



PERSPECTIVES

A publication for parents and professionals serving individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Autism Awareness Month

April is Autism Awareness month. Instead of discussing the “deficits” challenging people on the autism spectrum, here are a few advantageous traits! For every down side to autism, there seems to be a positive - an unusual trait that rarely appears among the “typical” community, but shines out among autistic folk. These plusses are well worth celebrating.



1. People on the Autism Spectrum rarely lie. We all claim to value the truth, but almost all of us tell little white lies. All, that is, except people on the autism spectrum. To them, truth is truth -- and a good word from a person on the spectrum is the real deal.

2. People on the Autism Spectrum live in the moment. People w/ASD truly attend to the sensory input that surrounds them. Many have achieved the ideal of mindfulness.

3 People with Autism rarely judge others. Who’s richer? Smarter? For people w/ASD, these distinctions hold less importance than for typical folks. In fact, people on the spectrum often see through such surface appearances to discover the real person.

4. People on the Autism Spectrum have fewer hidden agendas. Most of the time, if a person w/ASD tells you what he wants -- he is telling you what he wants. No need to beat around the bush, second guess, and hope you’re reading between the lines!

5. People with Autism are not tied to social expectations. If you’ve ever bought a car, played a game or joined a club to fit in, you know how hard it is to be true to yourself. But for people with autism, social expectations can be honestly irrelevant. What matters is true liking, interest and passion.

6. People with Autism have terrific memories. How often do typical people forget directions, or fail to take note of other details? People on the autism spectrum are often much more tuned in to details. They may have a much better memory than their typical peers for all kind of critical details.

7 People with Autism are less materialistic. at course, this is not universally true -- but in general, people with autism are far less concerned with outward appearance than their typical peers.

8. People with Autism play fewer head games. Most autistic people don’t play “mind” games -- and they assume that you won’t either. It’s a refreshing and wonderful change from the Peyton Place emotional roller coaster that mars too many typical relationships!

9. People with Autism open new doors for neurotypicals. For many neurotypicals, having an autistic person in our lives has had a profound impact on our perceptions and expectations.

10. People with Autism are passionate. Of course, not all autistic people are alike. But many are truly passionate about the things, ideas and people in their lives. How many “typical” people can say the same?



Top Ten List created by: Lisa Jo Rudy

Reprinted from an e-mail from Tanja Scalf

Tony’s Perspective

From my clinical

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experience I consider that children and adults with Aspergers Syndrome have a different, not defective, way of thinking.



The person usually has a strong desire to seek knowledge, truth and perfection with a different set of priorities than would be expected with other people. There is also a different perception of situations and sensory experiences. The overriding priority may be to solve a problem rather than satisfy the social or emotional needs of others.

The person values being creative rather than co-operative.

The person with Aspergers syndrome may perceive errors that are not apparent to others, giving considerable attention to detail, rather than noticing the "big picture".

The person is usually renowned for being direct, speaking their mind and being honest and determined and having a strong sense of social justice.

The person may actively seek and enjoy solitude, be a loyal friend and have a distinct sense of humour.

However, the person with Aspergers Syndrome can have difficulty with the management and expression of emotions.

Children and adults with Aspergers syndrome may have levels of anxiety, sadness or anger that indicate a secondary mood disorder. There may also be problems expressing the degree of love and affection expected by others. Fortunately, we now have successful psychological treatment programs to help manage and express emotions.

Tony Attwood

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Quotations

In my clinical experience I sometimes hear a comment from a person with Asperger's Syndrome that clarifies an area that had previously been

confusing. Just a few simple words can explain a complex behaviour or thought process or provide an insight that is remarkable. This section will include such quotations and I welcome additional quotations from readers of this web page.

When discussing eye contact, Mick said, "I look at an inanimate object. It helps me to think. I can concentrate more if I look at a blank wall but people think I am ignoring them".

Caroline writes down her inner thoughts as a dialogue to herself. This is a constructive activity but she can be very critical of herself. The following is an illustration that is applicable to us all. "The worst thing about disappointing yourself is that you never forgive yourself".



Guy Perkins has suggested the following quotation from a David Byrne song as illustrating a characteristic of some adults with Asperger's Syndrome:

"When I say something once my lips are sealed.
Say something once, why say it again?"

The following quotation is by Geraldine Robertson, a lady with Asperger Syndrome who lives in Tasmania. She provides a vivid description of the school playground.

