

## THE WAY I SEE IT: A PERSONAL LOOK AT AUTISM AND ASPERGER'S

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Future Horizons Publisher, 2008

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- The rate of autism is now 1 in every 150 births. It is four times more common in boys than girls, and is consistently prevalent around the globe, and within different racial, social and ethnic communities.
- The really social people are not the people who make computers, power plants, big hotel buildings. The social people are too busy socializing.
- When I was a little kid, Superman and the Lone Ranger never did anything that was wrong. Today, we have heroes that do things like throw the woman into the water or the woman ends up getting shot; the hero is supposed to be protecting the woman, not letting her get shot. You don't have clear-cut values. And this worries me, because my morals are determined by logic. What would my logic and morals have become if I had not been watching those programs, with clear-cut moral principles?
- My grandfather on my mother's side invented the automatic pilot for airplanes.
- Years ago, a scientist in Massachusetts said if you got rid of all the genes that caused disorders, you'd have only dried up bureaucrats left.
- The best thing a parent of a newly diagnosed child can do is to watch their child, without preconceived notions and judgments, and learn how the child functions, acts, and reacts to his or her world. That information will be invaluable in finding an intervention method that will be a good match to the child's learning style and needs. The worst thing parents can do with child between the ages of 2 and 5 is nothing.
- Passive approaches do not work. Parents need to find the people, both professionals and non-professionals who know how to be gently insistent, who keep the child motivated to learn, are child-centered in their approach, and are dedicated to teaching children with autism in a way they can learn, instead of insisting the child learn in the way they teach.
- All minds on the autism spectrum are detail-oriented, but how they specialize varies. There are three different types of specialized thinking: visual thinking/thinking in pictures; music and math thinking, verbal logic thinking
- Keep in mind that for visual thinkers, verbal responses can take longer to form, as each request has to be translated from words to pictures before it can be processed, and then the response needs to be translated from pictures into words before it is spoken.
- Young children with autism spectrum disorders do not learn by listening to and watching others, as do typical children.
- My black and white thinking led me to believe that clients would always be 100% satisfied.
- Our public education system is built upon the premise that children enter school with basic social functioning skills in places. Kids with autism, with their characteristic social thinking challenges, enter school already lagging far behind their classmates. Teachers who do not recognize this and make accommodations to teach social thinking and social skills alongside traditional academics, just further limit the opportunities children with ASD have to learn and grow.
- Many children and people with autism are not able to take all the facts they know and link them together to form concepts. What has worked for me is to sue my visual thinking to form concepts and categories.

- There is often too much emphasis in the world of autism on the deficits of these children and not enough emphasis on developing the special talents that many of them possess. Talents need to be developed because they can form the basis of skills that will make a person with ASD employable.
- I discovered that when I got in a cattle squeeze chute it relieved my anxiety. Fixations can be great motivators if they are properly channeled.
- Teaching social skills is very important, but if the person with autism is stripped of all their special interests, they may lose meaning in their life. I am what I think and do, more than what I feel.
- Rigidity in both behavior and thinking is a major characteristic of people with ASD. They have difficulty understanding the concept that sometimes it is okay to break a rule. Teaching flexibility at a young age helps teach common sense.
- Three basic levels of conceptual thinking: learning rules, identifying categories, and inventing new categories, the last of which is very difficult for ASD children.
- Children with ASD do not belong in a bubble, sheltered from the normal experiences of the world. Sensory issues do need to be taken into consideration, but aside from those, parents may need to push their child a little for any real advancement in learning to occur.
- For people on the ASD spectrum, sensory experiences that have little or no effect on neuro-typical people can be severe life stressors. Loud noises hurt my ears like a dentist's drill hitting a nerve. For some individuals, the seams in a pair of socks or the rough texture of materials like wool can feel like being constantly burned. That explains why a child's reaction is to take them off. He is not being defiant; the socks are physically hurting him.
- Some of the energy-saver fluorescent light bulbs have such a high degree of flicker that I cannot read with them.
- There are two kinds of auditory problems: Sensitivity to loud noise in general and not being able to hear auditory detail such as discerning one voice among other sounds, or hearing the hard consonant sounds of words.
- Visual processing problems are common in individuals with ASD. They can result in lack of eye contact, staring at objects, or using side vision. These individuals may have difficulty with visually holding still...they constantly scan their surroundings for visual information in an attempt to gain meaning.
- Children who remain nonverbal may be hearing only the vowels and no consonants.
- Eye contact is still difficult for me in noisy rooms because it interferes with hearing. It is like my brain wiring lets only one sense function or the other but sometimes not both at the same time.
- Normal people can discriminate which sound has a higher pitch, and therefore their brain registers two sounds. I cannot do this because the sounds blend together.
- Sensory integration activities such as relaxing deep pressure, swinging, visual tools, and other strategies be components of any good autism program. These activities help the child's nervous system calm down so that the child can be more receptive to learning. To be effective, sensory activities must be done every day.
- Therapies for children with autism are interrelated. We cannot work just on behavior, or just on social skills, or just on sensory. The progress achieved in one area will affect functioning in another.
- Swinging helps stimulate language and is why a growing number of speech and occupational therapists hold joint therapy sessions to improve learning.
- Problems with organizing information affect children's ability to form categories, the foundation for later concept formation. Difficulties people on the spectrum have with multi-tasking would also fall into this category.

