

ACADEMIC TRAJECTORY OF A POSTGRADUATE STUDENT WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER¹

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ABSTRACT. This study aims to delineate the academic trajectory and the social support perception of a postgraduate student with Autism Spectrum Disorder - ASD. The study was developed based on two procedures: (a) interview; (b) Social Support Perception Scale (SSPE) adapted to university context. Data collected in the interview were interpreted through verbal report analysis, for the establishment of meanings and senses attributed to certain phenomena. The average scores obtained with the SSPE were 1,78 (graduation) and 3,47 (post-graduation) for the practice support and 1,50 (graduation) and 3,20 (post-graduation) for the emotional support. Thematic axis obtained by the interview were: Graduation and Post-graduation Admission; Support core; Permanence in the University; Socio-emotional factors; Easinesses and difficulties encountered; Positive and negative aspects. It was possible to identify the absence of the social support perception during the graduation course and difficulties related to the learning and evaluation methods. On the other hand, in post-graduation, a higher level of social support perception and easinesses with academic skills was found, when compared to the graduation. However, in order to reach this level of education, students have to attend the undergraduate degree first, which is considered as a problematic instance in this research, because it meagerly responds to the differences.

Keywords: Autism; school inclusion; colleges.

TRAJETÓRIA ACADÊMICA DE UM PÓS-GRADUANDO COM TRANSTORNO DO ESPECTRO AUTISTA

RESUMO. Este texto objetiva retratar a trajetória acadêmica e a percepção do suporte social de um estudante de pós-graduação diagnosticado com transtorno do espectro autista - TEA. O estudo se deu com o uso de dois procedimentos: (a) entrevista pessoal; (b) aplicação da Escala de Percepção do Suporte Social – EPSS, adaptada ao contexto universitário. Os dados coletados, por meio da entrevista, foram analisados com base no relato verbal, para interpretação dos sentidos e significados atribuídos a determinados fenômenos. A média dos escores obtidos com a EPSS foi de 1,78 (graduação) e 3,47 (pós-graduação) para o suporte prático e 1,50 (graduação) e 3,20 (pós-graduação) para o suporte emocional, demonstrando a percepção de maior apoio na pós-graduação. Os eixos temáticos obtidos com a entrevista foram ingresso na graduação e pós-graduação; núcleos de apoio; permanência; fatores socioemocionais; facilidades e dificuldades enfrentadas; aspectos positivos e negativos. Foi possível averiguar a falta de percepção do suporte social durante a graduação e dificuldades com métodos de ensino e avaliação. Na pós-graduação, maior percepção do suporte social e facilidade com habilidades acadêmicas. Porém, para alcançar esse nível de ensino, os estudantes, primeiramente, devem cursar a graduação, que é uma instância tida como problemática nessa pesquisa, por pouco atender às diferenças.

Palavras-chave: Autismo; educação inclusiva; universidades.

¹ Support and funding: Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (Capes) e Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (Fapesp)

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TRAYECTORIA ACADÉMICA DE UN ESTUDIANTE DE POSGRADO CON TRASTORNO DEL ESPECTRO AUTISTA

RESUMEN. Este texto objetiva retratar la trayectoria académica y la percepción del soporte social de un estudiante de posgrado diagnosticado con trastorno del espectro autista - TEA. El estudio se dio con el uso de dos procedimientos: (a) entrevista personal; (B) aplicación de la Escala de Percepción del Soporte Social - EPSS, adaptada al contexto universitario. Los datos recogidos por medio de la entrevista fueron analizados con base en el análisis del relato verbal, para interpretación de los sentidos y significados atribuidos a determinados fenómenos. La media de los escores obtenidos con la EPSS fue de 1,78 (graduación) y 3,47 (postgrado) para el soporte práctico y 1,50 (graduación) y 3,20 (postgrado) para el soporte emocional, demostrando la percepción de mayor apoyo en el posgrado. Los ejes temáticos obtenidos con la entrevista fueron: Ingreso en la graduación y posgrado; Núcleos de apoyo; Permanencia; Factores socio emocionales; Instalaciones y dificultades enfrentadas; Aspectos positivos y negativos. Fue posible averiguar la falta de percepción del soporte social durante la graduación y dificultades con métodos de enseñanza y evaluación. En el postgrado, mayor percepción del soporte social y facilidad con habilidades académicas. Pero para alcanzar ese nivel de enseñanza, los estudiantes primero deben cursar la graduación, que es una instancia considerada como problemática en esa investigación, por poco atender a las diferencias.

