Autism and its Effects on Students

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Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) describes a disorder characterized, in various degrees by:

* Difficulties in socialization
* Difficulties in communication
* Repetitive Behaviors
All ASD disorders merged with the in DSM-5 in May, 2013.

Strong non-verbal skills are often present.

Troubles with verbal tasks, identifying feelings, and looking at faces exist.
Sleep
* Gastrointestinal problems
* Hypersensitivities to light, sound, taste, etc.
* Affection and eye contact can sometimes feel uncomfortable.
* Sometimes, disruptive behavior is used to communicate their needs.
Autism: Its Causes, and its Characteristics

* Excel in math, music, and visual skills.
* Excellent drive for detail and a desire for rules.
Autism: Its Causes, and its Characteristics

* Dr. James Cusack - Generalization that people with ASD are not good at interpreting gestures.
* Contrary, people with ASD can interpret gestures, but might have difficulty with responding to certain actions.
The following characteristics are often present:

* Awkward postures
* Delayed responses
* Oddities in pitch
* Easily distracted
Ackles continues,

* Strong, narrow interests
* Literal thinking
* Rock to calm themselves
* Easily overwhelmed
Ackles,
People with ASD have above average intellect as well as the following:
* Passion
* Strong sense of equality
* Exceptional talents
* Diligence with routine work
Ackles further states,
There are struggles with:
* Initiating effort
* Setting boundaries and priorities
* Working in groups
* Seeing other’s points of view
The current rate is 1 in 68, affecting 4 to 5 more males, with 3 million people in the US having autism.

40% have average or above average intellect.

25% percent are non-verbal.
25% percent have seizures.

Both genes and the environment play a role in causing ASD.

No study has linked ASD with vaccines since 2010.
After secondary education, less than half of people with ASD pursue education or paid employment within 2 years.

There is a popular belief that people with ASD gravitate towards science fields.
Third highest STEM participation rate, but the third lowest enrollment rate.

Many students with high-functioning ASD aspire for higher education.
Some students drop out due to:

* Social isolation
* Difficulties in change
* Independent living
* Poor organization skills
An increased risk of aggression and mood problems exists.
Less impairment can lead to more depressive symptoms.
Social anxiety disorder can occur.
Students with ASD have a lower proficiency when it comes to skills required for school.

Howlin notes college personnel suggest restricting parent involvement.
Public schools must allow equal access to educational programs by law.

Public schools – Not responsible for services to students with ASD after age twenty-two.
Students with ASD can self-educate. Stable environments and flexible hours for classes and homework is preferable.
Many high-functioning people with ASD do not accept their diagnosis in fear of stigma.
A lack of empathy or emotion is a stereotype, caused by a lack of understanding.

Students with a direct family member with ASD were more open to having friends with ASD.
Examples of Other People with Autism

TED and YouTube have multiple videos on ASD. Rosie King, Faith Jegede, and Joey Travolta are examples.
* Rosie has autism and talks about the fear of variety in everything that people have and how people try to force everyone to be normal.

* She has thousands of secret worlds in her head.

* She has a younger brother and sister with autism and are both non-verbal.
She knows of creative people with autism, contrary to the belief that they only like math and science.

The world in her head feels more real than the real world.

She cannot stop her imagination.
She has screamed in the past, and as a result, some people did not want to be friends with her.

She does not want to trade her autism for anything.
Faith has two brothers with autism and believes that people should live beyond normal.

Remmy, one of her brothers, is speechless but communicates joy in a way that the best orators cannot.
Remmy does not see skin color, does not care about differences, has never told a lie, and sings lyrics from childhood songs that Faith does not remember.
* Her other brother, Samual, has an excellent but selective memory.
* He does not seem to remember recent events, but he remembers conversations he had when he was four.
* Someone is diagnosed with autism every twenty minutes.
* Normality ignores the differences.
* There are no wrongs; just different kinds of rights.
Joey Travolta produced the film and has autism.
His film was about autism and was designed for parents with children with autism.
His mother has been frustrated with him, but is very supportive.
During the film, it was discovered that some people liked having autism, while others did not like having autism or certain aspects of themselves.

Jace, his younger brother, believed that Joey did not care about him, but the relationship felt special sometimes.
Some people with autism believed that “normal” people were scary and they were either ignorant or spoke too fast.
Survey - Determine the degree WMU assists students with ASD in multiple areas.

