

## AUTISTIC YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR REPRESENTATIONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA: AN ANALYSIS BASED ON CULTURAL STUDIES



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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to present an analysis of the representation of Autistic Youth in social media, specifically the narratives of a Podcast made by autistic people, who discuss their own experiences around Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Autistic young people address representations, contest, problematize stereotypes and debate the forms of naming and naturalization of certain characteristics produced in specific historical and cultural contexts. For this study, a historical survey was carried out on the first studies of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to understand the current concepts. The data analysis was based on theoretical references from Cultural Studies (CE), as well as several publications that address autism, the neurodiversity movement and the struggle for rights and recognition of People with Disabilities (PCD). Although autism has been a widely discussed topic today, there is still a significant lack of literature that addresses the representativeness of autistic people in relation to their own identity. Often, discussions focus primarily on treatment and intervention methods, leaving aside the important perspective of the experience and voice of autistic people themselves. It is of paramount importance to broaden the focus of discussions to encompass the diversity of perspectives and experiences of autistic people, ensuring that their representativeness has more visibility. From the analysis, it was possible to perceive the importance of the search for the realization of the rights of autistic people. The representativeness of Autistic Youth has been gaining strength with the neurodiversity movement and the search for the recognition of autistic people as neurodivergent. The representation of Autistic Youth on social media, especially through a Podcast made by themselves, has been an important way to contest traditional representations, problematize stereotypes and promote awareness about issues related to autism and neurodiversity, as well as deconstruct stereotypes historically imposed by society.

**Keywords:** Cultural Studies. Impersonation. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Autistic Youth. Neurodiversity.

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## INTRODUCTION

The following article has as its theme Autistic young people and their representations in social media: An analysis from cultural studies, more specifically the narratives presented in the podcast "Introvertendo". This podcast is conducted by autistic young people who share their experiences, reflections and perspectives on the disorder and their experiences in the digital world.

In this sense, the central analysis consists of understanding how the representations of ASD in the podcast "Introvertendo" are configured, how autistic young people represent themselves and how social media can become tools for the construction of an identity. In addition, it is necessary to analyze the possible implications of these narratives in the deconstruction of stereotypes and in the search for a more comprehensive and sensitive view of autism by society in general.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

### CULTURAL STUDIES

In this sense, the culture of a given society is a dynamic phenomenon that evolves over time, resulting in new cultures. Cultural Studies values the diversity of information and contemporary cultural configurations, becoming a line of research that examines the production and diffusion of specific cultural meanings.

For Stuart Hall, one of the main theorists of Cultural Studies, argues that culture is not limited to a set of traditions, but permeates all social practices, relating to them. In this sense, the analysis of cultural artifacts plays a key role in understanding different cultures. Cultural Studies breaks with traditional conceptions and offers a critical and theoretical approach that seeks innovative interventions in the interpretations of cultural manifestations.

According to Hall (1996, p. 263), cultural studies constituted itself as an opposition political project and its movements "were always accompanied by upheaval, discussion, unstable anxieties and an unsettling silence". Thus, Hall discourses on the various conceptions related to culture and their sphericities of opinions and their counterpoints.

According to Moraes (2019),

In his writings, Hall (2002, p.9 – 10) addresses three theories that discuss representation: the reflexive, the intentional and the constructionist. Each of them presents different approaches to the interpretation of meanings in the messages. In reflective theory, language functions as a mirror that reflects the true meaning that

already exists in the world; in intentional, the one who speaks imposes meaning through language; and, in constructionist theory, language is taken as a social product, in which meanings are constructed through systems of representation. It is in this third view that the author finds a better fit to his conception of representation (MORAES, 2019).

In view of Stuart Hall's theories, his conception will take place in the context of the constructionist theory, in which revolutions of culture occur as a result of technology and the means of production issued in relation to the circulation and cultural exchange of information.

In the conception of Heloisa Buarque de Holanda, Cultural Studies has a certain way of being, presenting itself through various thematic fields and theories, thus causing other problematizations to be woven. There is no way to talk about culture without involving other fields of knowledge, such as: anthropology, psychology, linguistics, art theory, literary criticism, philosophy, political science, musicology. This is because it is a theme that permeates several other disciplines and methodology, in which each one presents its contributions, of theoretical and political interests.

It is familiar knowledge that Cultural Studies concerns the mode of production of cultural analysis, with its principles and academic concerns, with interventions that lead to articulating theoretical concerns and concerns of a social group, because, in the production of knowledge, each one presents different concepts, often contradictory, erroneous and polemical, being subject to reflections.

According to Jodelet (2001), social representations in cultural studies become a set of meanings, with the objective of sharing knowledge. As Hall (1997b) assures us, representation, in cultural studies, involves understanding objects, but not in their proper sense, but from their symbolic function.

For Hall (2016, p. 32), representation, in cultural studies, is a term used to express something about the world and share it with other people, allowing us to understand the production of the meaning of language.

Hall points out that representations are means by which we express and share ideas, allowing us to assign meaning to language and cultural experiences. In this way, representations play an important role in the construction and transmission of meanings within a society.

## TEA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CULTURAL STUDIES

Considering that Cultural Representations are related to the production of meanings and the understanding of something, the following is cited as an example of how the issue of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is presented in the media. Such an instance appears in a standardized way, based on an erroneous perception of the reality of autistic young people and, with this, passes on to society information outside the reality about what the experience of an autistic young person is really like.

According to Hall (2016, p. 32), representation refers to the production of meaning through language. In this sense, the use of the concept of representation, in cultural studies, allows one to symbolize something, to put oneself in its place or for such an instance to be a sample or a substitute. Therefore, it is important to understand meanings, that is, it is important to represent what, according to cultural studies, is related to something that seeks to give meaning.