Palabras-clave: Autismo; inclusión escolar; universidades.

Introduction

Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are defined as a neurological disorder characterized by social and communicative impairment (Leung, Vogan, Powell, Anagnostou & Taylor, 2016). They are referred by the literature as deviations and abnormalities in social skills, at using the language for communication, and the presence of behavioral characteristics that encompass repetitions or persistence over a restricted but intense number of interests and stereotypes (Pereira & Barros, 2008).

Recently the ASDs were described by DSM-5 (APA, 2013) broadly, and this conceptual review covered four developmental disorders which were previously classified individually¹ (autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder and invasive disorders of development without further specification). However, this unique condition presents a great variability of degrees of severity and symptomatology. With the publication of DSM-5 (APA, 2013) the ASDs received a "severity" marker based on the impairment level. Thus, in the diagnostic criteria of the referred manual, three categories of severity are observed in the individual diagnosed with ASD, which may vary according to the context or oscillate with time: Level 1 (those who need support), Level 2 (those who require substantial support) and Level 3 (those who need very substantial support). These classifications are divided into two areas: Social Communication (CS) and Restricted and Repetitive Behaviors (RRC), characterizing the main symptoms of the disorder (Weitlauf, Gotham, Vehorn & Warren, 2014)

The diagnosis of ASD, however, is criticized by the scientific community, as reported by Tunes (2015), since the adoption of the criteria set out in the classification manuals highlight the pathological characteristics which are different from the socially established normality, placing the subject who is under this condition, in a negative position, besides searching for causes in organic anomalies or in himself. The author questioned the way in which other people connected to those who presented the diagnosis and if such a relationship, surrounded by prejudices, could contribute to aggravate the social deficit of those with ASD.

Therefore, with regard to the diagnostic criteria employed by the current clinical manuals such as DSM-5 and ICD-10, it becomes pertinent to reflect on the context /or about the importance of the dyad involving social relationships, which should not focus the responsibility strictly upon the diagnosed person, so that, as a consequence, their difficulty will end up imputing to them a supposed preference for social isolation.

Nonetheless, it is pertinent to recall that in Brazil, ASD was classified as a disability, according to the Law No. 12,764 of December 27, 2012, which established the National Policy for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder. After the publication of these regulations, the persons suffering from ASD had legal prerogatives that guarantee them conditions of access to health services,

work and education, for example. In the educational field, common education has been valued in an inclusive perspective, at all levels of education.

In the Brazilian scenario, inclusive education began to gain prominence in the 1990s, leading a series of reforms in the educational system. One of its founding premises is that persons with disabilities can benefit from common education provided that specific educational responses are given to the particularities presented, supported by the assistance of the special education service, as provided in the second paragraph of Decree 8368/14. In the case of ASDs, it is indicated that, as far as possible, their enrollment occurs in non-segregated educational spaces, favoring the common coexistence, and, consequently, their socialization with non-peers. In this sense, the context may act as an aggravating factor or facilitator of the inclusion process, since the proposition of actions may or may not effect the participation of people with ASD into the access and permanence in the common educational spaces, at all levels, since the infantile to the university. According to Leite and Martins (2012), "Common education networks, from the perspective of Inclusive Education, represent the most effective means of fighting discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming classrooms, towards an inclusive society that respects differences and human diversity."

It is recalled that Inclusive Education is based on the supporting paradigm, which provides a series of contextual adjustments, so that the persons with disabilities can join the same rights as any citizen, in addition to the provision of specialized individual services, aiming to improving their quality of life (Aranha, 2001).

One of these supports consists on social support, which is defined in the literature as any verbal and / or material information aimed at the care which results in emotional effects and / or assertive actions. It is offered by another person and / or group with whom they have systematic contacts (Gonçalves, Pawlowski, Bandeira & Piccinini, 2011).

