

Feeling Fast and Slow



A start to a conversation

Autscape:

Tuesday 1st August 2023

9:00 - 11:30



Event

- Introduction to me
- Where FFaS comes from
- Autistic Love
- Empathy as a social force
- Neuro-chauvinism
- Q&A

Introduction

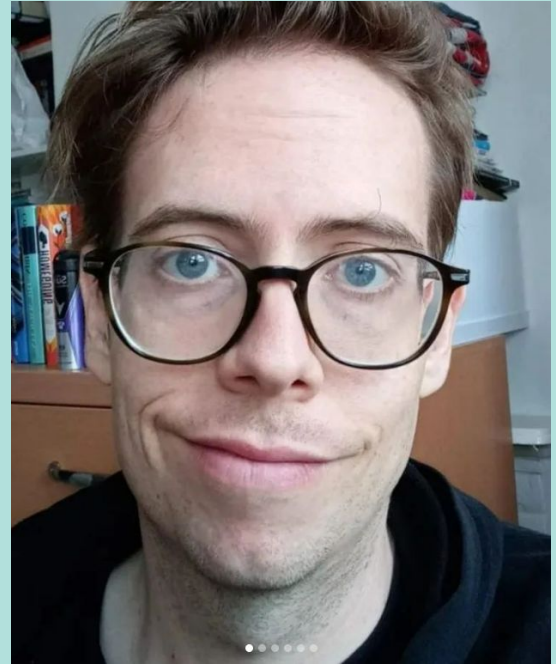
Hi everybody!

My name is Jorik Mol (he/him/sometimes they), I am 35 years old, I live in Bath, UK.

I am a white man, with soft dark-blond hair. I wear glasses and I have silvery blue eyes. I am 6'4" in height, wearing a dark blue ribbed jacket over a light-blue shirt and tan slacks.

My partner Luke cannot be here this year, but he's very much here in spirit.

I'm a writer, an educator and I work as an actually autistic mentor, speaker and disability and LGBTQ+ activist.





Feeling Fast and Slow

This presentation comes out of a project I've been working on since the summer of 2022, a book called *Feeling Fast and Slow*, to be published in mid-2024 by Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

The book is an expansion on my blog from November 2021 on Alexithymia and Emotional Porousness. I have interviewed autistic people, researchers (yes, even a few neurotypical ones) and feature a lot of the familiar combination of horror and stupid jokes that has become fundamental to my blog.


Since you, as autistic people, are my main audience, I want to share some of what I found out, as well as my conclusions.

The most important thing happens after this: the Q&A.

I'm opening myself up to your views here. Let me know what you think.



The next slides contain text - I will also read these out



I hadn't expected to have had such a rubbish personal training session. I'd woken up, had breakfast, hugged my partner, who'd had a bad night's sleep, waking up at 4 and not getting back to sleep. He would come home early, if he could. I gave myself a figurative pat on the back – I'd slept very well indeed. I got on my bike and left for the gym.

When I got in, I changed and said hello to Daniel, my personal trainer. I put my shoes on and started with the exercises. I had no strength in my arms. Something was going on. I didn't know what. I became more self-conscious, more sensitive, far less confident. I started apologising for everything. I nearly bumped into someone weightlifting. I told Daniel that, if he hadn't been there, I would have run away in shame.



Yes, after writing this week's blog the day before, my brain was a bit fried – but nothing too horrible. I was beating myself up for not being able to lift weights I managed easily a week before. I hadn't done anything wrong. What was going on with my body?

Daniel, who's got ADHD, was getting visibly nervous now – which was new for me. Am I making him uncomfortable now as well? I start apologising even more. I'm visibly shaking now – in public! Shame descends. We end the session early.



When we hide in the storage room, we go through the recent weigh-in and measurements. I beat myself up, seeing negatives in everything. Daniel then stops and says: “I’m sorry mate, I didn’t want to say it earlier because you were not having a good one. But..” Yes? “I’m going to stop doing personal training. I’m starting a new job in June.”

Suddenly, my mood shifts. There’s a wave of – something. Relief tinged with sadness. Though it’s not mine – it’s his. “It’s ok mate, it’s ok.” Now I’m the one giving him a hug, letting him cry. He was really nervous and scared to tell me, since we’d had such a great working relationship and that he’ll miss seeing me three times a week. For my part, I feel the same as I did when I came into the gym this morning. The heaviness evaporates and I’m smiling, cracking jokes, cheering up Daniel as best I can.