- To understand the mind of a child or adult who is completely nonverbal, without oral, sign or written language, you must leave the world of thinking in words. This can be quite challenging for many people. Our society functions through the spoken word. For the majority of people, words are their native language. It is difficult for them to step outside this very basic way of relating and imagine something else. Some neuro-typicals, especially those with stronger creative sides, can do this. Other neuro-typicals struggle immensely in understanding this concept.
- As a society, we equate intelligence with language. Smart people are verbal people; verbal people who can express themselves better than most are assumed even more intelligent. People who cannot use language are perceived as dumb. We do not usually stop and question whether oral motor skills, rather than intelligence skills, might be causing the language impairment. Poor kid/adult: he cannot talk. And, in our minds we continue with the most damaging thought of all: and therefore he has nothing to say. Empathy
- See Amanda Baggs: In My Language (Youtube)
- In ASD, attention-shifting is slow, and nonverbal impaired individuals are often slower than individuals with milder forms of autism. Clipping can occur in individuals who are both verbal and non-verbal. Attention-shifting can be so slow that the person may miss half the information the teacher is trying to convey.
- Research has shown that in autism there is a lack of interconnections between different parts of the brain. Dr. Eric Courchesne suggests that in autistic brains, large neurons that integrate different brain systems are abnormal.
- Three major behavioral sources of tantrums, hitting and meltdowns are frustration because the person cannot communicate, the need for attention, to escape from a task they do not want to do. Deciphering the correct motivator is important to identifying an appropriate solution.
- Consistency is calming; surprises produce anxiety in most individuals with ASD. The consistency provided by doing the same thing again and again, and getting the same result alleviates some of the anxiety associated with the rest of the world being in a constant state of change.
- At one group home, many outbursts and tantrums were avoided by using a touch schedule instead of a picture schedule. Ten minutes before breakfast, they were given a spoon to hold and ten minutes before a shower, they were given a washcloth. The tangible object communicated what was to happen and the ten-minute period gave their brains time to process the sensory information.
- Educators find it difficult to manage the behavior outbursts that can accompany autism, and often resort to punitive tactics, which have little or no effect on an autistic child who is having a tantrum due to sensory overload. Abstract concepts about morality and behavior do not work. The child has to learn by specific examples.
- The behavior, good or bad, of a child with ASD, largely depends on the adults' behavior. If you want to change the behavior of the child, first look at your own.
- Until a person participates in activities that are shared with other people, the teasing will continue. I strongly recommend that students with autism/ get involved in special interest clubs in some of the areas they naturally excel at. Enroll them in a university where they can be with their intellectual peers.
- Rudeness is inexcusable.
- I have learned that there is a whole upper layer of abstract thought mixed with emotion that I do not have. Thoughts and emotions are separated in my mind; they do not intermingle and affect one another. Thinking is concrete – it happens in pictures in my mind.

