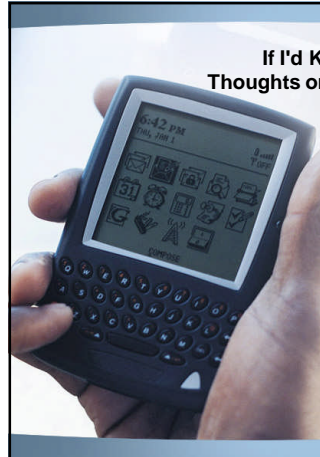


# THE AUTISM EDUCATION PRESENTS...


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## If I'd Known Then What I Know Now: Thoughts on Life on the Autism Spectrum

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## IMPORTANT NOTICE!

**My background is in consumer psychology and marketing. I am NOT qualified to offer medical or psychological advice. What you hear in this talk may inspire ideas, but you should *consult a qualified professional before implementing any such ideas.***




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## A Note on Altitude of “Functioning”

- Individuals on the autism spectrum vary considerably on
  - Overall abilities
  - Specific challenges—e.g.,
    - Academic
      - Verbal
      - Quantitative
    - Social
      - Family
      - Romantic
      - Work-related
    - Executive function
    - Sensory
  - Those who are more verbal may be able to express what others cannot

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## “If It [Were] Easy”

- Problems we face are often superficially similar to those faced by “neurotypicals”
  - Relationships
  - Understanding others
  - Conflict
  - Budgeting
  - Limited sensory abilities
- How we handle these problems

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## Why Do These Symptoms Go Together?

- Sensitivity to
  - Noise
  - Coarse materials
  - Food tastes
- Poor handwriting
- Difficulty maintaining eye contact
- Frustration with “spontaneous coordination”
- Difficulty imitating others
- Impaired spatial ability
  - Difficulty driving
  - Following maps
- Difficulty with sensory integration
- Difficulty doing arithmetic despite intelligence
- Depression

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### Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDDs)

- Categories
  - Autism
  - Asperger's Syndrome
  - Rett's
  - Pervasive Developmental Disorder—Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)
  - Childhood Degenerative Disorder
- Differences
  - Within-group
  - Between-group
- Meaningfulness of diagnostic distinctions
- Rigidity of criteria
- Arbitrary nature of standards
- No mention of sensory challenges



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### Individual Variations

- Not all people with AS have the same experiences!
  - Sensory wiring
    - Extremization of abilities
  - Context
    - Family
    - Culture
    - Social
    - Opportunities
  - Compensatory abilities
  - Maturation
  - Comorbidity
- Specific individual perspectives and values

For more background on autism, see "The Big Picture of Autism" at <http://www.intro2autism.com>

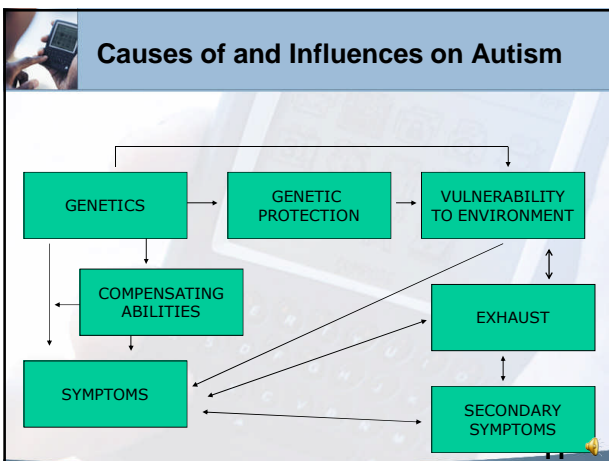
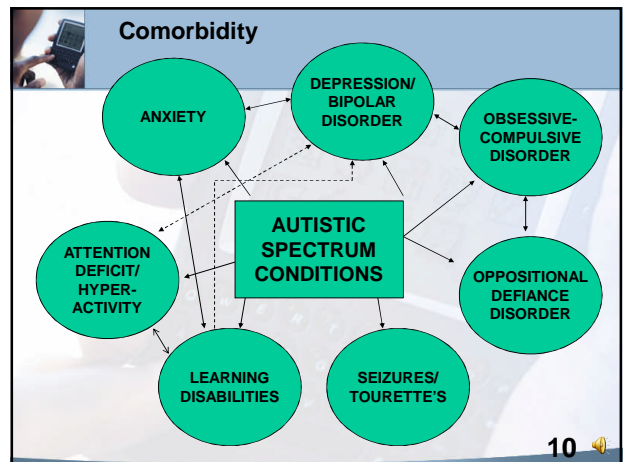
8