As already mentioned, one of the central concepts for Cultural Studies is that of representation. This concept, in the sense conferred on it by the field, acts as a significant force in the production of meanings and identities in contemporary times, since it translates into – and through language – what people think, what they signify and what they say about things, thoughts and ideas in a cultural system. In this way, identity is produced from the representations and discourses that are constructed through languages in cultures (AGUIAR, 2018, p.151).

In the meantime, it is worth noting that meaningful representation requires a range of interpretations and identities, in which the individual participates in a cultural system with their meaningful ideas and thoughts. Furthermore, in conjunction with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), it is necessary to think about representations in a broad way, as there are many interpretations and, added to the concepts of cultural studies, the analyses become more comprehensive to question, but it is necessary to have knowledge, from the clinical conception, of cultural approaches to the construction of the person's rights.

In this context, cultural representation works precisely on the issue of understanding the signs, that is, their meanings, which are different for each person who interprets them.

In this sense, it is important to understand more about what autism is, because, when we analyzed the various media representations, it was realized that they are interpreted in an erroneous way, with negative and incomplete stereotypes, as seen in

relation to the issue of the phrase "blue angel", much questioned in the autistic community by activists.

The article by Brilhante (2021) portrays this "blue angel" issue, whose title is "I am not a blue angel: sexuality from the perspective of autistic adolescents". In relation to this expression, therefore, the following text is presented as a response:

The expression "blue angel", widely disseminated to characterize autistic people, acts as a discursive process, normalizing its infantilization and contributing to the invisibility of female autism, as illustrated by the statement of Jasmin (15 years old): "I am not a blue angel. I was not born to be an angel. I'm not asexual. And I'm a girl. This blue one came about because people think that autism is more prevalent in boys and it is not. We, girls, take much longer to get the diagnosis. And this story of this blue angel makes it even more difficult." (Brilhante, 2021, p. 419).

For a better understanding of the stereotypes built around autism, I seek as an analysis the Podcast "Introvertendo", a space for interaction and information of content narrated by autistic people that, for this very reason, proves to be relevant to the study. Therefore, when listening to the episodes with the narratives of media representations, I observed a comparison between the information in order to think about the cultural representations that awaken to the autistic identity, from a cultural perspective, allowing us to problematize the historical process of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), ranging from the first concepts to studies related to neurodiversity.

The podcast "Introvertendo" is a space made by autistic people who talk about themselves, something very important for people to know more about this complex and multifaceted universe called Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and in each episode, problematizations are produced about the understanding of autism, whose arguments are questioned. This is because there are many media productions that feature autistic characters as protagonists.

It is worth noting that the study of the cultural artifact in question focuses on representation, indicating the ways in which autistic people contest representations, problematize stereotypes, discussing ways of naming them, generic ideas of autism that do not contemplate plural forms of life.

Throughout each episode, narratives were seen of autistic young people who reported their opinions regarding the content that social media bring as a representation of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), situating the counterpoints and conceptions of the media, thus presenting their opinions on various content that the media permeates in their communication context.

## CULTURAL HISTORY OF AUTISM

The research seeks to address autism in a broad historical context, considering diverse perspectives from the first clinical studies to significant advances in the field of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). In addition, it seeks to understand the neurodiversity movement, seen as a cultural movement of identity. The inclusion of this movement in the analysis aims to expand the understanding of the different ways of experiencing and understanding autism over time.

Considering that the first clinical conceptions of autism were intrinsically linked to psychiatry and psychology. In 1906, psychiatrist Phouller cites the term autism when analyzing the thought process of children diagnosed with childhood dementia.

Later, in 1911, psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler, notable for his influence on schizophrenia, associated autism as one of the main symptoms of the latter condition.

Bleuler took the term autoeroticism from Freudian theory and subtracted Eros, indicating autism as an effect of dissociation and an attempt to adapt to the pathological process. He described a particular kind of thinking—autistic or derreistic, which is not guided by goals but by affects and desires that appear in extreme forms in schizophrenia and play an important role in the case of autistic children. Thus, the essential symptoms of schizophrenics of autistic children can be encompassed under a common denominator: a rupture in the relationships between them and the outside world (Dias, 2015, p.308).

Based on Freud's studies in the field of psychology and mental health, psychiatrist Bleuler delved into hypnosis, stating that mental processes that are difficult to understand could be unconscious, seeking to study the processes of a psychoanalytic idea.

Although autism was previously mentioned as one of the symptoms of schizophrenia, child psychiatrist Leo Kanner, in 1943, used the term autism, referring to a new condition of disease, using the term "Autistic Affective Contact Disorder", linked to the condition with very specific behavioral characteristics such as: disturbances of affective relationships with the environment, extreme autistic loneliness, inability to use language for communication, presence of good cognitive potential, apparently normal physical appearance, ritualistic behaviors, early onset and predominant incidence in males.

According to Dias (2015), about childhood psychosis:

Kanner, studying childhood psychoses at Johns Hopkins University, in the USA, publishes *The autistic disorders of affective contact* in which he presents a new nosographic entity — early childhood autism — based on the analysis of 11 cases

with severe pathology and unique conditions and fascinating peculiarities (Dias, 2015).

According to Teixeira (2016), about autism studies:

Autism was first brilliantly described by Johns Hopkins University physician, researcher, and professor, Austrian child psychiatrist Leo Kanner, in 1943. He published a scientific article with the report of 11 children who had three characteristics in common with each other that made their behavior very different from that usual for young people of the same age. There was disinterest and inability to relate to other people; a peculiar development of verbal language, marked by echolalia (repetition of words heard by the child); presence of stereotypies (repetition of body movements with no apparent purpose) and pronominal inversion (children who called themselves in the third person), for example, saying "Pedro wants water" instead of "I want water", or even calling oneself "he" or "she" (Teixeira, 2016, p.16).