He is so relieved that I wasn't upset, but needs a moment to deal with his own feelings. He is also baffled that, somehow, my body felt his nervousness. And I didn't even know it.



Three Questions

1. *What is empathy?*
2. *What is your experience with Alexithymia?*
3. *How do you become aware of the emotions of other people? If so, is that volitional? If not, why not?*

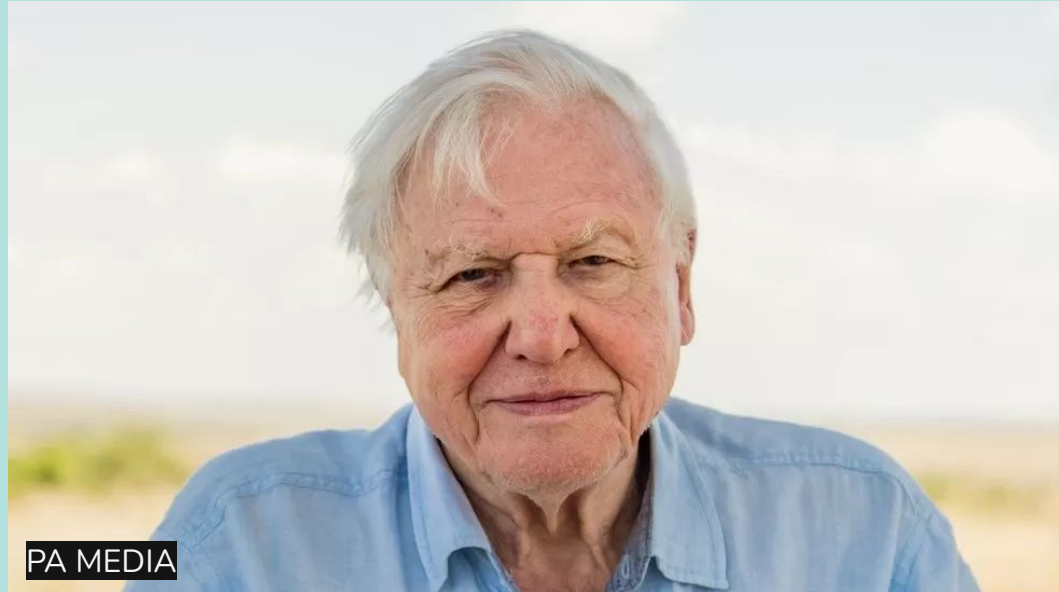
A dark, atmospheric photograph of a forest path. The path is covered with ferns and leads into the distance between tall, thin trees. The scene is dimly lit, with some light filtering through the canopy. The image is framed by a teal background on the left and right sides, with a light teal semi-circle graphic in the top left corner.

I can see in the dark



Story

- Nomination
- Humiliation
- Peregrination
- Vision





Alexithymia and Emotional Porousness

- These two are vital. Autistic people, on the whole, tend to have both.
- It is what solidifies our particular lived experience and helps explain our often wonky sense of self.
- I am writing about the co-occurrence of these two and complex trauma, since many autistic people have diagnosable PTSD.
- Lastly, I consider processing time to be a vital to our emotional world. We *do* become aware of our feelings, eventually. This is fundamental to understanding our emotions: intuition needn't be immediate.



Alexithymia

- Most of us are aware of alexithymia; the difficulty of assessing what we feel, rather than 'empathy', though I posit they are linked.
- This is dependent on how well we are doing on the day, what our energy reserves are, and how much attention we can meaningfully pay to what our bodies are telling us.
- Also: I don't distinguish between alexithymia and interoception, because none one of my autistic interviewees did either. They were weirded out when I said neurotypicals understand those as distinct concepts. Because I feel with my body. To me, they're identical.



Emotional Porousness

- In 2018, I saw Tony Attwood speak and he referred to research where autistic children were able to pick up on the emotions of their caregivers, before having seen or heard them.
- Porousness is not a choice. The emotions of others are just *there* and, like with my personal trainer, they're going to stay in my body until I figure out where they came from. Only then can I file them away.
- I refer to emotional porousness, rather than emotional contagion, because of the obvious negative connotation. In one interview I was asked if I want this to change. I don't. It's part of my body and I value what it brings to my existence. It's morally neutral, to me. I'm not an 'empath', with all the HSP-discourse that may bring.