"They told me I would have friends but the playground was a nightmare of noise and fighting, lying, and cheating and people going fast, all knowing what to do but me. It was like a flock of birds, wheeling, surging, changing direction at a whim, all knowing what to do, and all in unison except for one at the back. Me. I had to watch and

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anticipate and follow so I was never quite in harmony. Sometimes I got left behind and there are hawks out there. I didn't know how to tell who was a friend."

Reprinted from <http://www.tonyattwood.com.au/publications.html>

INTROSPECTION

by Adrian Flynn

Locked in a body that knows how to function,
This mind knows the rules, but not how to speak.
Rehearsed interaction is laboured, but managed,
Learning language and actions, but still feeling meek.

Fragments of knowledge are processed and filtered,
To sift out the right way to smile and to cry.
Emotionally barren and socially awkward,
Avoiding eye contact, mistaken for shy.

Hang on to a pattern, a routine, a ritual,
To feel safe with existence, to know how to live.
Avoid changing backgrounds and unknown
encounters,
From anxious to full fearful panics, they give.

All manner of subjects researched infinitum
Obsessive behaviour is par for the course.
First one then another thing learned to its limits,
All referenced and noted to every last source.

First learning then working, to the exclusion of
friendship.
One minded and narrow, to a depth never seen.
A gulf holds me far from the mind of all others.
Confused where I fit in; somewhere in between.

Reprinted from <http://www.tonyattwood.com.au/publications.html>

Do you "have" Asperger's?

If they gathered us all in one place, all 20 million of us, our number would be similar to that of the entire population of Australia. We could have been a continent of our own!

Now suppose you then take 66 thousand people who

do not "have" Asperger's and disperse them evenly among this theoretical continent, shake well, and observe: what would the symptomology be for those 66 thousand "others"?



Their two main defining symptoms would be:

1. Lack of a strong focus or drive in their lives. Their interests tend to get dispersed, and are often counter-productive.
2. Desperate need for social coherence and grouping, and an inability to define themselves without this. Inability to spend time alone (The systems that our culture would have created would cater for our social needs in a way that is balanced with our advancement, and caters to our individualistic needs, but these would be insufficient for these "special needs" people).

As a group, they would also be more prone to fight and start wars. Wars rely on a certain social affinity that we do not have. We would not feel the same sense of belonging, at least not in a way that is beyond a theoretical concept.

The full list of symptoms would be much longer and a large number of those would relate to the difficulty of those "different individuals" in integrating into our social structures and our individual-based social environment.

Obviously this sounds strange, and you may even question the symptoms or the logic behind them, but this is precisely the point: it is impossible to assess how we would be like in an environment where 'the way we are' would be the norm, and it would be impossible to imagine how we "Aspergians" (a term we use on this site) would be like if we did not grow in an environment where we are a minority surrounded by a foreign social context.

I think it is time we thanked the researchers, theoreticians and professionals who helped identify the phenomena and make it public. The work of Dr Asperger and the follow up by the likes of Wing and Atwood has been pivotal in identifying that there is indeed a group of people who are born with a neurology which is inherently different to that of the

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general population. This group processes information differently, has a different set of social interactions and a wide variety of uncommon traits such as a high sensitivity to external stimuli.



We must be grateful to them for "classifying" us, but now that our existence is officially recognized by the majority, is it not time that we start classifying ourselves? Is it not time that we take responsibility for our own self determination, rather than letting others tell us who we are, what our behaviour should be like, and how we should be treated?

Asperger's isn't a disease or an illness. It is a unique set of traits, which is very likely to be the driver behind some of the greatest human achievements to date. It is speculated that Einstein himself had Asperger's as did many other prominent historical personalities. Asperger's is the single minded determination behind invention and innovation, and the ability to create something different to standard thinking. Human minds are locked within their barriers of social acceptability. Asperger's allows the expansion beyond this.

Note: you are born with Asperger's, you do not acquire it like an illness. Put plainly it is a genetic mutation - your genes jumped a little and you got some extra traits, and, to keep the balance, had to give up some others. You are only different because your environment is not ready for you, but you are not a one off fluke. Nature manufactures us repeatedly. perhaps there is an evolutionary reason for this? Perhaps these extra traits have a special role to play in the progression of humankind? Explore this site further and you will understand more how much this makes sense, and read our lead article about rebranding Asperger's.