The analyses thus observed by Kanner are related to behaviors such as difficulties in social relationships and communication with other people, naming this condition "extreme autistic loneliness", which is the main characteristic of autism. In his records, the doctor saw each case as a unique individual. But what they all had in common is that they did not consider them to be cases of mental retardation, epilepsy or any other type of neurological disease, that is, without a prescribed definition. Kanner, like a good doctor, identified common characteristics and differences in all of them, not considering them as symptoms.

Dias comments on Asperger's studies:

In 1943, Hans Asperger presented his thesis at the Faculty of Medicine with cases seen at the Children's Clinic of the University of Vienna, which constituted a syndrome that names childhood autistic psychopathy. A syndrome characterized by difficulties in the social integration of children, but who, unlike those described by Kanner, had a good level of intelligence and language and the symptoms appeared after the third year of life (Dias, 2015).

In his studies, the psychiatrist observed some similar characteristics between autism and schizophrenia, as had already been seen in previous studies, such as difficulty in social affective relationships, isolation, stereotypies and inappropriate behaviors, because, for the psychiatrist, the difficulty of eye contact comes from the beginning of life, placing fanciful thoughts in the picture of the disease of schizophrenia.

The author Dias uses Asperger's work to describe the treatment of children with ASD:



He describes them as a peculiar and interesting type of child who can compensate for their deficiencies by a high level of thinking and personal experience that can lead them to exceptional successes in adulthood. Its purpose in presenting the difficulties of psychopaths was to make legitimate the demand for an appropriate educational treatment for different human beings and with specific and characteristic difficulties (Dias, 2015).

Thus, the behaviors presented in the children analyzed by Asperger presented a condition of above-average intelligence levels, and would not prevent them from performing their social behavior, but interventions from other areas such as psychology and education were necessary, which, together, work on these issues of behavior patterns.

Dias comments on Kanner's research:

Kanner's work at the time was possible because it was English-speaking, while Asperger's was totally unknown not for lack of merit, but because it was restricted to the German and Dutch reader, probably due to the Second World War. It was translated into Russian in 1975 and English, its translation appears in her book *Autism and Asperger's Syndrome* (1991, pp. 37-92) ten years after Lorna Wing made reference to Asperger's work (1991, pp. 1 and 40) (Dias, 2015).

Therefore, the two studies by Kanner and Hans Asperger are of great relevance to the studies of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), since, in their research, they presented autism with different disorders and were disseminated by other researchers. Then, several other debates were emerging around autism.

However, over time, the concept of autism has undergone significant transformations, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the disorder. An important milestone was the contribution of Lorna Wing, an English psychiatrist and autism activist. She brought new perspectives to the discussion by highlighting a triad of symptoms that include changes in sociability, communication, and atypical behavioral patterns. His research has had a profound impact on policy, society, and the scientific community.

In this sense, Dias mentions what Wing referred to on the subject:

Wing points out that there are differences between the accounts of the pioneers. The children described by Asperger developed language before school age, had a broad vocabulary and reasonable grammar, although socially isolated they make attempts to approach them. They have an odd appearance in contrast to the lively and captivating appearance of Kanner's children. They present an "originality of thought" and their interests are channeled into subjects that are preferably abstract and of little practical use (Dias, 2015).



In addition, Lorna Wing has played a key role in spreading awareness about autism and advocating for parents in the UK. His role included founding the National Society for Autistic Children in 1962 and his involvement in the selection of Sybil Elgar to lead the new society. She played the role of science policy advisor to the group, acting as an intermediary between parents and the scientific community. This has helped to provide practical information on how to deal with autistic children and promote a deeper understanding of their families' needs.

The concept of the autism spectrum, introduced by Lorna Wing in 1984, has also become a key contribution to the understanding of autism. Their participation in the composition of the revised criteria for the diagnosis of autism contributed to the creation of a broader perspective, recognizing that autism can manifest itself at different levels of intensity.

Importantly, in each historical period, clinical narratives about autism are subject to constant change, driving new treatments, assessment approaches, and diagnosis. Each evolution in the conceptions of autism aims to improve the quality of life of people living with ASD.

In this context, clinical reformulations and the classification of ASD into levels (Level 01, Level 02 and Level 03) play a central role. These levels recognize that autism is a variable condition, requiring interventions.

Chart 1 follows, elaborated on the levels of Autism Spectrum Disorder and individualized supports.

Chart 01 - About the levels of Autism Spectrum Disorder and individualized supports

<b>AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)</b>	
Level 1: Mild Grade (requires little support)	With support, it may have difficulty communicating, but it is not a limiting factor for social interactions. Problems of organization and planning prevent independence.
Level 2: Moderate degree (require support)	Similar to the characteristics described in level 3, but with less intensity in terms of communication disorders and language impairment.
Level 3: Severe degree (need more support)	It concerns those who have a deficit considered severe in verbal and non-verbal communication skills. That is, they cannot communicate without support. As a result, they have difficulties in social interactions and have reduced cognition. They also have an inflexible behavior profile, having difficulty dealing with changes. They tend to social isolation, if not stimulated.

Source: Neuroconecta website (2022).

## NEURODIVERSITY MOVEMENT

Throughout the history of autism, the neurodiversity movement is of paramount importance, as it highlights the diversity of neurological characteristics, and many people, even at a later stage of life, recognize the characteristics of autism in themselves, leading to an accurate diagnosis and, consequently, greater understanding.

In Toronto in 1993, Jim Sinclair, autistic, at a conference on autism, emphasized a controversial issue in relation to the ideas that autistic families had, through which they argued that their children, because they had autism, were a tragedy of fate. Then, among other issues, Jim countered this imagery, stating that it was not true and that there was no need for lamentation.

