

AAC'S RECOVERY APPROACH TO AUTISTIC SELF-IMPROVEMENT & ADVOCACY (BASIS FOR BELIEVING IN A DIFFERENT APPROACH)

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OVERVIEW OF MY LIFE STORY

PRE-DIAGNOSIS

- ❖ Raised in the 70s & 80s, long before society knew enough about Autism to understand my academic & social struggles.
- ❖ Scored 140 on an IQ test given to me in the 3rd grade, which is considered “borderline genius.”
- ❖ Graduated from Mesa High with a 1.9 GPA, which means I barely passed most of my classes.
- ❖ Began working a program of recovery from co-dependency at a Christian general purpose 12 Step program, *New Wine*, in 1990. It was at this time I developed skills in areas that Autistics are known to struggle in:
 - Self-assessment of my character and actions
 - Theory of mind
 - Emotional intelligence
 - Analyzation of situation I found myself in, including how my actions and/or inaction impacted event.
 - Stress management
 - Conflict resolution
 - Other general abilities in socialization

GETTING DIAGNOSED

- ❖ Recognized as an Autistic/Aspie in February 2009 after my birth mother, who's now a retired LPN, attended an Inservice hosted by SARRC (Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center)
- ❖ Received a diagnosis in the summer of 2009 which qualified me to receive SSDI by the Social Security Administration. I was not able to obtain a copy of that diagnoses to find out what I was diagnosed with.
- ❖ Received a documentable diagnosis ASD (Level 1) from Voc-Rehab; 2015 (waisted taxpayers' money by dealing with me like I was low functioning and/or just out of high school) & 2018 (RI convinced me to give them a 2nd chance by going to the office they have a strong rapport with).

SINCE MY DIAGNOSIS

- ❖ Joined the Tempe Adult Autistic/Aspie Support Group, September 2009.
 - **Sue Golubock, M.Ed., OTR/L** (Retired Occupational Therapist, Autistic & Co-organizer)
 - **Tara Marshall, BA, SLPA** (Speech Language Pathology Assistant, Autistic & Co-organizer)
 - **Dr. Bryan K. Woodruff, MD** ([2011-2014] Neurologist who has a personal interest in the Autistic community, volunteered his extensive knowledge of neurology for our edification)
- ❖ Became an Autistic Self-Advocate March 2010.
 - Started my own monthly topical discussion group & weekly support group in February 2011.
 - Host an annual Autism conference, and other Autism related activities, at my now former church; April 2011-13.

- Began publicly voicing my objections to the status quo means in which the Autism community operates; April 2014
- Began “amateur lobbying” the state legislature; March 2015
- Took Peer Support Certification Training through RI International; April/May 2018

OBJECTIVE

Since being diagnosed, I've observed that most of the Autistics/Aspies that I've come across in support group meetings and social media are enslaved to self-hatred. The problem seems oblivious to me, just type “*what is Autism*” into your favorite internet search engine and then start clicking on the links affiliated with the most reputable Autism Organization. Nationally; *Autism Society of America*, *Autism Speaks* and the *National Autism Association* are at the top of the list. In Arizona; the *Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center* is the top local organization. Go through each of the list and try to find 1 thing on any of them that's positive or that can provide a foundation for building the self-confidence and self-esteem of Autistics/Aspies.

Although none of these organizations say anything that positively impacts how I view myself, but what I learned in *New Wine* did. In fact, it was a major point of emphasis for anyone struggling with any addictive/dysfunctional behavior. RI International fully embraces the concept that, although Autism isn't an addictive/dysfunctional behavior, the principles of recovery apply to all human beings no matter what the nature of their struggles. Furthermore, these principles are used to improve the quality of life of individual with every assortment of mental health issues, including those that constitute mental illnesses.

Just to clarify, I'm not presenting this information as an official representative of RI International, nor is selling their program my #1 goal. The fact is, there are concepts that I strongly advocate for improving the quality of life of every Autistic and they're the only major organization that has my back. I would be thrilled if I could add more organizations to my list, especially those that are Autism specific, but I just can't do so at this point. Until I can, I will not recommend any of them to any Autistic who is struggling and/or wanting to improve their quality of life, but will instead advocate the path that has worked so well for me.