The World Health Organization has long recognized that social support and institutions for interactive relationships, provide an important contribution to health. This support provides practical and emotional resources people need. Therefore, being part of a social network, and the resulting implications enable people to feel cared for, loved, esteemed, valued, belonging to a group, so that such factors contribute positively to health promotion and healthier behaviors. On the other hand, people who receive less social and emotional support are more likely to face depressive disorders, extending to other mental and / or physical health (Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003).

The perception of social support can still be seen as "an exchange of resources between at least two individuals, perceived by the provider or recipient, aiming to improve the recipient's well-being" (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984). When compared to the measures of social support received, the perception of social support is more closely related to the recipient's physical and mental well-being (Uchino, Bowen, Carlisle and Birmingham, 2012). In this direction, the perception of social support more accentuated for a long time, has been related to lower mortality rates (Blazer, 1982) and actions derived from social competence, such as: reciprocal visual contact and other forms of nonverbal communication, are correlated to the abilities of conversation, affirmation, cooperation, and empathy (Cohen et al., 1986; Sarason, Sarason, Hacker and Basham, 1985; Muller et al., 2015).

Studies indicate that the low level of perception of social support can have a moderating effect on the quality of life (Bishop-Fitzpatrick, Mazefsky & Eack, 2017) and on the estimation of depressive moods (Gotham, Bishop, Brunwasser & Lord, 2014) of people with Autism Spectrum Disorders. It is reported that people with this diagnosis present greater commitment in the perception of social support, in relation to people with neurotypical development (Alvarez-Fernandez et al., 2017).

It is observed, therefore, that the perception of this support can have a moderating and protective effect on the lives of people with different disabilities (Cobb, 1976), especially in moments of transition, such as entering the world of work or university context, for example. Thus, considering that social support or its absence can have a great impact in several aspects of people's lives, the analysis of the individual about the support received is considered important, since it makes it possible to analyze the individual participation in several social spheres, and consequently, conditions for the human development (Gonçalves, Pawlowski, Bandeira & Piccinini, 2011). Therefore, it is reiterated the importance of investigating the perception of social support by people with ASD in academic studies, in situations of social interaction.

The literature reports that the number of people diagnosed with ASD is increasing in the world scenario (Tsai, 2014; Christensen et al., 2016). Regarding Brazil, the published data need to be revised. It is pertinent to cite, however, a study by Paula, Fombonne, Gadia, Tuchman and Rosanoff (2011), which considered the estimates published by the United States - that approximately 1% of the population of children are diagnosed with ASD - at least 1.5 million Brazilians currently suffer from ASD. (Paula et al., 2011).

As the interest of this text focuses on higher education, according to data collected by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research (INEP (Ministry of Education, 2015), in face and distance modalities, three hundred and thirty-eight students with ASD, enrolled in the country, out of a total of thirty-seven thousand nine hundred and twenty-seven enrollments of students with disabilities – which consists of less than one percent of that public (Ministry of Education, 2015). However, according to Ciantelli, Leite and Martins (2015), the mapping of students with disabilities in higher education has been configured as something under construction, and the identification of this public has occurred by self-declaration at the time of enrollment or by admission tests (Enem or admission process) which makes it difficult to draw a real frame of the public mentioned.

In this regard, it should be noted that the number of young people and adults with ASD attending University is increasing (Schalkwyk, Beyer, Martin & Volkmar, 2016), although it is still considerably smaller for young adults with other types of disabilities (Shattuck et al., 2012). It is known, however, that there are few students with ASD who are able of completing graduation (Wehman et al., 2014), a factor linked to difficulties with reciprocal social interaction, difficulties with non-verbal communication and limited capacity to understand and to use the rules of social behavior - essential aspects to learning (Shattuck et al., 2014). Thus, since education constitutes a right for everyone and duty of the State, and that Higher Education Institutions have responsibility to serve everyone with quality, inclusion is imperative, and institutions, family, society and the State should be aware of their rights, in order to provide them a healthy environment adapted to their needs.

When considering that inclusive education policies stipulate the promotion of a common schooling, and linked to the promotion of adequate social support, providing that people with disabilities can reach higher stages of education, this study aims to analyze the academic trajectory and the perception of the social support of a ASD student who attends postgraduate, doctoral level.

Method

Participant

A 38-year-old graduate student, from a public university, selected for convenience, participated in this research.