Jim Sinclair cites that for people like him, autism parents were part of the problem. It had long been the case, he argued, that fathers and mothers had made the mistake of believing that their children had autism were a terrible stroke of fate. But that was far from the truth, Sinclair asserted. "Do not weep for us," he said, because there was not and never had been a need for weeping (Zucker & Donvan 2017, p. 513).

Jim Sinclair, an activist in the neurodiversity movement, made his criticism about the statements of parents of autistic people, who were looking for a cure and, however, ended up desolate for only looking at their children from a medical-pathological conception, not seeing them as social subjects with rights.

In 1990, sociologist and activist Judy Singer, in her studies, addressed the term "neurodiversity", with previous studies already carried out on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). In the field of medicine, the sociologist makes her analysis as a new concept, not in the sense of disease, as the first conceptions of the disorder were seen, but considering the perspective of psychoanalysis, which had a negative view of autism.

In this way, the author analyzes the disorder in the sense of biological difference, considering that it mischaracterizes the disease, making a parallel with the biodiversity and biological diversity of living beings, but also considering that neurodiversity is the neurological diversity of individuals, being a neurological condition.

According to Aguiar (2018, p. 85) "Neurodiversity has been constituted as an international civil rights movement, more strongly related to the rights of autistic people, perhaps because this is the most influential and active group of activists".

Neurodiversity is, in fact, an international civil rights movement that has gained prominence, mainly for its association with the defense of the rights of autistic people. This is partly due to the significant influence and activism within this group. However, it's

important to remember that neurodiversity encompasses a wide variety of neurological differences, including autism spectrum disorders, ADHD, dyslexia, and more. The movement seeks to promote acceptance and inclusion of all neurodivergences, recognizing diversity as a fundamental part of the human condition.

This movement brings, as a force, the level 1 autistics, the "neurodivergent", forming an identity group, and what matters is the difference compared to the neurotypical (without autism). Breaking with the concepts coming from psychiatry that was involved with psychoanalysis – which had a negative view of autism – the metaphor of the "refrigerator mother", a very cold mother, was used as a redefinition movement, because autism concerns a brain issue, and not a disease.

Aguiar talks about the movement:

The movement argues that divergent brain functioning should be recognized and respected like any other human variation. Among these are differences such as: giftedness, borderline personality, bipolarity, dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyscalculia, autism spectrum, Tourette's syndrome, among others categorized by medical textbooks as pathologies of the order of mental disorders (Aguiar, 2018, p.85).

Ortega then mentions neurodiversity:

As we read at the beginning, "neurodiversity" on Wikipedia and the dozens of websites dedicated to the movement is a term that tries to point out that an atypical (or neurodivergent) "neurological wiring" is not a disease to be treated and, if possible, cured. It is rather a human difference that must be respected like other differences (sexual, racial, among others). Individuals who call themselves "neurodiverse" consider themselves "neurologically different", or "neuroatypical" (Ortega, 2008).

However, the neurodiversity movement seeks to promote recognition and respect for the various forms of brain functioning. This movement goes beyond autism and encompasses a variety of neurological differences, which include conditions such as giftedness, borderline personality, bipolarity, dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyscalculia, Tourette's syndrome, among others. The central point is that these differences should not be seen as diseases to be treated or cured, but as part of human diversity to be respected, similar to other differences, such as sexual and racial differences. The term "neurodiversity" highlights the importance of accepting and valuing the unique experiences and perspectives of people who consider themselves "neurodiverse" or "neurologically different." This represents an important advance in the promotion of

inclusion and in the fight for civil rights of individuals with different forms of brain functioning.

According to Rios (2017), "Such demands follow the model articulated by other social movements that emerged more or less at the same time." It is a time when these demands were built by models of social practices involving politics and society for universal equality.

The motto "nothing about us, without us" is a statement of disability activism (PWD) around the world, dating back to the 1970s. It encapsulates the struggle for rights and benefits in the social context, but goes further, emphasizing the fundamental desire to be recognized as free and autonomous subjects. This recognition is central to enabling persons with disabilities to actively participate in decision-making in various spheres of society without interference from third parties. According to the author, the importance of this motto as a driving force in the political activism of this group is highlighted and emphasizes the need for empowerment and genuine inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of social and political life.

In Brazil, some laws have been implemented to regulate specific issues related to autistic people. Before these laws, autistic people and their families had no legal support and were not recognized as People with Disabilities (PCD).

Law No. 13,977/2020, known as the Romeo Mion Law, amended Law No. 12,764/2012 and Law No. 9,265/1996 to institute the Identification Card for Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Ciptea) and establish other pertinent measures.

These laws were important milestones in the achievement of rights for autistic people, guaranteeing the right to enrollment in the regular school system and adequate treatment. However, there is still a long way to go, as autistic people continue to face discrimination, prejudice, and ableism.

The movement for neurodiversity has gained strength as a social group in different contexts and spaces. The media play an important role in the circulation and legitimization of narratives about neurodiversity. It is increasingly common to see representations of autistic characters in movies, series, soap operas, podcasts and other media.

These representations can contribute to the cultural construction of the autistic person, but they often perpetuate negative stereotypes. However, there are also productions that seek to promote the view of autism as a variation of brain connectivity and celebrate autistic forms of communication and expression.

In the book "Neurodivergentes", author Sophia Mendonça highlights significant examples of representations of autism in the media, such as the character Benê in "Malhação: Viva a Diferença" and the series "As Five". These productions and autistic representation in communication channels, such as the "Asperger's World" channel on YouTube, strengthen the visibility and understanding of the autistic community.

