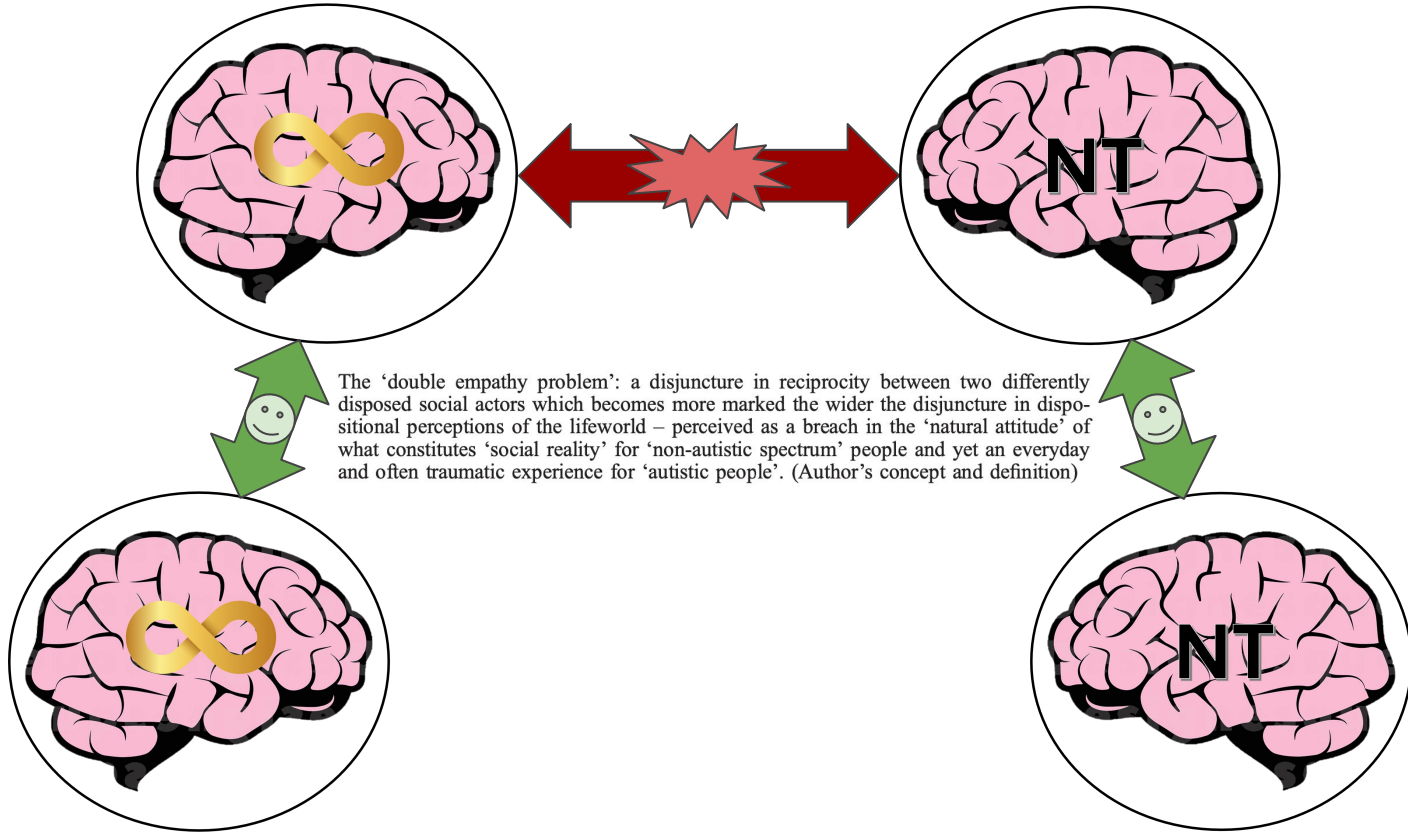


Where did the Double Empathy Theory Come From?

Theoretical Conception and Experimental Evidence

by Arden Tsang



The Double Empathy Problem

Damian Milton

The double-empathy problem

- If autistic people are not socialised into the same shared 'ethno' as 'neurotypical' people - 'breaches' in understanding would happen all the time, leaving both in a state of confusion.
- There exists a 'double-empathy' problem, in the sense of both autistic and neurotypical people having a severe difficulty in understanding the 'other'.
- McGeer (2004) – Theories based upon the notion of a 'lack of empathy' are based on a one-sided asymmetrical view of two people failing to understand one another.
- Lack of awareness of self and others shown to be untrue when looking at the personal accounts of those diagnosed.