Tools

For data collection, the following materials were used:

I – Identification form

In order to characterize the participant, this material covered personal identification data, such as: course, schooling, socioeconomic-cultural level declared by the participant, among others.

From the data collected through the identification card, it was possible to identify that the participant attended the math course during his graduation course and attended postgraduate degree in special education area. In addition, the participant declared to be single and belonged to the lower economic class. At the time of the interview the participant did not present any formal occupation, but he was an academic fellowship - PhD, by CAPES - social demand.

II - Social Support Perception Scale (SSPS)

Elaborated by Siqueira (2008), this instrument assesses the individual's perception in his/her broader relationships. The scale is composed of 29 items, divided into two factors. Factor 1, denominated as practical support, contains 19 items related to instrumental and informational support. Factor 2, denominated as emotional support, contains ten items. In face of the items, it is asked how often the participant realizes the possibility of having someone's social support. The answers comprise a four-point sequenced scale, so that: 1 represents never; 2 - few times; 3 - many times; 4 - always. It should be pointed out that, given the interest of this research, the statements that make up the SSPS items were directed to the university context. To do so, the initial question contained in the scale, which in its original version is "When I need it, I can count on someone who ..." was adapted with the addition of "*in the University*", thus being: "*When I need, at the University, I can count on someone who ...*"

III - Interview guide about the accessibility and difficulties, or easinesses to study at the institution

It was employed an interview guideline which sought to ascertain the academic trajectory and the accessibility aspects perceived by people with disabilities, enrolled in higher education.

The instrument includes questions distributed into eight thematic categories: 1 - Reasons for attending the graduation course; 2 - Information on the condition of disability in the selection process; 3 - Adaptations made during the selection process; 4 - Accessibility conditions in the Graduation course ; 5 - Relationships in the University context; 6 - Adaptations in the teaching and learning process; 7 - Assessment of the accessibility conditions in the university campus; 8 - Demands arising from disability.

Procedures

Data collection

The initial contact with the participant was made by e-mail and included brief information about the study: title, objective and thematic to be addressed, as well as the invitation to contribute to the research. After acceptance, the date of the interview was scheduled, which, by suggestion of the participant, occurred in the research laboratory to which he had a post-graduation link. On the day and time scheduled, the researcher went to the combined location, introduced herself and complied with the ethical precepts.

The researcher initiated the data collection procedure applying the data characterization sample. Next, she employed the guiding script to continue the interview, which lasted 90 minutes. Finally, the Social Support Perceptions Scale was applied, in the light of the two university periods, corresponding to undergraduate and postgraduate studies. All the procedures performed were recorded using a digital recorder and then transcribed.

Data analysis

In order to analyze the data obtained with the SSPS, the proposal of Siqueira (2008) was followed, which provides the correction of the scale and the establishment of scores for each factor (Factor 1 = practical support; Factor 2 = emotional support), performed according to the sum of the answers, ranging from 1 "never" to 4 "always". From the calculation of the scores, it was possible to obtain the mean values for each factor and, finally, a comparison was made between the values, referring to graduation and post-graduation.

For the analysis of the reports obtained through the application of the interview script, the precepts of the sociocultural approach (verbal report analysis) were employed, since it could allow access to the higher psychic processes for interpretation of meanings and the ones attributed to certain phenomena. In other words, verbal account analysis was performed, so that meaning was the aggregate of all psychological facts which emerge in consciousness, as a result of the word (Vygotsky, 2001).

Thus, from the transcription of the interviews, the reports were read repeatedly for the identification of words and sentences of prominence and later constitution of the thematic axes. The most importante

passages were: relevance to the topics covered by the study (academic trajectory, accessibility and permanence in the University); the recurrence of the word or subject in speech; variation of intonation; the occurrence of events and deviations in speech (interruption or abrupt change of subject). From this analysis, therefore, it was possible to ascertain the facts reported by the participant, as well as the meanings used by him, referring to his experience.

Ethical Considerations

The research actions outlined in this study were registered and approved by Plataforma Brasil (CAAE 48308815.0.0000.5398). The selected participant was invited to participate in the research and, upon acceptance, signed the Free Consent Term, elaborated according to the resolution of the National Health Council CNS 466/12.

