

**Topic: Health, Relationships,
Social Inclusion**
**Title: Concepts of normality;
the autistic & typical
spectrum**

By Wendy Lawson
Bss Bsw(Hons)
GDip(PsychStud) GDip(Psych)

What To Expect From This Talk

- A definition of 'normal'
- Because understanding 'normal' is important to how we view our fellow human beings.
- What is 'normal' or usual in autistic development and normal or usual in typical development ?
- Could we be wrong in thinking of autism spectrum (AS) as a mental disorder?
- What if it were a cognitive difference?

That's Typical

"That's typical" I heard her say.
I wondered what she meant?
"You always want it your way"
She echoed without relent.

I waited, silent as a bird,
And pondered on her words.
She just kept talking,
I kept walking,
What was it that I heard?

That's typical

"I always want it my way?"
What other way could there be?
I only know the proper way,
The way that's there for me.

If we do it her way,
It wouldn't be right at all.
It would be wrong and all along,
I'd know it's wrong and not OK!

That's typical

So, why can't she understand?
What is it she doesn't get?
I must firmly stand my ground,
I mustn't give in yet!

if I give up she'll never learn.
She'll never know the way.
She calls it "being stubborn",
But, I'm scripted for this play.

Normal is:

- 'a lack of significant deviation from the average'
- 'the most common behaviour in a society is considered normal'
- 'group rules for what is usual, typical or normal for that group'
- So, the idea of normal must always be implicitly relative to a point of view or interest.

Normal & Cognitive Development

- A sensory- motor, attention - Interest, Perception Loop
- 3 systems work together
 - Sensory (one's senses)-motor (response)
 - From attention (sparked Interest)
 - Informing Perception
- Role of Interest leads to outcome
- Genes, environment & systems work together (Bjorne, 2007).

Cognitive Development means

- These systems inform learning.
- Many cognitive theories have been developed to account for the characteristics seen in the typical & AS populations (e.g., Theory of mind (ToM) Lesley; 1987; Baron-Cohen, 1985)
- Most theories concerning AS have been developed from a 'deficit model' (Triad of Impairments)
- Most common theory for learning 'typically' applied to 'normal' & AS populations is ToM

Cognitive Theories

- Theory of mind' (ToM) (Lesley; 1987; Baron-Cohen, 1985..)
- Executive functioning, (EF) (Frith & Happé, 1999; Frith & Hill, 2004; Hughes, Russell & Robbins, 1994)
- Central Coherence, (CC) Frith & Frith, 2003; Happé, 1991, 1996, 2006
- Enhanced Perceptual Functioning, (EPF) . Motttron. et. al. (2006).

Cognitive development

- 0 – 9 months: intention: friendly or unfriendly by: Touch – rough touch = upset, cry, soft touch = calming, happy
- Auditory – 'harsh' noises = cry 'soft' noises = happy
- Vision – walk toward door, going to leave me! Eye to Eye contact

Cognitive development

10 – 18 months: Shared – Activating – Mechanism

- Children start to understand you could have same belief as me, e.g., I like red buses, and you could like them too.

Cognitive development

18+ months: Theory of mind develops where children understand belief, false-belief, and representational thinking. Children understand people can think different things to each other.

- based on Baron-Cohen's book, *Mindblindness, 1996. Used with permission from Stagnitti*)

Method: Revisit Literature

- levels of evidence applied to the existing research concerning the cognitive theories of AS.
- Found: via a process of falsification (e.g., all swans are white is proven to be false when we find a black swan) that current cognitive theories do not account for either typical or AS cognition and experience (Bjorne, 2007; Lawson, 2001, 2008..) e.g., AS individuals pass false belief tasks (ToM); many are highly organised (EF) being detailed focussed (single focus), only applies to areas of interest (CC) and EPF doesn't allow for other areas of dysphoria in AS.

autistic Culture or Norm

- Culture could be equated with 'usual, typical, normal'. It affects the ways that individuals eat, dress, work spend leisure time, understand their world, communicate, etc. Thus, in a sense, autism functions as a culture, in that it yields characteristic and predictable patterns of behaviour in AS individuals.