- Theory of Mind is the ability to know what other people may be thinking. Involved within Theory of Mind is perspective taking being able to think about and understand an event or a situation through the eyes of another. These skills must be taught to ASD students.
- Written instructions are best for me, as they are for a majority of children and adults with ASD.
- Teach the Golden Rule, one specific example at a time.
- My career gives my life meaning.
- People on the spectrum often have a strong sense of social justice. This sense is probably on a separate brain current from the circuits that are responsible for emotional relatedness.
- People on the spectrum are more concerned about the lower portion of Maslow's pyramid.
- Geeks swoon over the new technology they create; social addicts swoon by communicating with the technology and showing it off as a status symbol. Is one better than the other? I think not.
- Our goal is not make these individuals find meaning in our lives, but for us to help individuals with autism/Asperger's find meaning in their own.
- Even if a person with autism was more aware of social cues that go on between people, their inability to quickly shift focus would prevent them from catching these short, silent messages that people frequently use to communicate nonverbally.
- Many adults with autism have commented that they finally discovered, at a later age, that normal people have a language of their eyes; however, they could never understand it. Not being able to rapidly shift attention may be the reason.
- Social Rules
  - In order to maintain a civilized society, there must be prohibitions against doing really bad things such as murder and arson. Learning to play fair will help a child grow into an adult who will not commit really bad things.
  - All civilized societies have courtesy rules, such as saying please and thank you. These rules are important because they help prevent anger that can escalate into really bad things.
  - Sins of the system are rules that must never be broken although they may seem to have little or no basis in logic. They must simply be accepted within our country and our culture. In the U.S., the two major sins of the system are sexual transgressions and drug offenses. Never commit a sin of the system because the penalties are usually very severe.
- My emotions are all in the present. I can be angry but I get over it quickly. When I replay scenes, the emotions are no longer attached to them.
- Self-esteem is built little by little through real achievements.
- The literal, concrete mind of the autistic child requires that self-esteem be built through tangible accomplishments, couple with verbal praise.
- Today, kids are being reinforced for the littlest things. It is setting up a cycle of needing approval for every little thing they do.
- Especially when kids are young, encouraging them to engage in activities with visible, tangible outcomes helps them learn the direct connection between their actions and their abilities, their sense of mastery and control over their world. You cannot build things or paint picture or create anything concrete without making choices, learning sequencing skills, seeing how parts related to a whole, learning concepts and categories. This, in turn, lays the groundwork for more advanced skills to form, skills indigenous to the less-concrete world of social interactions.
- Perspective-taking, being able to look beyond oneself and into the mind of another person, is the single most important aspect of functioning that determines the level of social success to be achieved by a child or adult with ASD.

- Good teachers tend to do the same thing, regardless of the theoretical basis of the teaching methods. They have a natural instinct about what works and does not work for a child and they adapt whatever method they happen to be using accordingly.
- Some people see the glass half-empty and are pessimist; others see the glass half-full and are optimists. It is no different among people with autism and Asperger's we still share common personality traits aside from the different ways our brains are wired. Not all the problems within autism arise from the autism. Some arise just because of who we are and the personality we each have.
- As our understanding grows of how the brain works, one day we may discover that savant skills are resident in every human being, but that the use of language masks our ability to access these parts of the brain. Perhaps then this understanding will promote acceptance of people who, while lacking social skills, can make meaningful contributions to society just the same.
- Dr. Simon Baron-Cohen at the University of Cambridge has discovered that there are significantly more relatives who are engineers in the family histories of people with autism than in typical families.
- In many ways, today's always connected society has put more social demands on people, and a lack of social ability may be seen as more of a handicap than in the past.