Results

The responses obtained through the correction of the Social Support Perception Scale (SSPS) were analyzed according to the criteria used by Siqueira (2008), which divides the scale into two factors: factor 1 - practical support, and factor 2 - emotional support. In this way, the values referring to each factor were added and then divided, in order to obtain the average value for each academic stage of the participant, as shown in table 1:

Table 1

Mean values and difference in the perception of practical and emotional support regarding the graduation and postgraduate periods

Academic period	Practical support	Emotional support	Difference between the supports	Scale of answers
Undergraduate	1,78	1,50	0,28	
Postgraduate course	3,47	3,20	0,27	1 to 4
Difference between the periods	1,69	1,7		

Regarding the absolute values, it was possible to identify that, during the graduation, in relation to factor 1 "practical support", the participant presented 34 of the possible 76 (45%) and, in relation to the factor 2 "emotional support", he presented 15 of the 40 possible points (37%). During the Postgraduate Course, for factor 1, "practical support" he presented 66 of the possible 76 (87%) and for the factor 2 "emotional support", the participant had 32 out of the possible 40 (80%).

It is observed, therefore, that during the graduation, the participant presented values below the average in the two factors, an aspect markedly differentiated concerning the post-graduation, in which it was possible to identify values close to the maximum punctuated by the scale. These results allow us to ascertain a considerable difference between the perception of the supports received in the two investigated moments, undergraduate and postgraduate. There were no striking differences for types of "practical" and "emotional" support.

Regarding the data obtained through the interview, the analysis for establishing the thematic axes was based on the relevance of the topics covered by the study; in the recurrence of speech; in the difference of intonation, subsequence of events and speech deviations. Thus, the analyzes allowed the identification of six thematic axes, common to the two academic periods (Undergraduate and Postgraduate): Admission; Support nucleus / accessibility; Permanence in the University; Emotional and social factors; Facing easinesses and; Facing Difficulties. The excerpts from the interview which illustrate the classification of the axes are shown in table 2.

Table 2

Thematic axes and excerpts from the interview referring to the graduation and postgraduate periods.

Thematic axes	Academic period	Excerpts from the interview
Admission	Graduation	"I acted as an ordinary student, nothing different. I did not even know I needed some adjustments"
	Post graduation	"All phases (masters) are smooth, I did not need any kind of adaptation, I did not need any help and I was calm. " "In 2014 I entered (doctorate) and I've been very well. I knew I was the second best note of the whole selection process. "
Support nuclei Accessibility	Graduation	"There was never an adaptation, and when I required, I was rejected in the worst possible way." "The evaluations were the main barrier. I understand that the evaluation can be continuous and the only evaluation they provide is the punctual evaluation: two evaluation moments per semester "
	Post graduation	"There is, it exists today. Poorly disclosed but exists. " "I used to do all the exercises, all the lists, the professor followed me, I knew the subject, but the only way to evaluate it is two tests and a substitution test. Nothing else. Tests, the only way of evaluation. In their view. "
Permanence in the University	Graduation	"Teachers assume that if I do not have good grades, I'm stupid. With these terms: "Ass, incapable, has no ability to study math."
	Post graduation	"Library, I used to go to the library, as many labs as I could. As leisure I did aerobics, swimming, running, that is, doing physical activities during this period. " "Anxiety was my main problem."
Socio-emotional Factors	Graduation	Intense depression, enough to think of suicide several times. I felt psychologically affected, because of this abuse of the professors. And all the professors treated me that way, as incapable. "
	Post graduation	"The environment of exact sciences is extremely competitive and very unethical. Lack of ethics in human sciences is recurrent, but it is less intense than the problem concerning exact sciences. And it's becoming easier to deal with situations, both emotional and professional " "Understand how to study, I was able to concentrate after adapting to the process, place, everything that the professor offered me. I improved the repertoire and never had any difficulty. "
Easinesses encountered	Graduation	"Understand how to study, I was able to concentrate after adapting to the process, place, everything that the professor offered me. I improved the repertoire and never had any difficulty. "
	Post graduation	"There is a good relationship with the guiding professor" [...] "The defense was fine"
Difficulties encountered	Graduation	"I had great difficulty in the didactic adaptation process. To study, learning how to study."
	Post graduation	"The difficulty was in the test, the clarity of the evaluation, the punctual test and not in the dialogue; the professor was a complicated person, harsh, very difficult to deal with. [...] I succeeded, did not fail. She gave me the minimum concept and I went on. "