APPROACHES TO AUTISM THAT I DO NOT AGREE WITH

Based on my observation, the concepts on this list are viewed by me to be detrimental to the developing of the self-confidence and self-esteem that Autistics need if they are ever going to reach their full potential. This is not to say that those who advocate them aren't well meaning, and/or don't make many valid points that should be discussed, any humans' endeavor to succeed at anything they set their efforts to will hinge largely on the effectiveness of the strategies that we utilize. I critique any concept that is presented to me, so I can weed out as many flawed concepts as I can prior to using them. If it becomes clear that something isn't working as effectively as I'd like, I humbly accept the facts before me and make appropriate changes.

I believe that many Autistics are capable of living a much higher quality of life than they have resigned to, but their lack of self-confidence and self-esteem prevents them from maximizing the unique abilities. I've seen many individuals who are enslaved to self-hatred (Autistics and non-Autistics alike) squander their abilities to improve their own quality of life, as well as society in general.

Example: Many Autistics are math and/or computer geniuses, so why don't more of them volunteer to tutor those who struggle in those subjects? Because they are so convinced that they can't succeed in any social environment that they won't even try. As someone who has been a volunteer English teacher, I know from personal experience that my students from foreign cultures didn't even realize that

my behavior was considered atypical by American standards until long after I started teaching them. Once they did, struggling students aren't going to care if you're social skills are atypical, they're just grateful for anyone who takes the time to help them.

Although the Autism organizations may provide me with much Autism specific insight that has been instrumental in improving my quality of life, they have little or nothing to offer me when it comes to making specific choices that will enable me to reach my fullest potential. Programs that provide me with a basis to believe in myself, such as the 12 Steps and RI International, do. I therefore will choose to follow their teachings and concepts, in spite of the fact they are lacking in Autism specific knowledge. However, that's not a problem for me because I can bring that insight with me and integrate it into a comprehensive strategy that will enable me to reach my fullest potential.

I'm now going to conclude this section with a rhetorical question that everyone who is walking a path that they believe will lead them to ultimate happiness: Are you truly happy with where your path has led you? If not, then maybe you should consider if what's required is a simple course correction or a complete change of direction.

COMPLETE DEPENDENCY ON TAXPAYER FUNDED PROGRAMS FOR AUTISTIC SELF-IMPROVEMENT

- ❖ You don't need a master automaniac to change a flat tire, nor do you need a master's degree to find solutions to all of our struggles.
- ❖ What are those who are completely dependent on these programs going to do the next time they get cut due to politicians reprioritize public spending, be it because of recession and/or political agendas. Low and no budget solutions are exempt from recession & political agendas.
- ❖ None of this is to say that if you are getting benefits that are improving your quality of life that you should stop immediately, but that you not view them as your only hope for any improvement to your quality of life.

THE CHEERY PICKING, RESULTING IN SUBSEQUENT, OF DR. KANNER

You can download a copy of Dr. Kanner's 1943 article, Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact, at: <https://simonsfoundation.s3.amazonaws.com/share/071207-leo-kanner-autistic-affective-contact.pdf>

If you actually read what he wrote for yourself, you will see that he was not the dedicated fault finder that he's been made out to be. Of his 11 patients, 8 of them were verbal. Of those 8, he noted the superior rote memorization ability of 7 of them. Considering that he came out in opposition to the euthanasia for the "feble-minded" the previous year, it makes no sense that he would then publish an article that could be used as ammunition by those who advocated what he opposes.

PERSON FIRST APPROACH TO AUTISM

- ❖ Changing the labels does not end the societal stigmas towards anything, it simply gets transferred to the new label.
- ❖ You may view me as "disabled" when I struggle to do something that is so easy for the typical person, but when I focus my time and energy on what I do best, I will accomplish things that will amaze the masses. Even if the person first approach works well for those who struggle with issues that can't be considered anything but disabilities, Autism is 1st and foremost matter of atypical neurology, resulting in gifts/strengths are as well documented as our struggles.

"AUTISTICS ARE FROM MARS, NEUROTYPICALS ARE FROM VENUS" MENTALITY

- ❖ Many have the mindset of whatever men are, women are the exact opposite, and vise-versa. After I started attending the monthly meetings, I started noticing that this same basic mindset of whatever

non-Autistics were, Autistics are the exact opposite, and vice-versa. Furthermore, I noticed that the stereotypes about Autistics was very similar to those of men, and the stereotypes about Neurotypicals was very similar to those of women.

