Technology use by high school students with autism: It’s not just for playing video games and watching animated movies

Susan Hedges
University of North Carolina

Introduction
The majority of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are leaving high school ill prepared to integrate successfully into adult life, which comes at a huge cost, not only to themselves and to their families, but to society at large. Technology supports have the potential to improve their outcomes and enhance their quality of life. Knowing that most individuals with ASD have an affinity for technology and that technology is becoming more portable, less expensive, and more widely available, makes it an attractive potential support. Previous studies of the technology use by adolescents with ASD focused primarily on discretionary use (Kuo et al., 2013; MacMullin, Lunsky, & Weiss, 2015; Mazeuk et al., 2012; Shane & Albert, 2008). This mixed methods study investigated the use of everyday technologies as a support tool by high school students with ASD.

Objectives
1. To gain a first-person account of technology use
2. To find out what forms of tech teens w/ASD are using
3. And for what purpose
4. To gain insights into perceptions of the benefits and barriers of tech use

Methods
- **Survey N=243**: Technology can be a distraction
- **Interviews N=10**: Technology can be a support tool by high school students with ASD.

Survey Results
- 94% use technology to communicate/socialize
- 97% use technology at school
- 57% say technology can be distracting

Interview Results
- **Benefits**: Improve organization skills, reduce anxiety and stress, promote independence, improve social opportunities
- **Barriers**: Distraction, impede social interaction, reduce social opportunities, limits to access

Conclusion
Practitioners/parents should leverage the use of everyday technologies to:
- improve organizational skills, promote independence, reduce anxiety and stress, enhance social communication opportunities

Researchers:
- Need for efficacy studies for the above uses

Limitations:
- Self-report only
- Lack of diversity in sample

References

For more information: hedges@live.unc.edu