It is pertinent to inform that the last question in the questionnaire referred to the positive and negative aspects that the university experience as a whole provided, and, for this reason, the answer was not classified, due to the two academic periods, but they were analyzed separately, as shown below. According to the participant, the positive aspect was: "A broad view of the world because I lived in a village with 1000 inhabitants" (Interviewed, 2015). Regarding the negative aspects, the participant mentioned that: "[...] there is not enough information for the student who has any special needs or some difficulty, nothing else. The information provided is: there's the classroom and you have to pass the exams, that's all" (Interviewed, 2015). It is possible to observe, therefore, that although he encountered several barriers in his academic trajectory, the participant seems to be satisfied with the benefits acquired as a university student, so that, if the specific problems pointed out by him were solved, the University would be an important experience for students diagnosed with ASD.

Finally, considering that this study was carried out dynamically and based on an interactionist perspective, and that, during the interview, a difference was observed between the reports concerning the period of graduation and post-graduation, a question was added to the participant, referring to the reason why he believed that such changes existed. The answer can be viewed, as follows:

Awareness of the problem. Different types of assessment. I began to improve the relationship firstly with awareness and information that I acquire [sic] related to the bachelor's degree process. Then, the undergraduate assessments are continuous, practical. Grades are always very high, motivating. I continue the treatments³. Before I did not have access, now I have more access. (Interviewed, 2015).

Based on the analysis of the reports obtained, it was possible to verify that during the graduation, the major highlights made by the participant refer to the problems faced during his undergraduate course, and to the emotional factors involved. In relation to the permanence factors, it was possible to identify that the lack of comprehension from the teachers, the absence of support nuclei, the methods of punctual evaluation and the financial difficulties were the main complications for the participant, and for this reason, he needed to extend his course for eleven years. Regarding the socio-emotional factors, it was possible to ascertain the anguish of the participant due to his difficulty in remaining in the University, so, this anguish is reported as Anxiety and Depression Disorder and thoughts of suicide.

Regarding postgraduate studies, the reports follow another direction, not focused predominantly on the permanence and socio-emotional factors, but rather encompassing all the topics questioned in an equanimous way. Although the participant pointed out occasional difficulties with the evaluation method and with a course professor, he mentioned mainly his easiness, with the apprehension of contents, his academic abilities and good relationship with professors. Moreover, in his reports, the financial hindering aspect is no longer present, which is possibly justified in view of the higher values of academic scholarships offered to students at that education level. It was also possible to find out that the "awareness" of his diagnosis and the follow-up with the indicated treatments seem to have contributed to a positive experience of the postgraduate student. Finally, it is important to mention that the continuous evaluation methods were reported by the participant as a facilitating factor for his post-graduation, which allowed him to achieve good grades and to be motivated to continue his studies.

Discussion

The accomplishment of the present study identified that the emotional and social factors had great importance in the academic trajectory, especially during the graduation of the participant of the study. Regarding this, it is pertinent to cite Segar (1997), an adult diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome who reported his academic experience during the baccalaureate course in biochemistry. Segar (1997), informed that when he joined the University, he had the same illusion that he had throughout his life, imagining that a new beginning would mean not having to deal with "jokes". His optimism was not confirmed, however, according to his accounts, his social life in the first year was "terrible," so that he lived the whole year in an apartment with seven other guys, practically living in isolation.

The experience reported by Segar (1997), in his book, allows us to reflect on points of intersection with those mentioned by the participant of this study, so that difficulties with socially adequate behaviors and consequently with social relations become complicating factors, not only for permanence in the

university, but also for other activities life of people with this diagnosis, such as: sharing housing, sports and leisure practice. Throughout the interview, it was possible to identify the importance of social relationships for the participant, followed by his difficulty in initiating and maintaining a conversation; characteristics compatible with ASD diagnosis and, in particular, generating anxiety. In this regard, it is also appropriate to reflect that the participant's university context did not seem to meet his specific demands, so pre-judgments and accusations misinterpreted by the professionals, and possibly the classmates involved, were inferred. This aspect is reiterated by the low values measured in the Social Support Perceptions Scale, demonstrating that during the graduation the participant was possibly isolated (or felt), without the necessary support to face the various issues involved in this academic period.