Typical cognitive properties

- touch, sound and sight: cognitive connection concerning child's perception of 'intention' by another. Rough touch indicates the possibility of potential harm or unfriendliness whilst soft touch portrays 'caring' and 'calming' attributes as intended by another.

Sensory, perception & development

- This is of interest because in AS soft or light touch may be felt as 'pain' (Gerland, 1997; Grandin, 1986; Lawson, 1998).
- Could this mean, therefore, that AS individuals might be building a sense of 'harm' anticipated by being around individuals who commonly use 'soft' touch?

Sensory, perception & development

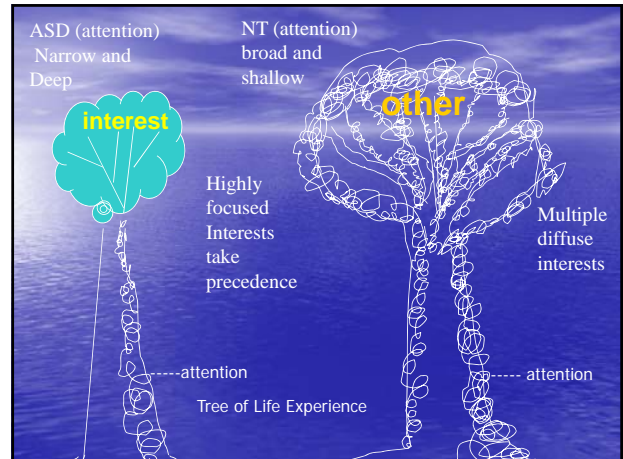
- individual leaves a room is interpreted as meaning "I am being left... or abandoned" in typical toddlers.
- but may not be noticed by infants who later gain a diagnosis of autism.
- Many AS individuals report that they are often so taken up with what they are focused upon, that they fail to notice that others are looking at them; leaving them or even waving to them (e.g. Hoy, 2007; Lawson, 1998, 2001).
- Not a ToM issue, but an interest/attention issue

Sensory, perception & development

- awareness occurs, AS individuals more able to connect (Hoy, 2007; Lawson, 1998, 2001).
- the process of developing awareness of self and of other is occurring differently in AS individuals
- ToM; EF; CC; & EPF not comprehensive in accounting for clinical picture.
- Single Attention & Associated Cognition in Autism (SAACA) is.

SAACA

- Spread of attention informing interest system leading to sensory-motor, attention/interest, perception loop governed by Monotropism and it's product.
- AS individuals brain configuration is different (e.g., Minshew, 2007).



SAACA

- Being monotropic (being single minded; led by an interest system that is single focused) (Lawson, 2001; Murray,1992; Murray, Lesser & Lawson, 2005)
- Therefore, making correct assessment of individuals is essential
- And building success needs to allow for their autistic diff - ability

Rita Jordan said:

AS: could be defined as:

- Psychological definition of ASC (autistic spectrum condition)
- Medical diagnosis limited to ASD (autistic spectrum disorder)
- Both respected as part of human diversity

Rita also said:

- "...severe autism, at times compounded by intellectual disability and sensory complications can leave an individual deeply handicapped. If this is not recognized and appropriate supports put in place, the individual could then be experiencing a life 'disorder' which needs medical intervention.. "

Results: Discussion

- Single attention available captures interest
- Sensory system informing interests
- Perception and learning style will happen differently
- Brain configuration and interaction will be different in AS to the TS population
- Education and relationships need to be informed by SAACA
- Employment, housing and activities also.

Sensory Environment

- If a child (or adult) has sensory issues (hypo or hyper) they are not 'available' to listen or learn.
- Sensory assessments are imperative
- Addressing their sensory needs are essential; ignoring these or hoping they will 'disappear' with time is not an option.
- Every child/individual deserves a sensory environment that does not cause them pain or discomfort.

