ‘graceful exit’
- Do allow for a break in case of sensory overwhelm or distracting behaviors.
BEHAVIORAL THERMOMETER

Calm

Rumbling

Rage
WHAT CAN I DO?
PROVIDE SPECIFIC SUPPORTS

• Use visual and auditory modes together.
• Provide PP or notes when appropriate.
• Access to notetaker
• Plan for extra clarification about expectations and specificity on assignments via email or via scheduled appointment within office hours.
WHAT CAN I DO?
PROVIDE SPECIFIC SUPPORTS

- Consider alternate mode of demonstrating mastery of material (if it does not diverge from the required rigor of the material)
- Identify multiple forms of class participation (you may allow e-mailed comments after class or brief office hours check-ins, participation to discussion boards to count toward class participation)
Follow predictable classroom routines
• Have clear classroom/course expectations
• Clear deadlines
• Extra notice about upcoming deadlines
• Make explicit implied or non-literal communication
• Task Analysis & time lines for academic projects/papers
  (where to begin and what to do and in what order)
“What’s the answer? What’s the answer?? What’s the answer?”

Give the student question cards... he surrenders one each time he asks a question...
• Do be prepared to wait for slower responses as HFA/AS students’ process information from a reason vs. intuitive process.
• Do assign HFA/AS student to a group vs. self-selecting.
• Do attend to pacing of social interaction in a classroom to help the student with ‘catching’ all that is happening.
• Do make explicit what is expected in a group or in classroom participation.
• Do assign student to group rather than let them pick.
WHAT CAN I DO? PROVIDE TESTING/WRITING ACCOMMODATIONS

- Testing accommodations:
  - 1. Extended testing time
  - 2. Testing in a distraction-reduced environment
  - 3. Use of computer with word-processing
  - 4. Use of organizational software such as Inspiration for writing down ideas
  - 5. Use of noise-reducing devices such as white noise machines and head phones
WHAT CAN I DO: PROVIDE SUPPORTS FOR HOUSING/REGISTRATION

- Single/private dormitory rooms (??)
- Pair with a known roommate
- Educate RAs about ASD
- Assistance of dorm staff in emergency situations
- Priority registration
WHAT CAN I DO? PROVIDE A SAFE PLACE

- This may be a lounge, someone’s office
- Train individuals who are part of the “Safe Place”
- What could be your safe place(s)?
- Keep a mental list of empty classrooms, quite offices (Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2012)
Research to date has noted that individuals with AS are not at any higher rate of intentional acts of violence than the general public.

Their reaction? Usually quick and a result of misunderstanding.
Bjorkly (2009) reviewed cases of violence and AS. The main finding of his review was that “despite anecdotal reports of increased violence risk in people with AS, little systematic research about its frequency and character has been published. That being the case, the review suggests that (a) there is no empirical evidence to support a claim that there is a link between Asperger's syndrome and violence, and, at the same time, (b) because of the paucity of studies on this issue, there is no evidence to preclude the claim that there is an increased risk of violence in persons with AS.”
Many individuals with AS feel marginalized

Many individuals with AS are victimized

Many individuals with AS compare themselves unfavorably to their peers

They feel a sense of frustration
REFERENCES

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