The words "symptoms", "condition", "difficulties" etc are one element in a cycle that causes us to define our lives in other people's conceptual terms. We need to break free from this. We need to take ownership of our own future. We need to understand that we are possibly one of the best things that happened to human development.

Our focus and single mindedness, coupled with a range of special skills allow us to excel in places where others never could. There are of course social trade-offs, but as we grow more aware, we can start looking after our community, creating solutions for our needs in a way never thought of before: social meetings with our own special structures, organizations with our focus to drive them, and, of course, support to those young Aspergians. children who need to learn that they are different only from those around them. In the land of Aspergia they share the traits and background of others. So come with us on this journey to self determination: Aspergia is born!



Reprinted from www.aspergia.com

MY LIFE: SENSORY OVERLOAD

Andrew Gering, 13: what's my life like? I don't like my autism because I get anxious. It makes my stomach hurt. I can't do things—like drive a car when I'm older. Sounds bother me. At the movies, when it's so loud, I sometimes cry and have to cover my ears. Or if someone gets impatient with me and raises his voice. I also don't like when my dog drinks water or eats. The noise really bugs me. Two years ago I was attacked by bullies on the playground. I don't want to talk about it, if it ever happens again, I'm going to punch them in the face. I like math. I'm an expert at it. I'm also really good at spelling. There's a spell-a-thon next Monday. Studying is easy: I see words once and I know them. I'm very good at recognizing stuff like a person's haircut or new frames on their glasses, or if a picture was moved, even by a couple of inches.

Am I done now? That's all I can explain about myself.

Swimming pools calm her down

"Sometimes my mind feels noisy, but I'd never wish for my autism to go away. It helps me focus" -- DELANEY RODGERS, 16

DELANEY RODGERS, 16: Water makes me feel safe. When I'm swimming, it's one of the only times that my head is quiet. Creating art also feels very calming. When I draw, I go into a place in my head

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where there are no distractions. Otherwise there's just so much sensory disruption.

I was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome when I was 8. Before then I had a feeling I was different. I had trouble understanding teachers if they didn't say things concretely. Like if one of my teachers said, "Do that problem over," but didn't actually point to it, I would be trying to figure out what problem they meant. I would get all upset. But I can also do some things really quickly, like reading, and learn very, very fast if somebody gives me very clear, visual instructions. Right now I'm in ninth grade, but I also take 12 hours of college courses.

About three or four years ago I first started realizing that I needed to make small talk. All my friends knew how and I felt left out. At first it seemed like magic. But I taught myself how to do it. Sometimes my mind feels noisy, but I'd never wish for my autism to go away. It helps me focus.

In his mind, a world of his own

I don't want to be seen as ignorant. I'm as intelligent as the next person, if not more so.—
PETER FOY, 18

Peter Foy, 18: When I feel stressed, I like to twirl a piece of string between my fingers. When I was younger I did it in public, but now I just do it at home. It helps me think more clearly. My mom calls

it my "drug," so I can block out reality. In my mind, I've created an alternative reality with hundreds of TV episodes or movies. Some are sequels to favorite movies like *Pulp Fiction*. I don't really tell many people about them. I just replay them in my head. I like my autism because it makes me unique. However, it used to get in the way with people because I was so opinionated. I'd tell other kids who were smoking that it was bad for their health. Or not to swear. But I've gotten a lot better since then. I'm a lot better at eye contact and making small talk. I didn't mean any harm, but I guess they felt lectured to. Their name calling was pretty brutal. I never really learned to tie my shoes or hold a pen properly. My grips is too loose. But I can take notes with a word processor, and I'm excited to be going to college next fall. I want to see what I'm capable of. I don't worry about the academics. I'm a B-plus student right now. And I don't want to be seen



as ignorant. I'm as intelligent as the next person, if not more so.

First two sons—now their mom

Cindy Idell, 50, with sons Philip, 15, and David, 12: I wasn't diagnosed until after my sons were. The specialist looked right at me and said, "Do you know anyone else in your family who has this?" For most of my life, I've had problems with speaking in public and with sounds. Balloons are my number one enemy. I'm afraid they're going to pop. I've gone to restaurants where they're blowing up balloons and I've had my husband ask them to stop. I can tell they're thinking, "What's wrong with this person?" The sound goes through my inner body. I run out of the room crying. A psychiatrist told me to carry a balloon in my purse and gradually build up to blowing it up. I never got past carrying it. He didn't understand autism, the difference between neurological and psychological. I think having it myself allows me to understand my sons. My father thought my balloon problem was ridiculous. He thought anything could be cured with discipline.