Our Brains and the Sensory World

- On a biological level, I don't think we differ much from neurotypicals.
- We are people. Therefore we respond to the world, using our neurological system as an interface.
- Our brains are divergent in the sense that we are less streamlined than neurotypicals. We are more sensitive to the world around us. A lack of neurological pruning at a vital age may be partly responsible for this, but there is no way to know.
- I hypothesise, that hyper- and hyposensitivity are explained by BOTH our greater sensitivity to the sensory world AND the fact we have the same bandwidth as neurotypicals, who have less sensitivity.
- Their brains learn to usefully shut out what doesn't immediately concern them. Add the Double Empathy Problem and centuries of cultural marginalisation for us and we end up with the current situation.



Autistic Love - Luke

The main character in this book, though, is my partner, Luke.

We have been together since 2019 and have been friends since 2017. We are two very silly autistic men who love each other very much.

The experience Luke had with anxiety is the main throughline of this book.

It was through alexithymia and emotional porousness that the problem arose, that it escalated, and that we can now say is behind us.

The love of two autistic people, who get each other wrong as much as we get each other right, is vital to understanding our lived reality.



Autistic Tropes

The conclusion I've drawn after the interviews is that autism, as we know it, is a series of culturally defined concepts.

Instead of our own lived experience, what matters for neurotypicals is the character *they* have spent centuries building up and we became attached to in the early 20th century.

We have not been allowed to write our own stories. Instead we are stuck in a paradigm where in order to access any services or seek to undo inequality, we have to mask.

We first have to wear the mask of a neurotypical for our own safety.

We then have to wear the mask of this ghost neurotypicals have created and attached us to.

The autistic as a cultural trope, arising from late 19th century imperialism

Psychiatric: Kanner, SBC, Triad of Impairments, Personality Disorders

'No empathy'-narrative and Uncanny ghostliness: 'something's not right.' 'I just got a bad vibe'.

Waste of resources: Useless Eaters, Austerity -> Necropolitics

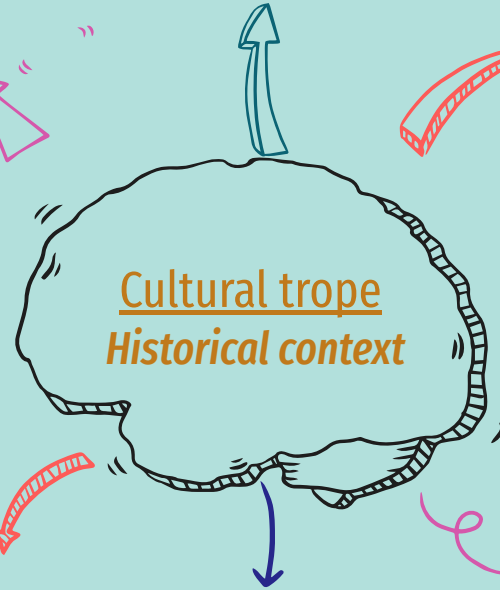
Dehumanisation: Robots, monsters, AI, zombies, autistic villains

Eugenics: Double Empathy Problem meets best of intentions. T4.

Target of ridicule: *Commédia dell'Arte*, Music Hall, comedy, dramatisations

Narrative of superiority: White supremacy, queerphobia, misogyny, colonial extraction and victim blaming

Sexual tropes: r**ists, frigid women, inverts, perverts, uncontrollable monsters





What *is* Autism

A set of cultural codes.

Created at a specific time.

