

⊥ Finding and maintaining a
niche

Finding a niche

- Every living being must find a niche
- As human beings that niche is necessarily a socio-economic niche

Mutual understanding

- Essential - every human being needs to be understood
- Understanding is rarely perfect - especially when non-autistic people try to understand autistic people and vice versa

Basic requirements for mutual understanding

- Effective theory of mind
 - True for everyone
- Effective communicative medium
 - True for everyone

Misleading ideas re minds and theories

- There is “central” as in “central coherence”
 - **FALSE!!!**
- Complete/perfect understanding is possible
 - **FALSE!!!** even in maths (see Gödel’s theorem)
- Minds are naturally neat and rational
 - **FALSE!!!**

Obstructed understanding re autism

- People who are not autistic routinely read each other's minds
 - **FALSE!!!**
- People who are autistic are unable to understand other people
 - **FALSE!!!**

Other misleading ideas about autism

- Autistic people are fundamentally not social
 - **FALSE!!!**
- Autistic people do not try to fit in
 - **FALSE!!!**
 - although they may
 - conspicuously fail rather often
 - be more likely to give up trying
 - succeed by adopting trouble-avoidance and/or social mirroring as a leading coping strategy

In fact...

- Just like anyone else, autistic people get much pleasure from comfortable relaxed social interaction and acceptance
 - The experience just tends to be rarer ... there are things we can do about that!

Another misleading idea about autism

- Autistic people lack imagination
 - **FALSE!!!**

In fact...

- Autistic people have very powerful imaginations which tend to be
 - Highly concentrated rather than multiply diverse
 - Reality based rather than theatrical/presentational (ie they tend to have a leading interest in Truth rather than in Presentation of Self)
 - Detailed and precise rather than vague and suggestive

Final misleading ideas re autism...

- Research results are almost invariably interpreted in a way which identifies an autistic dysfunction, eg
 - More accurate visual processing is interpreted as “lack of a top-down component”
 - Greater honesty is seen as “lack of a key social skill”, ie the willingness to tell lies - strange world we live in!

In fact...

- For a list of autistic superior performances, in perception research, drawn up by Michelle Dawson please visit
- <http://www.parl.gc.ca/38/1/parlbus/commbu>
OR
- No Autistics Allowed - google it!
- www.autismandcomputing.org.uk

What happens?

- Somehow it “goes wrong!” - its going wrong is what attracts a diagnosis (please see the wholly negative - and relative - diagnostic criteria in DSMs & ICDs) [why *I* have never been diagnosed]
- Somehow, in spite of all their strengths and potential, the apparently welcoming socio-economic niches tend to resist and reject autistic people

We can dismiss these as causes of autistic mis-fit:

- A incapacity to understand others
- B lack of sociability
- C poor imagination
- D inferior processing

I and colleagues propose that the underlying cause of issues of autistic mis-fit is a natural difference which can serve the species well, rather than an inherently dysfunctional difference which should be excised.

Ours is not a model of autism it is a theory about human beings in which autism has a natural role as contributing to essential diversity.

└ The interest model of mind is a new way (graphic, mathematical) of conceiving of people as **transient collections of desires/directed energies affecting and being affected by perception, imagination, cognition and action.** We think it makes psychological data (people) easier to analyse.

People

- \top Forget the black boxes and simple one-way arrows of cause and effect, it just isn't like that
- Think of other people as collections of often co-active interests with energetic flows travelling in a variety of directions and the whole picture becomes messier but more like the real thing

Autism and monotropic interest systems

A monotropic disposition

- Tends towards concentrated energy, energy travelling in one direction - eg towards task completion,
 - as opposed to spread, multi-tasking distribution
- Makes things happen
- Requires internal consistency/coherence
- Can also choke up, or become overloaded
- Will not be swiftly turned off
- Can be experienced as “minding too much” or “becoming over excited” (too much for me or too much for other people? - often both see below)

Monotropic flow

- Does not mean narrow scope, but intense concentration
- The interest which generates this flow may just be the desire to know What's Going On?
- Or it could be the desire to know What is The Meaning of Life The Universe and Everything?
- Or it could be the pleasure of contemplating, say, this bit of carpet...

Subjective issues for autistic people

- Input overload - 'system crash'
- Output overload - 'bottlenecks'
- Extreme sensitivity to some aspects of the environment to the potential exclusion of all others
- Extreme sensitivity to rule violation /cognitive dissonance /incoherence
- Disorientation - 'where am I?' [in this sequence/conversation/world]

Impact of subjective issues 1-5

any of issues 1-5 can

- Impede communication (understanding)

- Create an impression of stupidity

- Create an impression of non-cooperation

- Lead to discombobulation (issue 6)

Subjective issue with catastrophic potential

6. Discombobulation - catastrophic shock of the unlooked for: often has both social consequences and a social cause

Catastrophic upset

- Internal catastrophe
 - individual is left with no available resources, ergo no immediate chance of coping, all is swamped by bad feeling

Can become

- External catastrophe because of the social ramifications of the above
 - these are the times when society will tend to be at its most rejecting
 - AND the individual who is upset is most likely to deepen the rejection with further “inappropriate behaviour”

Reducing the general likelihood of disaster

By chilling out [pre-emptive self-regulation]

- finding a socially approved way of doing that is a really good idea
- eg dance, meditate, ride a bike or run a few miles, play with Reactive Colours ©
<http://www.reactivecolours.org/>
- You thus both chill out and get social credit

Social discombobulation

- Can be caused or prolonged by
 - Failed communications
 - Being treated like an idiot
 - Being treated like someone who is deliberately not cooperating
 - Being treated like someone who is not already trying to “get it right”
 - Having one’s inability to respond within a certain timeframe treated as socially meaningful

Improving communications

- Obviously crucial
- Can be generally effected through the neutral medium of a computer
 - please see www.autismandcomputing.org.uk for more about this, for those who don't speak as well as those who do!
- **Particularly hard in crises**

Failed communications in a crisis

- Difficult communications get dramatically worse
- Autism Alert cards www.autism.org.uk/card are a really good idea (cf also Dennis Debbaudt's website)

BUT... Getting out a card

- Requires presence of Γ mind sufficient to identify the appropriate sequence of actions and carry them out effectively
- An instant response is likely to be expected
- Reaching for a card may suggest reaching for a weapon
- Reaching out to the concerning Other with the card may appear threatening
- Reaching out to the concerning Other at-all may not appear an option to the discombobulated person

To complement the card

I propose something inspired by

- These nice colour coded cards which I first encountered a few weeks ago at Autscope in the UK - their model was I believe the system devised at Autreat (<http://ani.autistics.org/autreat.html>)
- My mother's sorry complaint that I "just didn't see the red light" - ie when she was about to lose her temper with me

The idea...

- Light emitting displays (leds) - ca 4cm diameter
- Woven into transparent cloth which can be transferred to and lightly stick to all clothing
- Flash red for a minute or so when struck
- Settle to glow red for a pre-programmed while
- Would automatically fade to yellow
- Could be “restarted” any time by another blow
- Something like “Autistic Crisis” could be visible within the display

A new sort of communication device which...

- Offers a low demand tool to aid self-regulation
- Would work instantly
- Would have a swiftly recognisable meaning - especially if backed with a publicity campaign
- Would not involve movements towards pockets or bags
- Would be very cheap to mass produce
- Could help avoid total catastrophe...
- Could work well with an Autism Alert card