The analysis of media representations is important to understand how they are influenced by the medical perspective and whether they are aligned with the human rights model of disabilities or reinforce the paradigm of pathology. It is also essential to question whether autistic people are heard by the media in the production of this content and whether stereotypes and myths related to autism are reinforced or challenged.

This analysis demonstrates the importance of understanding these productions, as some portray autism faithfully and free of stereotypes, while others may carry negative stereotypes.

Chart 2 below explains the media and their respective synopses, according to the film or series in question and its specificities, and this demonstrates how important it is to understand certain films or series.

Chart 2 - Media

MEDIA	SYNOPSIS
"The Big Bang Theory" Series	It brings together, in the main character, Sheldon, all the characteristics of an autistic Asperger's, although the creators of the series have never admitted the various comments from the public about it. The way it is carried out, the approach is so caricatured that it can be and has been used, including for didactic purposes, to help in the understanding and consequent insertion of autistic people in schools and colleges.
Workout Series	The portrait of autism reveals itself to be faithful and free of stereotypes. An interesting point is the passage to discover oneself as an adult, as a subtle alert for the diagnosis during or after adolescence, which is real and important to develop the quality of life of the person with ASD.
Soap Opera "Amor a Vida"	She was heavily criticized for carrying her hand on stereotypes, blaming her mother and not defining well the degree of the young woman on the spectrum, which made her a poorly developed character throughout the plot, despite a good interpretation by actress Bruna Linzmeyer.
"Well-Being" Program	She made a series of reports on ASD that was the target of harsh criticism from the autistic community, for showing the view of autism as a disease, including the testimony, by a health professional, that <i>stim</i> (stereotypy, a way for autistic people to self-regulate) would not be functional – which even led to a small campaign on social networks, called "#respeiteostim", created by autistic and activist Amanda Paschoal.
Movie "Crazy in Love", with Josh and Raddha	Despite the somewhat psychophobic national title, it stands out for addressing the multiplicity of the spectrum, bringing to the screen a group of autistic people who have difficulties and potentialities linked to hyperfocus, social skills, literalness, crisis of aggressiveness, naivety and intellectual characteristics.

Movie "Temple Grandin"	The film "Temple Grandin", about the autistic woman who was slow to speak, and today has a PhD and is a professor at the University of Colorado, reveals itself to be a faithful portrait of her biographee. Film critic Isabela Boscov points out that Grandin is a well-known figure in the United States, both in restricted circles, for having created more humane ways of handling cattle, and in much broader fields, as functional autism – despite limitations of social skills. It went much further, becoming an expert in an area of activity.
An Extraordinary Lawyer	Recently hired by a large law firm, a brilliant young man on the autism spectrum faces challenges both in and out of court.
Love on the Spectrum	Finding love is not easy for anyone. And, for young people on the Autism Spectrum, exploring this challenging world of relationships  Brings  even more challenges.
The Good Doctor	In The Good Doctor, a young surgeon diagnosed with savantism, a rare psychic disorder, is recruited to work in the pediatric ward of a prestigious hospital. Despite his incredible knowledge in the field of medicine, this doctor cannot relate to the world around him. It remains to be seen whether this difficulty will be a problem when it comes to saving lives.

Source: Own Source and Adapted from Mendonça (2019).

Although autistic people are represented in the media, there is still a lot to advance, as the participation and protagonism of people with disabilities are often made invisible in issues related to them, such as education, work, and health. It is important that media representations count on the active participation of autistic people themselves to define what Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is.

## METHODOLOGY

This study involves, on the one hand, a bibliographic research via consultation of theses, dissertations, books and scientific articles on Representation and on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Social Media, that is, it seeks to ascertain how autistic young people are represented in the media and, on the other hand, to carry out an analysis of selected episodes of the podcast "Introvertendo".

A cultural analysis of six episodes of the podcast "Introvertendo" was carried out, based on the selection of themes discussed by autistic young people in the podcast and the decoupage/transcription of the speeches.

Costa (2003) then asks:

What is, after all, Cultural Studies? This phrase and others like it entitle some books and articles in Brazil and in many countries whose objective has been to define the contours of the intellectual movement that emerged in the post-war political panorama, in England, in the middle of the twentieth century, provoking a great upheaval in cultural theory.



It is necessary to emphasize that this cultural movement is problematized in culture and with popular domination, in which prejudice dominates, with extreme and complex conceptions, within a cultural and popular context.

For Costa (2003),

Cultural Studies (CE) will emerge in the midst of the movements of certain social groups that seek to appropriate instruments, conceptual tools, knowledge that emerge from their readings of the world, repudiating those who have interposed, over the centuries, to the yearnings for a culture guided by democratic opportunities, based on free access education.

It should also be noted that interests are the most compiled in favor of representation for society, being implied in representativeness for the collective and social interest. In this sense, the Lutheran University of Brazil (ULBRA) in Canoas/RS, within a consolidated perception, offers as an area of concentration in its *Stricto Sensu* Master's Degree in Education, Cultural Studies in Education has been standing out for considering various clippings and stories that permeate this cultural and educational context.

Differentiated thoughts within the field of Cultural Studies (CE) are considered and analyzed in their particularities within the disciplinary field and according to each thought and interests, and may cause contradictory and different emphases.

In this context, the terms autistic youth, autistic person, media, cultural studies, representation and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are really investigated and deepened as a priority and, however, appropriate to a methodology that can satisfy the cultural and social sphere.

The perspectives proposed in this work of conceptual terms of Representation and ASD, make us direct the patterns in appropriate ways in arguments drawn in a conception of how people look, analyze and define Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the context of culture that includes the concept of representation.

According to Dias (2021), "Therefore, understanding how autism goes from an unfamiliar object to an object assimilated by a social group allows us to reach the way this group responds and behaves in the face of autism and the autistic person". In this understanding, the author permeates a culture within a significant representation, in order to achieve its representativeness within the scope of that group.