Dorothy Fancher - Thesis chair and associate director of Disability Services for Students (DSS) - Sent invitations to 24 students.
Results of Survey

Only two students completed the survey, both males, but the results should provide some insight into the college life of a student with ASD.
The students both like WMU and have found majors they like.

They are both timely and accurate with their homework.

Both students do not stress about homework or friends.

One student, however, has stress for extended periods of time.
They are both happy and spend significant time by themselves.

One student responded to the last question and said “Sometimes, I feel that my contributions are unhelpful during the Emerging Leaders Program, when it comes to activities involving teamwork”.
The 2 students fit characteristics of ASD, but contrary to the stereotype that people with ASD are not social, the two students spend time with others.

They both have supportive families and special talents.
My responses would be:

* WMU was my first choice for a college as one of the students mentioned.
* The students and I both agree that DSS assists students with ASD well.
I also found a major that I like, and I have a good GPA.

I also complete my homework on time and accurately.

I feel a little stress sometimes when friends do not respond to me.

I participate in the Kalamazoo Philharmonia and work out six days a week.
I can play the viola and piano.
I also spend much of my time alone.
I go home on weekends.
I have a supportive family like the students.
Baron - How to reduce stress:

* Increasing social support
* Daily schedules
* Relaxation
* Exercise
* Pictures
Assisting People with Autism

More ways to reduce stress:
* Promoting self-esteem
* Receiving feedback
* Speaking slowly and softly
* Being told specific directions
* Autism often evokes an image of someone who rocks, flaps their hands, and is socially isolated.
* Baron points out that difficulties exist with switching to different movements.
Stress can make it hard for someone with ASD to switch their movements.

Stress often comes from the thought that others will judge them or having intrusive thoughts.
Assisting People with Autism

- Isolation can damage one’s health.
- Edwards – Cognitive therapies and medications can help improve the behavior.
- Like physical activity.
- Individual, family, and social understanding programs can have positive effects.
Assisting People with Autism

- Howlin - People with lower-functioning ASD tend to avoid contact.
- Howlin - People with high-functioning ASD are more worried about interactions.
- Any act of friendliness towards someone with ASD is often misinterpreted.
People with ASD are often vulnerable to other people’s demands.

Following the rules and correcting others despite social rules is common.

Trouble with knowing when to change behaviors is common.

People with ASD should discuss their difficulties with others so that interactions can go smoothly.
Changes in routine or boredom can make stereotyped movements such as rocking back and forth return.

Changes to the environment and making rules can help with disruptive behaviors.

Howlin - When fearful situations are learned, people with ASD will avoid those situations.
Treatment can help people with ASD as ASD is life-long.

15% can achieve self-sufficiency as adults.

Under the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), people with ASD can self-advocate for rights.
I have a few recommendations:

* Everyone in school should have an awareness of disabilities and how to assist people with disabilities.

* Abstract concepts should be explained in a straightforward way.

* More direct help such as social coaching should be provided upon request.
My College Experience with Autism

* I exhibit many of the same traits as someone with ASD.
* I have above average intelligence, diligence with routine work, and an excellent but subjective memory.
* I also have strong, narrow interests, indecisiveness, and struggle with abstract concepts.
* I do not show a lot of emotion, and I do not seem to feel happiness very much.
I tend to remember things I need to remember, like information for tests, or memories where I was upset.

I sometimes dwell on minor incidents for weeks, months, or years.

I have difficulty initiating conversation.

My hobbies include video games, reading non-fiction books, watching YouTube videos, and playing music.

I do not like when people do not contact me back quickly, get upset at me for no reason, smoke, when things do not go my way, or when I have wasted time.
I enrolled as a computer science major as I wanted to become a video game designer.

I also enrolled as a Lee Honors College student and became a member of DSS.

I had a hard first week as I did not have any friends to hang out with and was in my room a lot.

Later on, I made some computer science friends who I hung out with, and I made a friend through the peer mentor program at DSS.
Despite that and my good grades, I continued to feel isolated as I was still spending a lot of time in my room. I was leaving my room more by the second semester, but I still saw a counselor at Sindecuse in order to become more social. Despite the counseling, the lack of direct help did not really help with becoming more social, plus the peer mentoring program was already helping me with that and more.
During that semester, I became a part of an honors organization dedicated to volunteering called Alpha Lambda Delta.