- ❖ The problem with having an almost entirely generalized view of Autism is that it undermines your ability to understand yourself as an individual.
- ❖ The New Wine method of teaching about co-dependency was not by having us reading books, but by everyone in the group explaining how co-dependency affected them personally. We also learned about how men and women respond to different situations, not by quoting “*Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus,*” by allowing each one to speak to how they personally have responded to various situations in their own lives. In so doing, it becomes abundantly clear that we are all unique individuals that can’t be put in easy to remember stereotypical categories, which often resulted in direct dialog between conflicted parties who had new insights in a variety of different ways to view the issues. I believe this is a much more logical approach to anything that affects individuals in as diverse manners as co-dependency, gender conflicts, Autism, etc.

CONFUSING RESEARCH SCIENCE WITH CONSENSUS SCIENCE WHILE NEGLECTING USEABLE SCIENCE.

- ❖ **Research science:** A lot of people make the mistake of turning the latest research that they’re excited about into proven facts, in spite of the fact that their source made it clear that the research is still ongoing. Press releases and abstracts that you hear at conferences are often just sales pitches that omit opposing viewpoints.

This is not to say that there is a deliberate attempt to deceive the public, just as you putting your best foot forward on a 1st date is not necessarily a deliberate attempt to deceive your romantic interest. Your main objective for being on your best behavior is to get a 2nd date, the objective of the press releases and abstracts is to raise more money for more research. After all, we are a capitalist society and scientific research is subject to these principles. I’m also not claiming that there is no value in research science, and/or that it should just be ignored, but that we need to not overstate the strength of the case that can be in support of these various concepts.

- ❖ **Consensus science:** No matter how overwhelming the scientific evidence supporting a fact is, there is always going to be someone who says it’s wrong. Nevertheless, there are a number of facts that the overwhelming majority of the scientific community supports. This is what I use for my foundational understanding of Autism because I don’t have to worry that it’s ever going to go out of date.
- ❖ **Usable science:**
 - Just as you wouldn’t try to teach trigonometry to kindergarteners, I question the why conferences promoted to the general public spending so much time on aspects of Autism that professionals and research can understand and use, but are beyond their ability to comprehend of the general public.
 - I find that your research MIGHT result in therapies and treatments that MIGHT benefit me 5-10 years from now, but none of that is going to do me any good 5-10 minutes from now.
- ❖ **The usable for me science that Dr. Woodruff verified was in compliance with consensus science back in 2013:**
 - **Autism is an atypical neurological connectivity paradox resulting in heightened activity in some areas of the brain and decreased activity in others, compared to non-autistic individuals.**

- **Atypical:** There is a vast range of how people development, as well as means of completing certain routine tasks, problem solving, socializing, etc. However, some individuals are so far out of that range that it sets them for apart from the majority. It is far more accurate to refer to them as “Atypical” because often times, no matter what diagnostic label you may put on someone, “different is not less.”*
 - **Neurological Connectivity:** The simple explanation of this is that Autism/Asperger’s is, at its neurological roots, a neuro-connectivity issues. Our neuro-connections are atypical.
 - **Paradox:** The paradoxes of Autism can result in Autistics being extremely gifted in some areas, and extremely inept in others. The struggles Autistics deal with are often aggravated by people, who do not accept that Autism is a paradox, focusing solely on one aspect of Autism while refusing to acknowledge the paradoxical opposite.
- **Brain Plasticity:** The brain of every life form on Earth is constantly changing, enabling it to adapt in both positive and negative ways. This provides us with a scientific basis to believe that some areas which Autistics struggle with may self-correct and/or be modifiable.
 - **Natural Countermeasures:** It is well-known fact that someone who loses their sight will develop an increased sense of hearing. This concept is not just limited to the blind, but is a well-known factor in so many other physical disabilities that the healthy part(s) of a body will compensate for unhealthy or injured parts. Not only do I believe that this gives us a basis to consider the possibility that this same principle may at play for those with developmental disabilities, but I believe that I can provide specific examples of it being a factor in the day-to-day lives of Autistics/Aspies.
 - **How I Explain My Unique Way of Problem Solving:** My executive functioning impairments make it difficult for me to problem solve by conventional means, so I compensate through the use of superior memorization. Metaphorically speaking, when most individuals “try to invent the wheel,” executive functioning plays a central role in figuring it out. I on the other hand lack the ability to figure it out on my own, but I will instead recall all of the times I’ve seen someone try to invent the wheel. I’ll not only recall what all worked and didn’t work, but why they did or didn’t work. Then I’ll create a customized wheel that’s perfect for your situation.

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The following are a selection of specific points that I believe are most relevant to Autistics.