### El Niñofication



- The tendency to move to one *extreme* or the other on performance or behavior
  - Examples
    - Sensitivity
    - Confrontation
    - Math or verbal abilities

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### Brief background

- Autism suggested by school psychologist in kindergarten
- AS diagnosed at age 33
- First date at age 35

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### The Context of Autism: My Case

- Privileged background enabled me
  - to take time needed
  - to avoid many frustrating situations
  - to end up in academia
- Confound: Immigrant to new culture
- Parents divorced: Then why the need for a father?
- Family of proud eccentrics

A very wise man once said that...

**"Being normal is not a badge of distinction!"**

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### Some Childhood Experiences

- Pressures for conformity
- Social overwhelm
  - “Thimble” of socializing (Attwood)
  - “Unauthorized leadership”
- Teasing
  - Had actually forgotten about incidents
  - “Against the rules” to beat up the bullies even though I could
  - Limited by personal and social status

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### Why Maintain Contact With My Father After the Divorce?

- Now embarrassed to admit:
  - Did not understand why I would need to interrupt my very comfortable life
  - Fear and resentment of temporarily giving up more affluent surroundings
  - Fear of having to eat foods I did not like or loss of other privileges
- Did not want to stay overnight or go along on trips
- Complication: Sister saw father as more of a positive opportunity
- “Escape” to the U.S.
- Annual Christmas phone call

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### School Problems

- Early on
  - Frustrated by school
  - Some learning difficulties
    - Initially had remedial reading instruction
    - Subsequent problems in doing massive arithmetic
- Handwriting
  - Constant criticism
  - Variability from time to time
  - Learned to type early on!
- Group work
  - Very “inefficient”
  - Decisions made by “unworthy” others


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### Other problems

- Physical education
- Fear that teachers and classmates were “communists”
- Discomfort of expressed disapproval of my privileges by
  - Classmates
  - Teachers

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### Trying to “Psych Out” Others



- Drawing a Christmas tree— what was missing?

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### Later Experiences

- Why did certain things come so easily to “stupid” others?
- How can you not enforce the rules?!

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### Diagnosis--Round 0


- “Comorbidity”
- Diagnosed with depression at age 26 before entering Ph.D. program
- Off-hand comment by general practitioner treating gastro-intestinal problems  
“I am not really sure...” Was I being frivolous?  
A sigh of relief!
- Had actually raised the possibility with counselor earlier
- Medication helped tremendously on discomfort, speech fluency



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### Diagnosis—Round I

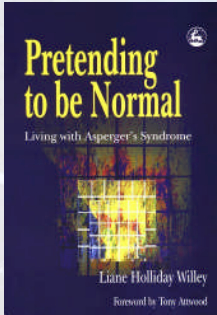
- Diagnosed at age 33
- Had sought consultation for ADD due to attentional problems
- “Aswerverer’s Syndrome?” “What do you mean, high functioning autism?!”
- DSM IV descriptions made sense
- Break-up of psychologist and psychiatrist



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### Round II

- Had been aware of social and concentration issues
- *Pretending to Be Normal* went to the heart!
  - Spatial orientation
  - Hyper sensitivity to stimuli
  - Same beautiful writing style!
  - Problems with spontaneity



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### Round III

- Greater disclosure
- Went back to see psychiatrist and was persuaded to see a psychologist, too
- Became involved in autism organizations
  - Met many interesting people—autism conventions are major social events for those who choose!
  - “There but for the grace of God go !!”

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### Round III, Continued

- Family receptivity and resistance
- Is the autistic spectrum part of my identity?
- How much disclosure is too much?