On the ontological status of autism: the 'double empathy problem'

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In recent decades there has been much debate over the ontological status of autism and other neurological 'disorders', diagnosed by behavioural indicators, and theorised primarily within the field of cognitive neuroscience and psychological paradigms. Such cognitive-behavioural discourses abstain from acknowledging the universal issue of relationality and interaction in the formation of a contested and constantly reconstructed social reality, produced through the agency of its 'actors'. The nature of these contested interactions will be explored in this current issues piece through the use of the term the 'double empathy problem', and how such a rendition produces a critique of autism being defined as a deficit in 'theory of mind', re-framing such issues as a question of reciprocity and mutuality. In keeping with other autistic self-advocates, this piece will refer to 'autistic people', and 'those who identify as on the autism spectrum', rather than 'people with autism'.

- 2011 presentation "An insider's critique of the dominant psychological models of autism"

- Published as a paper in 2012
- Cited frequently in his later publications

Early Citations

Autism and Higher Education

‘Why should I be like bloody Rain Man?!’ Navigating the autistic identity

Andrea MacLeod, Ann Lewis, Christopher Robertson

Autism is a complex social construction ([Milton, 2012](#))

What should services for people with autism look like?

Carol Povey ▾

Advances in Autism

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Permissions 



Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to examine the key components and approaches which contribute to good autism services.

Design/methodology/approach

This paper reviews some of the literature around quality of life in autism services and describes the approach taken by The National Autistic Society.

Autistics speak but are they heard?

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Erratum Notice - A previous version of this article wrongly implied that Michelle Dawson is a self-advocate or autistic self-advocate, that she is part of self-advocacy movements or has similar views, and that she is academically trained (rather than being a researcher within a university-based research group). These have now been corrected, and we regret the errors.

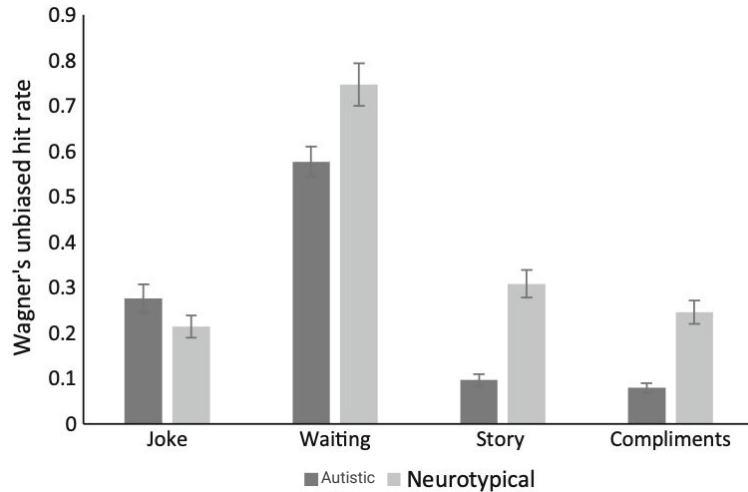
ABSTRACT

In this article, we argue that the exclusion of autistic people from meaningful involvement in social scientific research is both ethically and epistemologically problematic, and constitutes a significant barrier to impact. By the term 'meaningful', we refer to the inclusion of different autistic voices not merely as sources of empirical material, but as active participants in the production of knowledge on autism. We discuss two trends in research that are of concern: firstly, the failure to explore and engage fully with the lived experiences of participants in social research; secondly, imposition of problematic narratives on autistic experiences, linked to partial or complete absence of engagement with the diverse work of autistic authors. We conclude by pointing to some contemporary developments and intellectual exchanges that serve as exemplars which increase the ethical and epistemological integrity of research on the lived experiences of autistic people.

A Designer's Approach:
Exploring how Autistic Adults with
Additional Learning Disabilities
Experience their Home Environment