ONE DEFINITION OF CULTURE: The biggest problem that I have with most “cultural awareness” presentation is that almost all of the leave out the fact that everyone has free will. I know many immigrants, especially from male chauvinist societies, that want nothing to do with their culture. They want to choose for themselves the path that want, not what their society wants for them.

Many of us Autistics want to have these same chooses, but are not supported in perusing those paths that we want for ourselves due to the close mindedness of those around us. This ranges from those who think that everything they need to know about us the can get just reading books and/or online

* Temple Grandin, the most prominent Autistic Self-Advocate in North America

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resources about us, to those who are so focused on what they want for us that they don't take the time to fully embrace what we want for ourselves.

"Culture is everything in the environment that affects the development and growth of a group of people" (Page 53) You would be hard pressed to find an Autistic that would dispute the notion that we are micro-culture that exists in every culture and sub-culture. I believe that it would be beneficial for non-Autistics to approach us in the same manner they would an immigrant.

FEDERAL SEXUAL SUPPORT FOR LGBT: All humans have the same basic needs, wants, desires, emotions, emotional responses, etc. By focusing on our commonalities, we stop looking at our differences (including sexual orientation and neuro-configuration) as a basis for social divisions. Sample scenario (Pages 64-65) Autistics need to be view in the same way. Autistics are first and foremost human beings who have Autism. We have the same needs, wants, desires, personality strengths and weakness, etc. as any other human being, but face unique challenges in having their needs and wants met. There are also be residual benefits to the built-in countermeasure they need to overcome these challenges, especially in the area of executive functioning.

SELF DETERMINATION: All human beings have the right to choose the path of their choosing, provided they have the cognitive capacity to do so. Many well-meaning "fixers" will, whether they actually intend to or not, simply take over the decision-making process from those who are struggling. This is not limited to the Autism/disabilities communities, but the problem is far more prevalent in our communities because many get so focused on our struggles that they can't see anything else. Read, "*Avoiding Learned Helplessness: The Power of People Finding Their Own Solutions*" (Page 29)

RI DEFINITION OF RECOVERY: "Recovery is remembering who you are and using your strengths to become all that you were meant to be." (Page 1) This is completely contrary to the status quo means of defining Autism solely by our struggles while ignore areas in which we often outperform non-Autistics.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: "It is the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, motivation ourselves, and for managing emotions well in us and in our relationships." (Page 90)

Self-confidence & self-esteem: The status quo way of defining Autism is deficit based, which crushes our self-confidence & self-esteem. However, there is sufficient scientific understanding of Autism, and psychological knowledge that applies to all humans, to support a view of ourselves as unique abilities to fulfill unique societal roles that non-Autistics can never fill. Read, "*Developing Self-Esteem (Self-Is-Steam) and Managing Self Talk*" (Pages 39-51)

"You're the proof:" This is the basis of Alcoholics Anonymous' concept of sharing our experiences (what happened to us, our mistakes and struggles), strength (how we overcame our adversity, mistakes and struggles) and hope (how our lives have improved since we started working the program). Many Christian church advocate essentially this same type of model when teaching believers how to use their testimony as the most important element when sharing their faith. Peer/ Recovery Support Specialists rely on these concepts rather than advanced academic knowledge when supporting those in need.

I believe that the biggest reason that Autistics aren't more successful in self-improvement and self-advocacy is because, as I mentioned previously, they're conditioned to focus generalized book knowledge rather than who they actually are as a unique individual. Describing with whatever words best describe what they're actually thinking, experiencing, feeling, etc. during times of crisis. I've had several occasions when someone tried to modify my wording to make them more compatible with their preconceived notions. I responded by insisting that they need to open up their minds to the possibility that I'm sharing something can't possibly know about me unless I tell them exactly what's happening. I assure them that I said what I meant, and I meant what I said. Non-Autistics are never going to understand us unless we take such stands.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN PATH YOURSELF

It's not my place, nor anyone else's, to tell you that you have to walk a certain path. If there's 2 things that makes RI International stand alone from all of the Autism organizations, it is that concept, as well as the fact they actually do focus on the strengths of those who come to them for peer/recovery support services. It's for these 2 reasons that they are the only major organization that I trust to build the self-confidence and self-esteem of Autistics/Aspies, which will eventually result in them living a much higher quality of life than I believe can be offered by the Autism organizations. Nevertheless, the choice of which path you walk is yours and yours alone.