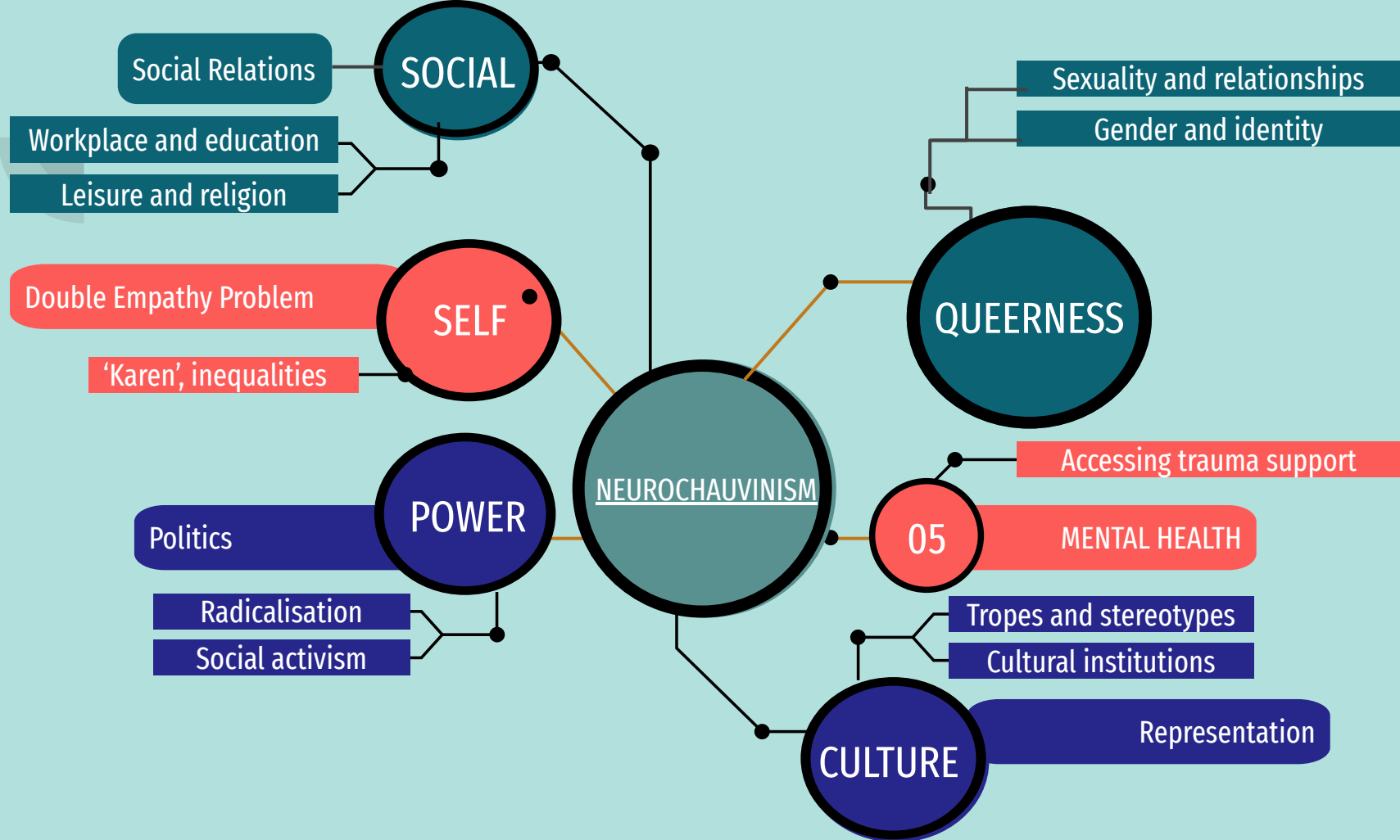
Serving a specific purpose.

The thing that holds this conceptual framework in place is, I posit, neurochauvinism.



Neurochauvinism

- The vast majority of discriminatory actions against us happens without an awareness of us being autistic.
- This is because of the double empathy problem. (see: Milton, 2012)
- However, the two sides are unequal (see: Sasson et al, 2017). We are expected to cognitively develop empathy towards NTs. They cannot access our humanity. Therefore, we are the ones without a soul.
- I posit that this is unintentional. Neurochauvinism is simply the idea that one's own neurotype is, if not the only one in existence, then the only neurotype worth having.





We, as autistic people, have many battles to fight in order to be seen as human beings by the neuromajority.

The strangest one, in my experience, is that we continually have to prove that we are human in the first place. The 'empathy' issue is case in point. Yes, sometimes autistic people DO struggle with empathy. Mostly with ourselves.

What empathy *is*, though, is a movable feast. Intentionally or unintentionally, it came into being at a particular point in time and survived for particular, socio-political purposes.

What it has been used for is the dehumanisation of neurodivergent people throughout history.

If we want to talk about the way we've been treated historically, 'Neurochauvinism' will be a very helpful concept.



Q&A



Any questions?

End!



If you want to know more about how I work to meet the requirements of living in a neurotypical society whilst trying to keep sane, please visit my website at <https://www.jorikmol.com>, where you can keep up with everything I'm doing and read my weekly blog.

If you have further questions, please contact me on jorik.mol@gmail.com or via the website.

Thank you very much for your time!

And now....



Thank you!



Credit to [Slidesgo](#) and [Freepik](#) for their