Thus, in order to understand how autism is absorbed by the social environment beyond the medical universe, but starting from it, some historical references are

necessary, as well as the way in which diagnostic manuals describe the disorder, since they are already products of social and historical contexts and are considered parameters to interpret and classify symptoms (Dias, 2021).

For this analysis, I researched the podcast "Introvertendo" on social media, formed by autistic young people who talk to each other about various topics related to autism. In the next item, then, I contextualize with the cultural artifact the podcast tool, linked to social media as a representation of autistic young people, who bring the most varied themes related to cultural representation, specifically about Spectrum Disorder

### PODCAST "INTROVERTENDO"

The analysis of the podcast "Introvertendo" as a cultural artifact was carried out through research on social media. This podcast is made up of autistic young people who discuss various topics related to autism. In the next item, the podcast will be contextualized as a cultural tool on social media for the representation of autistic young people and their themes related to ASD.

During the research on social media in search of a cultural artifact that represented autism in adulthood, the podcast "Introvertendo" was found, made by young Brazilian autistic people. The objective of this podcast is to contribute to and question the representations related to autism present in different media spaces. The podcast episodes analyzed in the research are of great relevance to understand the representation of ASD.

Autism is often represented on social media in a limited way, focusing only on behavioral characteristics and interaction difficulties, without recognizing the identity and rights of autistic people. However, the media plays an important role in the dissemination of relevant information about autism, through series, movies, newspapers, soap operas and other media.

The podcast is considered a cultural artifact that allows access to various topics and is enhanced by communication technologies. It can be used for both educational and entertainment purposes, containing programs with speeches, music, or both. The podcast has stood out as a multifunctional tool, facilitating the circulation of information and contact with different cultural groups.

The podcast "Introvertendo" seeks to deconstruct myths and stereotypes related to autism, providing a more diverse and individualized representation of autistic people. Its

distribution on the internet meets the expectations of social groups that want a socio-communicative communication related to the proposed media.

In summary, the "Introvertendo" podcast is a significant cultural artifact that represents autism in a broader and more diverse way, contributing to questioning existing representations and promoting a more comprehensive understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

In 2018, the podcast "Introvertendo" was started in Brazil, with the aim of promoting discussions about autism. The podcast is composed of autistic young people from the Federal University of Goiás and over the years, it has expanded to the participation of other participants from different states of the country. As of 2020, the podcast has been produced by Brazilian audio streaming company Superplay & Co.

"Introvertendo" releases a new episode every fortnight, addressing cross-cutting themes related to daily life, society and popular culture. The protagonists of the podcast emphasize their voices and identities in the context of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), offering listeners the opportunity to learn more about them through the episodes. The podcast is available on several platforms, such as Google Podcasts, Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Deezer, Castbox, Amazon Music and also has a YouTube channel.

The founders of "Introvertendo" are Tiago Abreu, Luca Nolasco, Otavio Crosara, Michael Ulian and Marcos Carnielo Neto. The name of the podcast was created by Luca Nolasco, and the slogan "a podcast where autistic people talk" was created by Michael Ulian and Tiago Abreu.

For this research, six episodes of the Podcast "Introvertendo" were selected based on titles related to representation and neurodiversity in social media, such as movies, series and soap operas. These episodes were analyzed together with the concepts of Cultural Studies.

The selected episodes cover the period from 2020 to 2022 and were chosen for their relevance to the research objectives. It is worth mentioning that the number of episodes available is extensive, but due to the time available and the need for a thorough analysis, a careful selection was made.

During the selection, aspects such as the structure of each episode, the average duration of 30 to 40 minutes, the search for articles, links and news related to the theme, in addition to the participation of autistic young people and their guests in the presentation of the episodes were observed.

## ANALYSIS OF THE EPISODES OF THE PODCAST "INTROVERTENDO"

The analysis of the episodes of the Podcast "Introvertendo" addresses the importance of the representation of autism and its intersectionalities, such as gender, sexuality and ethnicity, both in the educational and social fields. The need to persist in cultural approaches is highlighted, even in the face of conservative and retrograde positions that seek to curb policies related to these issues.

The selected episodes explore topics relevant to the autistic community, such as representation, representation in the media and culture. Participants discuss the predominance of information about autism in childhood compared to adulthood, highlighting the importance of understanding spectrum diversity and avoiding generalizations.

The representation of autism in the media is addressed, especially the lack of representation of autistic adults, autistic people in the labor market and scarcity of scientific literature on autism in adulthood. The need for more spaces on social media with the participation of autistic people talking about their own experiences is highlighted, contributing to greater representation.

The historical-scientific process of autism is considered as a way to obtain clarification and deconstruct erroneous conceptions. The podcast "Introvertendo" offers a space for interaction in which autistic people seek to clarify concepts and address their experiences and specificities.

Intersectionality, as the relationship between race, class, and gender, is relevant in the context of autism. The representation of autism is also discussed in films, series and cartoons, highlighting the importance of a more inclusive and accurate representation.

Methodologically, I centered my analyses on the following episodes: the first, entitled "Representation and Representativeness of Autism", the second episode, "Autistic Representation in the Media", the third episode, "50 shades of autism", the fourth episode, "World Autism Day: Awareness or Acceptance", the fifth episode, "Ableism" and the last episode, "What is Neurodiversity?"