Gotham et al. (2014), sought to investigate the association between psychosocial constructs (such as satisfaction with social support and the desire for social interaction) and depressive symptoms as factors that may interfere in the development or keeping depressive symptoms in adolescents and adults with ASD. The study hypothesized that the lowest index of satisfaction with social support is associated with higher levels of depression. These findings corroborate the results found in the study presented here, where it was possible to observe that the presence of depressive symptoms of the participant, during the graduation period was associated with low social support perception rates in the same period. These factors can be considered as indicative of absence of knowledge on the part of the institution in accepting the student, or also for not offering the adjustments in the educational process, that might, somehow, meet the specific educational needs of the ASD student during the undergraduate course trajectory

Concerning the academic performance, the analysis of the reports enabled the identification of the participant's difficulties in taking part of the same evaluation processes offered to all the students, which culminated in several failures by grades, and the expiration of the maximum term for conclusion of the graduation course.

Regarding this fact, Grandin (2013) described that there are three types of autistic minds, as: (1) "Picture thinkers"; (2) "Pattern thinkers"; (3) "Word-fact thinkers". The first one is characterized by Grandin as people who think through images and not for verbal thinking and who fail to present great mathematical skills; the second, in turn, is characterized by more abstract thinkers, often in the engineering professions and computer programmers with math and music skills; The third type, finally, is characterized by thinkers capable of reciting the whole dialogue of a film, but with poor drawing skills. This way, Grandin states that the three types of detached minds possess high skills in one specific aspect, but present poor skills in others. These factors, appropriately highlighted by the author, allow us to reflect on the particularities of each individual as something to be identified, encouraged and exploited. However, these aspects do not seem to be adequately addressed in the university context of the participant, since all students are included in the same teaching methods and learning assessment. In this sense, Leite and Martins (2012) point out that Inclusive Education must be supported by a new understanding of the teacher-student relationship and indicates a necessity for changes in the educational system, in the political and administrative sphere, in specific, conceptual, methodological and operational terms, and community education, considering that teaching proposals for people with disabilities should be reviewed, since the initial conception (Leite & Martins, 2012). Thus, considering an ideal context of inclusion, the student with ASD could benefit, if his particularities - such as attentional skills, dedication to studies or easiness in a given area were considered, and alternative methods of teaching and evaluation were proposed, when required.

The results of this study have also allowed us to find out, according to the participant's reports, the lack of support nuclei, or, afterwards, when there was such a nucleus, lack of adequate disclosure of the services offered. Regarding this fact, it is known that the university, as a teaching institution, needs to make changes in the educational system to meet the demand of students with special educational needs. Although it was observed that during the period in which the participant attended the undergraduate degree, his university did not have such support (which may be related to the low rates of social support perception); presently, a response to this fact is given by the creation of nuclei and/or accessibility committee, which seeks to promote conditions which facilitate the access, permanence and completion of the graduation of students with disabilities and other differentiated demands, through pedagogical and institutional measures (Ciantelli. & Leite, 2016).

Concerning the data related to the postgraduate period, there were predominantly positive aspects reported by the participant, especially in face of his academic abilities (such as reading and writing academic articles in several languages) and easiness in the selective processes, being approved without great efforts. Although socio-emotional factors were identified, those aspects do not seem to be as severe as presented during graduation, so they were not considered as decisive for his trajectory in that academic phase. Specific difficulties were identified regarding the evaluation method, which, however, were not considered problematic by the participant in view of being an optional discipline of the course.

In relation to this, the study by Branco (2015), carried out with five postgraduate students with disabilities in a Public University, presents similar data, indicating that this level of education seems to be less conflicting for these students, and one of the facts that assists the academic experience consists of having an advisor (professor) that guides the whole post-graduation course. However, the author pointed out that the university units of the researched institution still present the following main challenges: structural modifications, absence of prejudices, greater methodological support, acquisition of software, better use of information and communication technologies, absence of specialized educational support professionals to deal with the specific demands of this group, which corroborates the findings of this study.