Obsession? (Special Interest)

Willey, (2001) "At the base, I have to wonder, are we so very different from marathon athletes, corporate presidents, bird watchers, or new parents counting every breath their newborn takes? It seems lots of people, NT or otherwise, have an obsession of sorts. In my mind, that reality rests as a good one, for obsessions, in and out of themselves are not bad habits.

Obsession? (Special Interest)

There is much good about them. Obsessions take focus and tenacious study. They are the stuff greatness needs. I have to believe the best of the remarkable – the artists, musicians, philosophers, scientists, writers, researchers and athletes—had to obsess on their chosen fields or they would never have become great. In some respects, then, it must be said that obsessions do not have to be considered handicaps. (p. 122)

ACCEPTANCE (Rights)

- Being accepted for who I am is the very best thing and sends me a message that I am valued.
- Part of that acceptance is understanding that I have interests that take over my attention.
- Using those interests constructively keeps me motivated and gives me a starting place to learn how to share with others in our every day lives.

Recognising strengths

- Profiling and observation; great ways to recognise strengths.
- Often strengths come from interests. Interests don't have to be a distraction. They might be an asset.
- Highlighting my difficulties & all I cannot do might not be constructive.
- I don't need others to focus on these, as much as I need them to focus upon my strengths.

Valuing my disability/diffability

- Appreciate strengths and use them to assist me in learning about life.
- E.g. Some individuals are good with maps. Mapping can help us plan, de-stress & predict.
- Some are good with numbers; counting, ordering, calendars, dates and figures; these might help build a structure that we can hang our day on.

Examples in every day life

- Interests help connect to new interests and areas of study, e.g. a student who loves talking about the weather. One might channel this interest into a literacy activity by showing him where he could find the daily weather in the newspaper. Then introduce the student to other sections of the newspaper. Over time, s/he might become interested in the sports section, for example. Eventually, s/he might show interest in sports biographies, joining a sports club or being confident to share in conversation with peers.

The tool of Technology

- Environment: including other people
Structured,
predictable,
stimuli-reduced
Maximise the individual's control of controllable things and some of those that are not.
- Is in keeping with the way the rest of the world is going, so, it's fashionable!

Making a record or sharing ideas

- Using a camera
 - To get images onto the computer
 - To get images for printing
 - For daily use, objects of interest, food etc
 - For specific events
- Projects & Interests
 - Having a project increases motivation
 - Areas: health, diet, exercise, sport, hobbies etc.

– Dr. Dinah Murray Oct 2003

Common interest - Shared fun

- Around the computer



Developing in confidence and skill

- Through the medium of technology:
- Turn taking – games/ TV shows
- Listening
- Observing
- Sharing
- Valuing
- Appreciation of self and of other

Communication

- IT; Own picture book, story boards, augmented communication systems like PECS (Picture Exchange Communication Systems), sign language or Makaton, keyboards etc.
- If the child/individual does not have the CONCEPT (symbol or picture) for an object or event, how is s/he expected to understand it?

The Future

Life on earth is but a moment caught within
the crease of time,

The seasons come and go again,
You have your life, and I have mine.
The seed that's planted within the ground
Cannot choose what to become.
A potato, an apple or a rose for some.
However, for it to be the very best,
It needs rich soil, not poor.
The sun and the rains must come,
To open that seeds door.

The Future

I may be born to nourish others,
I may delight the senses.
I may grow tall,
I may grow small,
I may stay stunted beneath wire fences.

My future may not depend on my stock,
So much as it does upon sources.
Sources of warmth, sources of care
I depend on the nurture to be for me
there.

The Future

Then I can blossom and sing with the
birds,

Then I can grow my potential.

So plant me in goodness and all that is
fine,
Please keep the intruders away.
Give me a chance to develop, in time,
To become who I am, in life's future, one
day!

Resources

Web pages: www.mugsy.org/wendy
– www.autismandcomputing.com

- www.autistics.org
- Getting The Truth Out
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnylM1h12jc> (In my language)
- www.youtube.com (Posautive)
- Wendy's BOOKS & other resources:
- http://www.bookinhand.com.au/catalogue.php?sort_by=title