The following are the episodes selected as shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3 - Episodes

Date	Episode and duration	Title	General Discussion
13.11.2020	34 minutes, 18 seconds	Representation and Representativeness of Autistic People	Autistic people talk about representation, about representation in the media and in culture, emphasizing the fact that the information is more centered on autism in childhood than in adulthood. It is important to mention this, because, currently, there can be a proliferation of productions disseminating information about autism, showing what is thought about autism and what the life of an autistic person is like.
05.03.2021	29 minutes and 14 seconds	Autistic Representation in the Media	<p>Participants discuss the representation of autism in the media, focusing on the lack of representation of autistic women, as well as the predominance of male stereotypes. Criticism is raised in relation to the way autism is portrayed, often in a standardized way and without considering the diversity of the spectrum. The discussion also addresses the notion of "many autisms," emphasizing that each autistic person is unique, and their experiences can vary widely. Media representation needs to avoid transmitting incorrect or stereotyped information, in order not to harm the social life of autistic people.</p> <p>The influence of the media in the reproduction of sociocultural stereotypes is highlighted, which compromises the criticality and individuality of autistic people. While some autistic people may identify with autistic characters in the media, that doesn't mean they can live up to those depictions. The need for other autistic representations that address the social camouflage of autism and consider intersectionalities, such as black people, LGBTQIA+ and other non-normative groups in society, is highlighted.</p> <p>In addition, the lack of nuances in the media representations of autism is mentioned, with a predominant focus on level 03 of the spectrum and little approach to the other levels. The lack of representation of autistic women, especially black women and LGBTQIA+ subjects, is also highlighted. The critical analysis of autism representation in the media highlights the importance of portraying the diversity and complexity of the spectrum, avoiding stereotypes and promoting greater representation of different groups within the autistic community.</p>
06.05.2022	32 minutes, 41 seconds	"50 shades of autism"	<p>Participants discuss the stages of sex, from pre-sex to the act itself, and share their opinions on the subject.</p> <p>The stereotype of the "Blue Angel" is mentioned, in which parents of autistic people tend to infantilize their children, ignoring that they will also go through all stages of development, including sexuality. The academic literature on sexuality and autism is considered scarce, and there is criticism regarding the way autistic people are treated as asexual or devoid of desire.</p>

			<p>Autistic people approach sex as a non-verbal language and consider the sexual act as something new, being cautious about casual sex, as they see it as something more physical than romanticized. The autistic community also highlights that relationships are normalized, full of rules and norms to be followed and considered.</p> <p>Issues related to monogamy and non-monogamy are discussed, with criticism of the contemporary family structure. Each human being, including neurodivergent people, has a different interaction with the other, and neurodivergent people have their own particularities and specificities.</p> <p>Another point of discussion is the sensory sensitivity of autistic people, with hyperreactivity or hypoactivity to stimuli, which can affect their sexual experience. The importance of open dialogue and clarification on sex education, including protection against sexual abuse, is also emphasized. It is necessary to communicate the importance of understanding the sensory differences of the neurodivergent body during sexual interaction.</p> <p>In this episode, the Podcast "Introvertendo" addresses the complexity of sexuality in the autistic community, emphasizing the need for understanding, respect and open dialogue to promote a healthy and satisfying experience of sex among autistic people.</p>
02.04.2021	23 minutes and 38 seconds	"World Autism Day: Awareness or Acceptance"	<p>The criticism is directed at World Autism Day, which is aimed at raising awareness of the disorder. Participants question the need for awareness rather than acceptance, highlighting that autism goes beyond awareness and requires respect and acceptance. They argue that inclusion does not cover everyone, especially those who do not have access to adequate treatment or diagnosis.</p> <p>The importance of a comprehensive dialogue when revealing the diagnosis to the family is emphasized, in order to facilitate the exchange of information and promote better acceptance by family members. The issue of awareness is also discussed, with the perception that the acceptance of autism is something basic and essential, and that awareness is only the minimum necessary. Society must go beyond awareness and seek the respect, participation, and services necessary to improve the quality of life of autistic people.</p> <p>The episode addresses the importance of rethinking the values related to the struggle for autism acceptance, both inside and outside the autistic community. The discussion involves the terms "consciousness" and "awareness", highlighting that they have different meanings. Being aware is a central point of understanding and relates to a good understanding of the discussion at hand.</p> <p>Autism awareness is discussed in relation to acceptance, and it is realized that autism acceptance cannot be achieved without awareness. Society</p>



			<p>needs to be aware of autism in order to accept it without taboos or aversion.</p> <p>To promote awareness and acceptance, it is necessary to join efforts and create more spaces for discussion about autism in various spheres of communication. Topics such as autism in women, the labor market and technology, and the need for more concrete representation must also be addressed.</p> <p>The episode raises important questions about autism awareness and acceptance, highlighting the importance of going beyond awareness and seeking full inclusion and respect for the needs of autistic people.</p>
11.02.2022	33 minutes, 57 seconds	"Ableism"	<p>The issue of ableism in the context of people with disabilities is addressed. Ableism refers to the discrimination, prejudice and stigmatization faced by people with disabilities, being an effect of structural social relations.</p> <p>Disability is understood as an analytical, relational, political, moral, identity, health, mediation, and performance category. It is related to other social categories, such as class, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, generation, age, religion, nationality and regionality. Ableism is perceived as an effect of social structures and relations that have historically discriminated against and harmed people with disabilities.</p> <p>In Marco Antonio Gavério's speech, it is highlighted that ableism does not come out of nowhere, but is the result of crystallized forms of social relations, interactions and perceptions that categorize individuals in a pejorative way. Ableism is a network of relationships that produces conceptual terms based on the perceived capacity and inability of certain individuals in relation to others. This idea is inserted in the argument of normality and abnormality, in which being incapable is culturally situated as abnormal.</p> <p>It is emphasized that people with disabilities are as normal as others, and normalcy should be based on their capabilities rather than their limitations. Ableism is considered a violent act, which manifests itself in different forms of oppression. In the autistic community, ableism is perceived as a complex, personal, and inhumane debate. Some individuals do not admit their disabilities or claim not to have disabilities due to social pressure and the denial of their own disability.</p> <p>The episode addresses the need to raise awareness and combat ableism, highlighting the importance of recognizing and valuing the diversity of abilities and ensuring equal opportunities for all people, regardless of their disabilities.</p>
11.02.2022	32 minutes 44 seconds	What is Neurodiversity?	<p>The episode highlights the importance of the book written by the podcast's host, Tiago Abreu, as the first work in Brazil to address neurodiversity. The book contextualizes the history of autism, from the</p>

