

Modifying Social Behaviors in College Students with Asperger's Disorder : A Case Study

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Abstract

Young adults with Asperger's Syndrome (AS) often exhibit difficulty building and maintaining social relationships due to core deficits in socialization. Though many report a desire for peer relationships, they also report a higher degree of loneliness and social isolation. As services are often low for this older population with AS, there is a need for empirically-validated interventions targeting more complex social goals. A concurrent multiple baseline design across behaviors was employed for individualized target social behaviors with college students with AS. The intervention included 2 phases targeting, (1) social conversation skills and (2) social integration among the typical college-age population. Results showed that video self-modeling was effective in improving question asking and decreasing fidgeting in social conversations. Structured social planning was effective in increasing the number of weekly social activities the participant engaged in. Results are discussed in terms of moving intervention towards more complex social goals.

Background

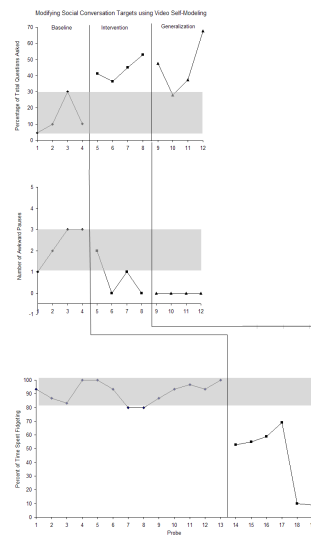
- An impairment in social interaction is a core symptom of Asperger's Disorder (DSM-IV-TR, 2000)
- Skill deficits can manifest in social conversation (DSM-IV-TR, 2000; Alpern & Zager, 2007; Koegel & Frea, 1993; Landa,)
- Trend of low levels of social integration and few quality friendships in this population (Bauminger & Kasari, 2000; Howlin, 2000; Jobe & White, 2007; Orsmond, Kraus, & Seltzer, 2004; Stewart, et. al., 2006; Strain & Schwartz, 2001).
- Deficits in organization and planning can interfere with the number of social opportunities planned and executed (Hum & Odom, 2007).
- Video Self-Modeling has been shown to be an effective intervention for a variety of social targets, including social conversation, with individuals with ASD or Asperger's. (Apple, Billingsley, & Schwartz, 2005; Bellini & Akullina, 2007; Maione & Mirenda, 2006; McCoy & Hermansen, 2007)

Representative Participant

- 21 year old male college student with a diagnosis of Asperger's Disorder
- History of social isolation and depression
- Difficulty functioning academically due to depression
- Cited "help with socialization and integrating into the college community" as primary reason for seeking help.
- Reported dissatisfaction with peer interactions and overall college experience.

Methods

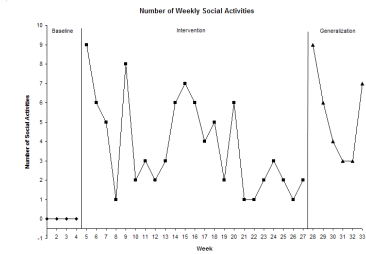
- Concurrent multiple-baseline design across behaviors
- Individualized, skill-based interventions for 2 primary areas of social functioning
- Phase I: Social Conversation
 - 30 minute social conversation probes with typical peers were taken in a family-room style clinic room.
 - During baseline probes, the participant and peer were instructed to converse like they normally would.
 - Video Self-Modeling (examples of the participant engaging in the appropriate target behavior and inappropriate behavior were shown) for 2 individualized targets.
 - Appropriate Question asking
 - Constant Fidgeting with Hands
- Phase II: Social Integration
 - Structured social planning targeted:
 - Number of opportunities for social engagement in the natural environment
 - Organizational skills in scheduling events with peers
 - Use of University resources in providing options for social events.
- Social validity measure at pre and post: Satisfaction Questionnaire measured the participant's satisfaction with social skills and social relationships.



Discussion

Results indicated that intervention was successful in improving the social skills and subsequent social integration for a college student with Asperger's Disorder. Though the social conversation targets substantially improved with video self-modeling, these improvements did not collaterally effect the social integration of the participant so an intervention targeting weekly social events was introduced. Replication is in progress with additional participants with ASD. Given these results, more complex social goals may be targeted. The participant noted in one of our sessions that dating is his current priority, yet he is unsure of how to approach these relationships and has little success in the past. Data are currently being collected on the effectiveness of a subsequent dating intervention for this participant.

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Results

- Phase I: Social Conversation
 - Appropriate Question Asking: Percent of questions asked during the 30 minute social conversation improved from an average of 13.65% to an average of 43.9% during intervention. These skills maintained during generalization probes for an average of 45.2% of questions asked which is in an appropriate range for social interaction.
 - Targeting question asking produced collateral gains in the number of awkward pauses between peers during the conversation (defined as pauses lasting longer than 3 seconds). Number of awkward pauses steadily decreased during intervention probes. 100% of generalization probes were below baseline range.
 - Fidgeting: decreased time spent fidgeting from an average of 91.3% (range= 80-100%) of one-minute intervals to an average of 42.5% (range 9-69%). Generalization data is still being collected for this target.
- Phase II: Social Integration:
 - Number of weekly social activities engaged in improved from an average of zero per week to an average of 3.74 per week. At generalization, he maintained high levels of social integration of an average of 4.17 social activities per week.
- Social Validity:
 - Participant reported an increase in the number of friends he had from 10 at pre-intervention to 25 at post-intervention. Participant reported a 3 point increase on the 7 point Likert-type scale of satisfaction with the number of friends he had. Participant reported a 4 point increase on the 7 point Likert-type scale of satisfaction with his college experience.