I found by this time that I was struggling with computer science due to the abstract content of the classes.

I ended up withdrawing from computer science 2 and the computer science degree.

I decided at that point to pursue a statistics degree as statistics would be concrete and straightforward.

I have always liked math and statistics and that there were hardly any exceptions to formulas.
I randomly met a few people with similar interests in the beginning of my second year and became friends with them. Despite becoming more social, I was still spending a lot of time alone and would become upset as I developed a notion that I always had to be with others. During the third semester, I became part of Delta Alpha Pi, an organization dedicated to eliminate the negative perceptions of disabilities.
My College Experience with Autism

* At the end of the fourth semester, I became a part of a program that helps find jobs for students with disabilities called the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP).
* During the summer after my second year, I worked as an Advocacy Academy intern for Disability Network Southwest Michigan.
* We interns were able to advocate for disability rights and have a bill passed that would allow for people to have their medical history available digitally on their ID.
I found during this year that I was socializing less due to my friends not contacting me back when I contact them.

Despite this, I was becoming less upset about being alone.

During the fifth semester, I worked on homework too much sometimes.

For no reason, I have anxiety since the beginning of the fifth semester due to what was a minor incident looking back at it.

I told a friend’s roommate to not smoke while I there as he was smoking inside, and he told me that he could do what he wants and that there was no reason I should be here.
Even though he kind of forgave me afterwards as I cried excessively afterwards and told me I could still come over as long as my friend is around and awake, I developed an extreme hatred of him, and many times, I end up clenching my fists, getting butterflies in my stomach, etc. whenever the incident comes back.

I can still remember the exact date, location, and approximate time and will now hopefully be treated for anxiety this semester.
The hatred came from the fact that it happened at the end of a good weekend and it was the one weekend during my whole college career I decided to stay during a weekend.

I have not had anxiety this semester concerning homework due to a lack of it, although I withdrew from a class due to abstract content I could not understand.

I was able to find a summer job through the WRP a few weeks ago.

I have spoken at two autism panels this semester.
I am going to graduate a semester early in December.

Despite having a couple of friends, I wish that WMU and DSS could have been more direct at finding friends for me.

Despite all of my qualifications, I was never able to find a campus job.

My roommates have never done much with me and I have gone home every weekend.

Overall, I accept my diagnosis, even though I believe that some of the characteristics of my disorder have had a negative impact on my life.
I like my supportive family and I have received good grades, but I wish I could be more social, more decisive, have more emotion in order to relate more with others, and prevent my bad memories from affecting me.
1. What gender do you identify yourself as?  Male  Female
2. Was WMU your first choice for a college?  Yes  No
3. Do you believe you are having a good experience at WMU?  Yes  No
4. Do you find that WMU assists students with autism well?  Yes  No
5. Do you find that Disability Services for Students assists students with autism well?  Yes  No
6. Have you been able to find a major that you can stick with? Yes   No
7. Do you like the major you currently have? Yes   No
8. Have you been able to maintain a high GPA (3.0 or higher) at WMU? Yes   No
9. Are you generally able to get your homework done on time? Yes   No
10. Do you generally find you are able to be accurate in your homework? Yes   No
11. Do you stress out about homework or tests? Yes  No
12. Do you stress out from other things such as money, emotions, body image, and friends? Yes  No
13. Do you find yourself having stress for significant periods of time? Yes  No
14. Do you participate in any extracurricular activities or Registered Student Organizations? Yes  No
15. Are you thinking about participating in any extracurricular activities or Registered Student Organizations? Yes  No
16. Are you generally happy? Yes   No
17. Do you have any mental illnesses such as depression or anxiety? Yes   No
18. Do you spend significant amounts of time by yourself? Yes   No
19. Do you spend time with others? Yes   No
20. Do you have a supportive family? Yes   No
21. Are you physically active most days?  Yes   No
22. Do you eat healthy food most of the time?  Yes   No
23. Do you have any special talents that set you apart from others?  Yes   No
24. Do you experience any sensory overloads when, for example, there is too much noise, touch, or light?  Yes   No
25. Do you believe you have had difficulties in college such as anxiety, loneliness, stress, depression, etc. because of your autism?  Yes   No
26. Is there anything else you would like to discuss about how your autism affects your experiences at WMU?


Works Cited


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Any Questions?