Giving Voice to College Students with Autism

Bradley E. Cox*, Amanda Mintz*, Taylor Locks*, Kerry Thompson**, Amelia Anderson*, Jeffrey Edelstein*, and Abigail Wolz*

*Florida State University

**University of Wisconsin-Madison

Brad.Cox@fsu.edu

Coming to College

- 1 in 50 children ages 6–17 have Autism
  - Rapidly increasing prevalence
  - Fastest relative growth among 14-17 year olds
  - 50,000/year turn 18 each year
  - Improved understanding and early intervention
    = Increasing numbers college eligible

- College experiences and outcomes poor(ly understood)
  - "considerable challenge for which we may be ill-prepared"
    (White et al., 2011, p. 697)

Challenges

Individuals
- Social

- Academic

- Independent Living

- "Co-Morbidities"

Institutions
- Identification

- Coordination

- Individualization

- Resources/Efficiency

Participants, Data Collection, Analyses

- 9 students w/ formal diagnosis

- In-person interviews
  - Video recorded
  - Synchronized transcripts
  - Questions: Input – Experiences – Outcomes

- Two rounds of coding
  - Round 1: *A-priori* from theory and literature
  - Round 2: recurring phenomena, representative summary statements, rich or vivid phrases, and patterns of proximal statements

Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	ASD diagnosis age	Co-morbidities/ age of diagnosis	Highest Degree	Educational Status	Vocational Status
Adam	30+	Male	3	Bipolar (Age 20)	Bachelor of Science	Graduate School	Employed
Brian	50+	Male	In his 40s	ADDHT, Dyslexia (childhood)	High School	Technical School	N/A
Christopher	24	Male	8 or 9		Bachelor of Science	N/A	Employed
Daniel	20+	Female	9		High School	Community College	N/A
Edmund	21	Male	15 or 16		GED	Community College	N/A
Franklin	23	Male	Unknown		High school	Community College	Volunteer
Gregg	33	Male	26	ADHD (Age 9)	Bachelor of Science	N/A	Employed
Harper	19	Male	Unknown		GED	N/A	N/A
Isabel	18	Female	4 or 5	ADHD, Dyslexia	N/A	High School	N/A

Findings: A Critical Threshold

- "Adults go to college. Kids go to high school, middle school and elementary school. It's really that defining moment where you're no longer a teenager. You're now an adult." – Christopher

- "Since then I haven't thought of suicide. I have a future. I felt better about myself than I have since I was a kid. That's a good thing. I'm looking forward not backwards."…"I hated myself for 30 years. I don't anymore. I'm not quite to where I love myself but I like myself. That's a big change." Subsequently, Brian explained, "I'm excited. I will be an awesome digital artist." – Brian

Findings: Focus on Academics

- Round 1 coding frequency
  - 129 *Academics*
  - 143 *Social*
    - 49 *Faculty Interaction*
    - Most peer interactions class related

- Four possible explanations
  - No Problems
  - Active Avoidance
  - Self-Monitoring, Self-Regulation
  - Ignore/Forget/Deny ----------→

- **I think just maybe the safety side and also grades and stuff, my GPA and a whole bunch of other social issues and stuff.**
- So grades and safety and social issues?
- **Yeah**
- Grades I think I understand. Safety, what is the concern about safety?
- **I don't really want to go into it.**
- Okay. How about the social issues?
- **I don't want to go into that either.**

Findings: Identity, Disclosure, Accommodation

- Interwoven

  Pragmatic disclosure of partial identity based on need for accommodation
  - SDRC often
  - Faculty limited
  - Peers rarely

- …but *not* Integrated

"I am comfortable in my own skin and I don't think this is – I don't think it's bad to have autism or anything…I usually prefer it to come up in conversation or somebody to like question, "Do you have autism?'" – Edmund

"We got into small groups and we had to talk about our race, our gender and disability came up so I did mention it quietly and quickly. I don't think anyone noticed but I did say it." - Daniel

Identity, Disclosure, Accommodations (cont.)

"It was never used as a weapon against me until now. "

"You are to pass yourself off as normal as much as you can."

"So I'm very proud of the fact that I'm able to fake out as many people as I do, honestly. I mean I know that's not really a healthy way to relate to one with autism or Asperger's." - Adam

Discussion & Recommendations

- Ready or Not
  - Institutional Readiness
  - Student Readiness

- Accommodations in Practice
  - Formal, legal accommodations
    - No roommate
    - Test: extended time & separate room
  - Institution-wide
    - Tutors
    - Faculty/staff professional development

More Information…

Brad Cox (brad.cox@fsu.edu)

Several related projects about

Autism Spectrum Disorders in

Higher Education (ASDHE)