Exploring the Ways US High School Students with ASD are using Social Media

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While the primary focus of educators is on increasing academic achievement, high school students with autism are also concerned with the social aspects of their school days such as entering peer groups, making friends, and developing intimate relationships. These non-academic skills may go unaddressed or overlooked by school staff. Within the social environment of high school, difficulties in the areas of communication and social interaction can put students with autism at risk for social isolation and bullying. Positive peer relationships have been found to facilitate positive social and academic outcomes. Social media, so commonly used by the majority of teens to navigate the social world, has been rarely examined in the lives of teens with autism.

Research Questions
1) What social media are high school students with autism using?
2) What do they perceive are its benefits?

Methods
• Paper surveys of 472 high school students with autism in California, North Carolina, Wisconsin
• Email interviews of 10 survey respondents

Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Survey N=472</th>
<th>Interviews N=10</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender Male</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>mean=16.8 SD 1.4 range 14-22</td>
<td>mean=16 range 15-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race White</td>
<td>67% (Hispanic 21%)</td>
<td>70% (Hispanic 10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income &gt;$99k</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ &gt;70</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Diploma Track</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>90%</td>
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92% use technology to communicate/socialize

Reasons why they use technology to communicate or socialize

Our study showed that many adolescents with autism are using a wide variety of social media to increase their social interactions. This study’s finding regarding adolescents’ access to and use of social media have implications for educators and families support of social skill development. Researchers should investigate the impact of social media use on:
• feelings of social connectedness
• reduction in symptoms of anxiety and depression

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