It is also worth mentioning that, even though occasional grants, such as "social skills training" and "academic skills training" were offered to the participant during the undergraduate course, such factors, when isolated, still carry the weight of focusing the participant's deficiency, not transforming the context in which he is inserted. In this regard, Moura (2013), stated that the significant number of studies aimed at improving or training social skills to people with ASD reinforce the positioning of characteristics predominantly intrinsic to these people. The author also questioned: "Is it possible to speak about social improvement if the focus is only on one person and not on the relationship that implies two or more people?" (Moura, 2013, page 43).

Therefore, it is pertinent to mention Omote (2008), who pointed out for the inclusion process to take place, it becomes necessary some adjustments in society, to accommodate people with disabilities, offering them the support they need - social, economic, physical and instrumental - for access and coexistence of this part of the population in the common space and of everybody. Furthermore, according to the author, social inclusion does not disregard the need for empowering the disabled person for socialization and performance of his/her different roles in the community (Omote, 2008). In another text, the author also states that he believes that the presence of incapacitating pathologies is part of normal life, when considering the community, and adds that, in such cases, all efforts must be done in order to reduce their occurrence, or, in face of impossibility, minimize its deleterious effects (Omote, 2006).

It is possible to consider, therefore, the contributions of this study to the psychology area, concerning some aspects which deserve special attention regarding the participation of students with ASD in higher education and postgraduate courses, intending to incite new discussions and future solutions to the questions presented, mainly proposing the revision of teaching actions and promoting the elimination of prejudice attitudes of the university community, addressed to that public, that is, the actions of psychology can help in the specialized educational service and in the recognition of the diversity as human constituent. The specialized look at the participant's report made it possible to know the academic trajectory of a subject who, like many others who have similar diagnoses, but who are sometimes perceived as weird and / or withdrawn, has pursued the university space trying to break educational barriers and experience prejudices in a space that is often seen as democratic. In giving voice to the subject, this study demonstrates that the public university still has much to do for the normative prescriptions, contained in the Brazilian Inclusion Law (Law No. 13,146, 2015) can be carried out on academic grounds.

Final considerations

With the accomplishment of this study, it was possible to identify how a student with ASD perceived the social support offer, during the graduation and post graduation course, at the public university. The employment of SSPS, enabled the verification of the presence or absence of social support in numerical terms, complementing the data obtained with the interview. The discrepancy between the values

corresponding to undergraduate and post-graduate students was noticed, since the participant perceived little social support (practical and emotional) during his baccalaureate course, and much social support during the master and doctor degree. This significant difference was attributed by the participant to the improvement of his / her socioeconomic status, to his awareness concerning the diagnosis and to the close relationship with his guiding professor. It is possible to find out, however, that there are many and complex factors that interfere in the perception of the emotional support of the ASD student, depending, mainly, of the opportunities offered by the context.

In relation to the academic trajectory, it was observed in his reports, considerable difficulty to complete the graduation course, due to barriers with evaluation and teaching methods, as well as the lack of diagnosis and appropriate support. Yet, during the postgraduate course, the abilities favorable to good academic performance, proximity to the guiding professor and greater affinity with the área, seem to have been the most important aspects for the student permanence in the university. The data from the interview therefore showed that the socio-emotional factors and student permanence were the most influential during graduation, considering that they almost made it impossible to complete the course and had an important weight in relation to their mental health. The same did not happen with regard to the post-graduation, considering that the reports did not cover problematic situations, and the participant was able to start and finish the course without any difficulties.

Due to the fact that this is a case study, it is worth mentioning that the results can not be generalized. And this is not the goal of the study either. This study intended to demonstrate the particular academic trajectory of a student with ASD who achieved higher teaching levels, in the public university context, in Brazil. This fact is important, because there are few studies of Psychology and related areas which investigated adult students. The results indicate that specific needs presented by this public may be unnoticed by managers and / or higher education professors, a fact that can lead to the course withdrawal. In the case presented here, it is observed that late diagnosis and lack of support hindered his academic performance and relationships in the university. Even in times in which normatives towards the participation of people with disabilities in higher education has been a reality in the country, there is much to be done, in order to make the public university inclusive, welcoming all the students who attend it. For this reason, the dissemination of these data can contribute to the promotion of educational actions, focusing the prevention or attendance of the specificities presented by this public.

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Received: Jun. 15, 2017
Approved: Oct. 31, 2017

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