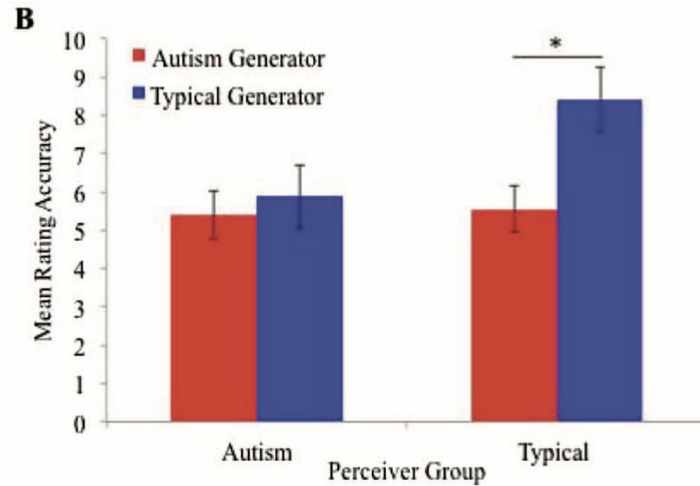
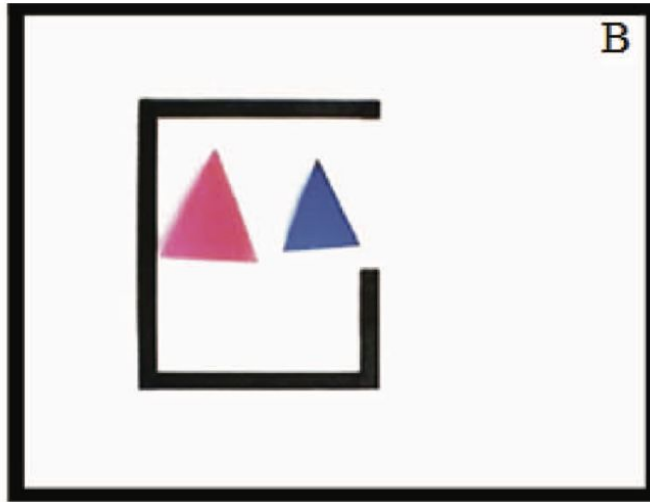
Experimental Evidence: Sheppard et al. (2016)

- Participants (autistic and neurotypical) were filmed reacting to situations, and other (neurotypical) participants watched those videos and guessed what they were reacting to



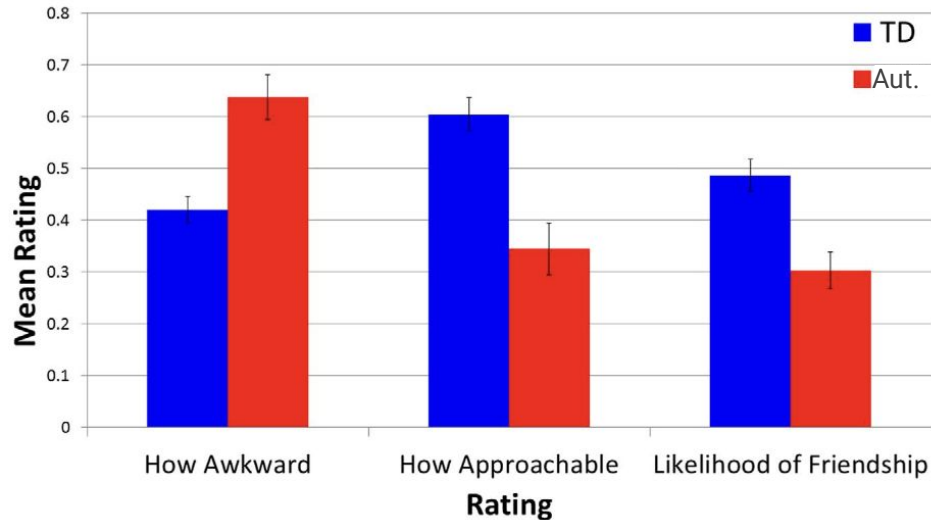
Experimental Evidence: Edey et al. (2016)

- Participants moved the triangles around with magnets to convey “coaxing”, “mocking”, “seducing” and “surprising”, then rated others’ animations



Synthesis: Sasson et al. (2017)

In this way, social interaction impairments in ASD may not only be an individual impairment, but also a relational one¹⁶ in which the perspectives of others affect the quantity and quality of the social experiences of those with ASD. Indeed, although it has long been established that those with ASD struggle to interpret the mental states of other people¹⁷, recent findings suggest that neurotypical individuals likewise have difficulty interpreting the mental states of those with ASD^{18,19}. Thus, difficulties with social interaction for individuals with ASD may be a bidirectional problem, not just an individual one.



What's happened since then?



Making the future together: Shaping autism research through meaningful participation

[Sue Fletcher-Watson](#)  , [Jon Adams](#), [...], and [Elizabeth Pellicano](#)  [View all authors and affiliations](#)

‘People should be allowed to do what they like’: Autistic adults’ views and experiences of stimming

[Steven K Kapp](#) , [Robyn Steward](#), [...], and [Ginny Russell](#)  [View all authors and affiliations](#)

> [Autism](#). 2020 Oct;24(7):1704-1712. doi: 10.1177/1362361320919286. Epub 2020 May 20.

Autistic peer-to-peer information transfer is highly effective

[Catherine J Crompton](#) ¹, [Danielle Ropar](#) ², [Claire Vm Evans-Williams](#) ³, [Emma G Flynn](#) ⁴,
[Sue Fletcher-Watson](#) ¹



Thank you for listening!

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