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## Round IV

- Increased interest in autism
  - Was asked to write article
  - Decided to write a book
- Theoretical and academic interest
  - Integrative theories
- Internet inquiries



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## Some Areas That Have Challenged Me

- Sensory
- Imitating others
- Spatial perception
- Spontaneous Coordination
- “Confrontations”
- Making and receiving requests

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## Sensory Issues

- Difficulty telling “target” voice from general background
  - Might as well skip cocktail parties. Better to make individual good impressions the next day.
- Sensitivity to and irritation with noises
  - E.g., laugh tracks, loud phone ringing
- Vision
  - Eye convergence
  - “Tracking” objects
  - Focus
  - Visual memory

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## Imitating Others

- “It is better to learn by adaptation than by imitation”
- Spontaneous movements must be verbalized

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## Spatial Perception


- Use MapQuest rather than maps!
- Shortcuts—however well intentioned—can backfire
- Is driving really worth it?
- It’s (usually) OK not to take passengers
- When one has to drive, timing is critical

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## Romance

- Problems
  - Spontaneity
  - Conflict
  - Making and receiving requests
- Is the Internet the answer?
  - Pros:
    - Searching by criteria
    - Avoiding face-to-face approach and rejection
  - Cons:
    - Beware of geography
    - May stay in cyber space


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## Understanding Others

- I of all people should be tolerant—but was I and am I?
- Beauty really may be in the eyes of those beholders
- Just when should one be literal?
- Do they have a sense of humor?
- “Spirit” of the law?
- Risk may genuinely be worth it to others


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## Empathy—do I have it?

- Understand that others have feelings
- Very sensitive to suffering of others
- Excessive conscience?
- Possibly less intuition about specific feelings
- However, trained as scientist to avoid the “Fundamental Attribution Error”
- Can the “Golden Rule” be taken too far?


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## “It Takes Every Kinda’ Perspective to Go Around the Autistic Spectrum” with apologies to Robert Palmer

- Specialists and medical practitioners
- Teachers
- Parents
- Individuals on the Spectrum
- Biomedical researchers
- Psychologists and Counselors
- Theoreticians
- General population
- Other(?)

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## Additional Information

- <http://www.larsperner.com>
- <http://www.AspergersSyndrome.org>
- <http://www.intro2autism.com>

**Recommended books:**

- Liane Holliday Willey, *Pretending to Be Normal*
- Stephen Shore, *Against the Wall*

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## Writings of Possible Interest

- “If I’d Then What I Know Now: What I Have Learned About Life With Asperger’s Syndrome--And What Still Eludes Me.”
- “Preparing To Be Nerdy Where Nerdy Can Be Cool: College Planning For The High Functioning Student With Autism.”
- “Literal Detours: Propositions On Abstraction In High Functioning Individuals With Autism.”
- “Even If the Emperor Does Wear Clothes, Should It Bee Everyone’s Goal to See This? Preparing for a Happy Life.”
- “Perspective on Autism.”
- “The Big Picture of Autism”
- “I Don’t Know What I’m Missing!”

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The screenshot shows a website with the following content:

- Navigation:** Home, About, Contact, Search
- Header:** AUTISM AND ASPERGER'S SYNDROME
- Menu:**
  - Autism Theory, Science, and Perspectives
  - Genetics
  - Autism Links
  - Sign My Guestbook!
  - My Blog - Thoughtful Reflections
  - Recommended Reading
  - NEW! Back to School Advice
- Quick Links:**
  - Autism Organizations Across the World
  - Autism Society of America
  - Autism Education Foundation
  - Online Asperger Syndrome Information & Support (OASIS)
  - MAAP Services (Asperger's Syndrome)
  - ANCA (IB) Foundation
  - Roger N. Meyer's Site
  - The Tallahassee Autism Support Coalition
  - WrongPlanet.net
  - Autism Planet
  - University of Tennessee Online Survey for Mothers of Children With Autism
  - Survey for AD/AS on the Autism Spectrum Who Have Experience Being Self-Employed
- Author Bio:**

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http://www.ConsumerPsychologist.com  
Blog: http://thehighfunctioningautism.blogspot.com
- Footer:** Welkom

Introduction to Autism - Mozilla Firefox

http://www.aspergersyndrome.org

THE BIG PICTURE OF AUTISM

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http://www.AsperseraSyndrome.org

[Introduction](#)  
[Diagnosis and Diagnostic Categories](#)  
[Paradoxes of Autism](#)  
[Autism and Genetics](#)  
[Brain and Physiological Differences](#)  
[Comorbidity](#)  
[Perspectives on Autism](#)  
[Autism and Values](#)  
[Learning Issues](#)  
[Five Factors of Performance](#)  
[Theory of Mind And Empathy](#)  
[Humor](#)  
[Some Questions and Answers](#)

INTRODUCTION

Autism is a complex and paradoxical condition. Looking at all the findings can be quite overwhelming. This material provides a brief introduction to autism and related diff topics to each other.