Previous 4 articles Reprinted from www.TheAutismPerspective.org

Asperger's Syndrome Gets a Very Public Face

By TARA PARKER-POPE

December 4, 2007

Heather Kuzmich has the neurological disorder known as Asperger's syndrome. She is socially awkward, has trouble making eye contact and is sometimes the target of her roommates' jokes.

But what makes the 21-year-old Ms. Kuzmich different from others with Asperger's is that for the past 11 weeks, her struggle to cope with her disability has played out on national television.

She is one of 13 young women selected by the supermodel Tyra Banks to compete on the popular reality television show "America's Next Top Model." The addition of Heather Kuzmich to an



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otherwise superficial show has given millions of viewers an unusual and compelling glimpse into the little—understood world of Asperger's.

The disorder, considered a form of autism, is characterized by unusual social interaction and communication skills. Aspies, as people with the condition like to call themselves, often have normal or above—average intelligence, but they have trouble making friends and lack the intuitive ability to gauge social situations. They fail to make eye contact and often exhibit a single-minded fixation that can be both bizarre and brilliant.

By definition, people with Asperger's are outside the mainstream. Even so, in recent months the syndrome has been cast into the limelight.

"Look Me in the Eye," a memoir about living with Asperger's by John Elder Robison, who once created special effects for the rock band Kiss, has been a best-seller. In August, the Pulitzer Prize-winning music critic Tim Page wrote a poignant article for *The New Yorker* about life with undiagnosed Asperger's.



Mr. Robison says the popular appeal of these stories may be due, in part, to the tendency of people with Asperger's to be painfully direct — they lack the social filter that prevents other people from speaking their minds.

"It's important because the world needs to know that there are tremendous differences in human behavior," said Mr. Robison, whose brother is the writer Augusten Burroughs. "People are all too willing to throw away someone because they don't respond the way they want. I think books like mine tell the world that there is more to us than that."

Reprinted from www.nytimes.com/2007/12/04/health/04well.html

Living with the Looks

By Laura Shumaker

Matthew was seven years old, and well past the age where his behavior could be excused as that of a mischievous toddler. By the time my groceries were bagged and I headed toward the exit, I heard the woman confiding to the clerk, "She ought to teach

him..." I left the store with a pleasant look on my face, and burst into tears once in my car.

"Stop crying!" yelled Matthew. "Be happy. Laugh!"

I stifled my tears and let out a fake laugh to subdue him. I really needed to cry, but knew my best chance was to get home, settle Matthew on the couch with a Raffi video, then sneak off to the bathroom, turn on the water, and let loose.

The looks and the snickering became a way of life now that Matthew's ability to blend in had gone away. He stood too close to people and asked strange questions.

"When was the last time you changed your baby's diaper?"

"How many airports have you been to?"

"Why do you smell bad?"

He jumped up and down, and flapped his hands like that boy I had seen at camp years ago, and made high-pitched sounds when he was excited. During this period I didn't worry so much about the laughter, but about removing him from such situations to preserve his dignity. I had given up thinking about how I might look, and knew people stared and talked about me, us. I heard comments like, "She's a saint!" or "Poor thing" and "She ought to leave him home!"

I remember the day when the laughter leveled me. Matthew was eleven years old and in his first year of middle school. I was waiting for him after school, and saw a group of kids approaching him, with big smiles on their faces. They didn't know I was watching. At first I thought, 'How great! These kids are reaching out to him.' And then they were circling him, asking him questions, telling him to pull his pants down. As Matthew smiled and reached for his belt, I leapt out of my car and shouted:

"Matthew! It's time to go."

The boys peeled off, and Matthew skipped to the car happily.

"Matthew! Never let people tease you like that."

"They weren't teasing me, Mom. They're my friends," he boasted.

"Friends don't tell you to pull your pants down!" I yelled. He started to cry, heartbroken and embarrassed.

"Mom?" he sobbed, "What do friends do?"

