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Oral Communication (COM 110 06)

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TEDx Talk: My Experience with Autism, and Why Autism Isn't Bad

I. Introduction

a. Attention-Getter:

“Being able to understand languages is something I believe we all take for granted. When I was about 18 months old, I stopped developing my language skills entirely and began throwing tantrums, freaking out at restaurants, and becoming disinterested in games. My mother thought this was indicative of the period of life known commonly as the ‘terrible twos’ and that I would eventually get over it.

“Luckily, a friend of the family who worked with autistic children noticed I had symptoms of autism and told my Uncle Matthew, who told my mother. If that friend had not spoken up to our family about it so that I could be enrolled in special education that helped me learn how to speak, there is a real possibility that I would have never learned to speak properly.

“I’m 19 now, and I think about my autism very little. It’s become so little of an issue in my life that if I don’t go out of my way to tell people about my autism, they will most likely never suspect I even have it. For a while now I’ve been calling myself a ‘high-functioning’ autistic person, but I have begun to learn that this idea of ‘high-functioning’ and ‘low-functioning’ is a bit inadequate to properly describe autism. So, today, I am going to share with you three things I’ve learned about autism and its issues.

- II. Key Point 1: My First Point is the Autism “Spectrum”. What is the Autism “Spectrum”?? – (Referring to slideshow)** This is a model for an autism test. As you can see, there are several different factors that are weighed when determining the main score, which is then compared to neurotypical scores. Note that this means that autistic people can have the same score but different levels of certain symptoms. So, it's not very accurate to separate autistic people into “high-functioning” and “low-functioning”, because all autistic people struggle with different high-low combinations of the same symptoms. Autism is more diverse than how we’re used to thinking of the word “spectrum”, like the visible spectrum of colors, which is drawn from a specific range of values.

- III. Key Point 2: My Second Point is Medical and Social Models** - These are two models of thinking that deal with the relationship between autistic people and the

world. I'll use the example of my younger self freaking out at restaurants to help explain these models.

The Medical Model states that there is a "normal" way of processing one's surroundings, and that behaviors that deviate from this way are "abnormal". The Medical Model would say that I freaked out at these places because there are imbalances in the way my brain processes the world, which result in my senses becoming overwhelmed and causing me to melt down.

The Social Model, on the other hand, says that the issue is not the brain of the autistic person, but rather the environment around them. The Social Model would say that I didn't freak out because my way of processing the world was wrong or abnormal, but because the environment around me was not designed with an autistic way of processing the world in mind. This model presupposes that autism is not a "disorder" like the Medical Model does but is simply a different way of processing one's surroundings.

I am more on the side of the Social Model. As an autistic person, I don't think my way of processing the world is wrong. People like Michelangelo and Sir Isaac Newton, who exhibited autistic behaviors such as social difficulty, fixation on their work, and preferring isolation, have contributed great discoveries and beautiful art. Autism is not really a bad thing, and should not be treated as such.

IV. Key Point 3: My Third Point is that Autistic People Aren't Getting Proper Help
– Let me delve into some statistics to explain.

A study from Denmark submitted to the Suicide Prevention Resource Center in April of 2021 found that autistic people were around 3 times more likely to commit suicide than non-autistic people. According to the "Thinking Person's Guide to Autism", only 15% of American autistics with university diplomas are employed. Autistic people are struggling in their current environment, and research is going toward trying to make them "normal" rather than helping them with their struggles.

Genetic research student Elle Loughran published a paper titled "Why autism research needs more input from autistic people", where she expressed how hard it is for autistic people to contribute to autism research. Medical researchers seem to believe autistic people aren't people they can talk to, and that people like Elle who seem more "normal" aren't as autistic as "those people", which is a skewed understanding of autism.

V. Conclusion – "In conclusion, it is my hope that people will try to be more understanding of those with autism and advocate for services that let autistic people be themselves rather than force them to be 'normal'. As a person with autism, I find it

terrible that autistic people are treated as problems to be solved rather than people to be helped.

“Try thinking of the relationship between autistic and non-autistic people as the relationship between two people who speak different languages. The one speaker is not illiterate and wrong just because they don’t understand the other language; they are simply expressing their ideas in a different way. The right thing for both sides to do would be to learn each other’s languages so that they may converse with complete understanding of each other. In the same way, autistic and non-autistic people should learn to understand each other’s way of thinking. Autistic people are just as human as non-autistic people and deserve to be understood, not fixed. Thank you.”

References:

- [Why autism research needs more input from autistic people | Spectrum | Autism Research News \(spectrumnews.org\)](https://spectrumnews.org/news/autism-research-needs-more-input-from-autistic-people/)
- [Suicide Risk among People with Autism Spectrum Disorder | Suicide Prevention Resource Center \(sprc.org\)](https://www.sprc.org/suicide-risk-among-people-with-autism-spectrum-disorder)
- [Why Is the Autistic Unemployment Rate So High? — THINKING PERSON'S GUIDE TO AUTISM \(thinkingautismguide.com\)](https://thinkingautismguide.com/why-is-the-autistic-unemployment-rate-so-high/)