			<p>first conceptions to the contributions of sociologist Judy Singer and neurological diversity.</p> <p>The discussion about neurodiversity arises in the field of disability studies, which in recent years have developed reflections on disability that go beyond medical and educational discourse. In Brazil, the discussion about autism was late compared to other countries due to language barriers and the lack of diagnosed autistic people in adult life to talk about autism. It was only in 2013 that the first autistic activists began to produce content in the media and to participate in events and in the elaboration of public policies.</p> <p>The episode highlights the need to talk more about autism and deconstruct stereotypes and negative discourses related to it. Neurodiversity is still a predominantly related topic in the study of autism, although some efforts have been made to develop a field of neurodiversity studies, especially in the UK, to reflect on cognitive impairment.</p> <p>In Carol Cardoso's speech, the book's contribution to the activism of autistic people in Brazil is highlighted, as it reflects the demands raised by autistic people themselves and summarizes their actions. The book also offers an opportunity for articulation and organization of the autistic movement in favor of their rights.</p> <p>The importance of evolving discussions about autism in Brazil and implementing public policies that cover areas such as education, work, health, among others, to effectively intervene in the lives of autistic people is highlighted. It is essential to combat ableism in relation to autism and deconstruct stereotyped ideas that have been culturally imposed throughout history.</p> <p>The podcast "Introvertendo" is mentioned as a platform that enables the participation of autistic people in the production of content and in the deconstruction of stereotyped conceptions about autism. The podcast's audio narratives contribute to reflections on cultural representation and meanings related to autism within the scope of Cultural Studies. In summary, the episode addresses the importance of neurodiversity as a concept that values the diversity of neurological functioning and proposes inclusion and respect for neurodivergent people. It also emphasizes the need to broaden discussions about autism, promote awareness, and deconstruct stigmas and prejudices related to this condition.</p>
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Source: The author, 2023.

## **DISCUSSIONS AND ANNOTATIONS OF THE ANALYSIS OF THE EPISODES OF THE "INTROVERTENDO" PODCASTS**

It is of paramount importance in the cultural perspective of autism and its intersectionalities that also permeate the educational field, as well as the central issues of gender, sexuality, ethnic-racial policies, etc.

It is possible to say – in spite of the fact that there is still a relative marginality of culturalist approaches in the field of Education – that it is becoming increasingly important to persist in them, especially because we live, and not only in Brazil, a moment in which conservative and retrograde positions have gained prominence in statements and administrative measures by representatives of the public power in the direction of curbing, notably, gender, sexuality, ethnic-racial policies, among others (BONIN, 2020).

Not only in the educational field, but also socially and specifically in inclusion, the struggles for public policies notably cover several sectors, regardless of cultural, educational, and inclusive approaches, as there is a link between gender, sexuality, and ethnic-racial policies, as they are intersectional and, therefore, gain prominence in any sector of society.

In view of this, I present some important points for the analysis, in order to understand how autistic people talk about themselves and, then, how discussions related to themes that bring important social factors to the autism community, in the context of representation, such as: race, gender and sexuality, occur.

I clarify that autistic people created the podcast, in which themes can be highlighted that analyze the way content is approached in daily life, the clarification, contestation and criticism of situations experienced and various topics related to their representation, emphasizing the importance of having more spaces on social media with the participation of more autistic people talking about themselves, Because it is something that comes to contribute to more representation.

I consider the historical-scientific process of autism as a help to obtain clarifications on this issue, bringing numerous conceptions that have been built throughout history and that have been deconstructed, as well as it is necessary to consider that it is possible for the autistic person himself to transcribe and analyze erroneous conceptions about autism, as is the case of the posts of the Podcast "Introvertendo".

Therefore, the choice of episodes for analysis is reiterated, with regard to the theme proposed in the dissertation, thus making a convergence of information from the data obtained.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The importance of understanding the concepts of representation in the context of Cultural Studies is highlighted, especially in the context of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Throughout history, autism has been associated with prejudices and stereotypes, often being portrayed as a disease and ignoring autistic people's cultural identities and their rights.

The podcast "Introvertendo" is mentioned as a platform that addresses relevant points about autism in a relaxed and natural way. Autistic people participate in the episodes, raising questions and deconstructing stereotyped concepts. The podcast discusses autistic representation and representativeness, highlighting the importance of addressing topics beyond the autistic child, such as autistic adults, the labor market and the participation of autistic women.

The need to combat ableism in relation to the autistic community is emphasized, which manifests itself through discrimination, prejudice and pejorative expressions. April 2, World Autism Awareness Day, is mentioned as an important date to promote understanding and respect for autism, in addition to stimulating discussions in various spaces and access to treatments and diagnoses for families.

The contextualization of autism in Brazil is considered fundamental, as well as addressing the disorder from a cultural and historical perspective, including studies on neurodiversity that influence issues of gender, sexuality and the labor market.

The importance of expanding the spaces for information on autism, with the protagonism of autistic people themselves, and of increasing representativeness and participation in the elaboration of public policies is highlighted.

It is concluded and emphasizing that talking about autism involves understanding, respecting and understanding the complexity of information around the disorder, not only from a clinical point of view, but in a broad way, recognizing autistic people as social subjects with rights. The lack of recognition of autistic people as subjects of rights results in exclusion and discrimination.

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