Over time, I learned to turn a blind eye to the looks, but made a point of listening to the comments so that I could jump in and explain some of Matthew's quirks, such as laughing at the

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Conferences

Date	Title & Location	Speakers	Fee	Contact Info
Mar. 18, 2008	Understanding Individuals with A.S. or HFA. Grand Rapids	Beverly Bishop	\$299	866-352-9539 www.lorman.com
Mar. 19, 2008	Understanding Individuals with A.S. or HFA. Detroit	Beverly Bishop	\$299	866-352-9539 www.lorman.com
Mar. 31, 2008	Nonverbal Learning Disability-Dx through strategies for Home & School Ann Arbor	Dean Mooney, Ph.D., NCSP	varies	Meds-pdn 715-836-9900
Apr. 1, 2008	Understanding Individuals with A.S. or HFA. Saginaw	Beverly Bishop	\$299	866-352-9539 www.lorman.com
Apr. 18, 2008	Transitions: Living with AS Traverse City	Michael John Carley, Richard Howlin, Nick Dubin, Daniel Blauw	\$109	jalbers@nmc.edu 231-995-1595 (day) 231-946-3524 (night)
Apr. 21, 2008	ASD Conference-Planning for the Education of Students w/ASD & Social Skills Development. Macomb ISD	Brenda Smith Myles	Varies	Autism-mi.org 8010-223-6722

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inappropriate time.

"He's autistic He laughs when someone is hurt."

"He's autistic He likes to lick things. So sorry!"

"Oops! Let me pay for another ice cream cone.

Autistic."

"I'm so sorry. Give me your address and I'll send a check. I insist."

"Uh, oh..."

One Sunday morning after a tough week, our family was headed into church when I heard a woman whisper to her husband, "That's the kid I was telling you about!" I snuck a peak at her but couldn't place her then glanced at Peter who seemed oblivious, and then slid into the pew next to Matthew. He picked up a pencil and started tapping it on the hymnal in his lap—thwap, thwap, thwap—and I reached into my purse and gave him a pad to draw on to quiet the racket. I felt my eyes well up — did I have the energy to quiet the next interruption?

Then a woman who I had never met, but whose face I will never forget, tapped me on the shoulder, and I turned around.

"I admire you so much," she said smiling, her eyes full of tears.

I could hardly take my eyes off this woman — it was a perfect moment that I didn't want to forget. But I turned around, revived, and squeezed Matthew's

hand.

Someone admired me.

Reprinted from www.TheAutismPerspective.org

Donna Williams

Art: "Featured artist on the spectrum"

Bio: Donna Williams was born in 1963 and grew up in a challenged family in the working class area of the inner city in Australia.

Tested for deafness, assessed as disturbed and finally diagnosed in her twenties as autistic, Donna lived a rather feral childhood, experiencing a freedom within the community that most children with autism are protected from these days. In her twenties, she wrote her international bestseller, *Nobody Nowhere*, following it with two sequels, *Somebody Somewhere* and *Like Color To The Blind*. As an international public speaker in the field of autism she went on to write three text books, *Autism: An Inside-Out Approach*, *Autism and Sensing; the unlost instinct* and *Exposure Anxiety; The Invisible Cage*. She is an accomplished sculptor, painter and composer with her own website www.donnawilliams.net. She lives with her husband Chris, her fellow adventurer.



Reprinted from www.autismtoday.com

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Support Groups

- × Autism Support Group of Genesee County:
www.geneseeautism.org
- × Advocates for Autism (formerly Flushing Support Group) meet the 2nd Tuesday of each month at North Baptist Church, 4004 Lennon Rd. Contact Cris at 810-732-1776 or Valerie at 810-659-7004
- × ASA/Oakland County Chapter Events:
www.asaoakland.org
- × Jack's Place for Autism: www.oakland.edu
(click site map, then centers)
- × Mott Children's Health Center Parent Empowerment Program for parents and caregivers of newly diagnosed or suspected ASD. Karen Shoemaker 767-5750, ext. 5292

Websites

- 🔗 Autism Society of America: www.autism-society.org
 - 🔗 Autism Society of Michigan: www.autism-mi.org
 - 🔗 ASA Oakland County Chapter:
www.asaoakland.org
 - 🔗 Dr. Tony Attwood: www.tonyattwood.com
 - 🔗 On-line Asperger's Information and Support-OASIS: www.aspergersyndrome.org
 - 🔗 The Gray Center: www.TheGrayCenter.org
 - 🔗 Liane Holliday-Willey: www.ASPIE.com
 - 🔗 Free pictures of visual schedules, etc.:
www.usevisualstrategies.com
 - 🔗 Picture Exchange Communication System:
www.pecs.com
 - 🔗 TEACCH: www.teacch.com
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