

TOO SANE FOR THIS WORLD

BY WILLIAM DAVENPORT



DISCUSSION GUIDE

Many adults on the autism spectrum discover their condition much later in life, some being diagnosed as late as the age of forty. Knowing that you are on the spectrum can bring a great relief and understanding of oneself, but also a label that brings its own set of societal discriminations. "Too Sane for This World" is about exhibiting the strengths, discussing the challenges and exposing the immediate need for society to address the concerns being voiced within the autism community. The questions for the interviews were devised by adults on the spectrum, and this film is a collaboration between neurotypical and A-typical filmmakers.

Purpose of the guide

This guide is designed to facilitate discussions about TOO SANE FOR THIS WORLD in the classroom or therapeutic setting. The film is intended for individuals from all walks of life and experience. It is a tool for educators, social group facilitators, therapists and others interested in autism. Use it to foster a greater understanding of the experience and insights from people who are on the autism spectrum.

Directors Statement

What is unique about this project is that the film crew featured adults on the spectrum, that also worked on the editing and pre-production. I believe it is so important that this film come from an authentic perspective, and even though I am the director my eyes and ears are open to their views. This film is about breaking the myths of how we view people on the autism spectrum. It is about giving a voice, where a voice has been silenced by society. The general public needs essential information about high functioning autism, and the true nature of living on the spectrum. In these growing political times it is essential that we address the rights of all, including those with autism and other disabilities. We are in need of a bridge that we all can cross together. A bridge to a better future of equality and everlasting love for the nature of life within a society that brings us true liberty. - William Davenport

Background: What is autism/Asperger's Syndrome

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and autism are both general terms for a group of complex disorders of brain development. These disorders are characterized, in varying degrees, by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication and repetitive behaviors. They include autistic disorder, Rett syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder, pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) and Asperger Syndrome. ASD can be associated with intellectual disability, difficulties in motor coordination and attention and physical health issues such as sleep and gastrointestinal disturbances. Some persons with ASD excel in visual skills, music, math and art.

Autism appears to have its roots in very early brain development. However, the most obvious signs of autism and symptoms of autism tend to emerge between 2 and 3 years of age.

FACT: Autism statistics from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identify around 1 in 110 American children as on the autism spectrum—a 600 percent increase in prevalence over the past two decades. Careful research shows that this increase is only partly explained by improved diagnosis and awareness. Studies also show that autism is three to four times more common among boys than girls. An estimated 1 out of 70 boys is diagnosed with autism in the United States.

FACT: More children will be diagnosed with autism this year than with childhood cancer, juvenile diabetes or pediatric AIDS combined. ASD affects an estimated 3 million individuals in the U.S. and tens of millions worldwide. Moreover, government autism statistics suggest that prevalence rates have increased 10 to 17 percent annually in recent years. There is no established explanation for this continuing increase, although improved diagnosis and environmental influences are two reasons often considered.

Asperger syndrome, also known as Asperger's syndrome or Asperger disorder, is an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) that is characterized by significant difficulties in social interaction, alongside restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior and interests. It differs from other autism spectrum disorders by its relative preservation of linguistic and cognitive development. Although not required for diagnosis, physical clumsiness and atypical use of language are frequently reported.

Asperger syndrome is named after the Austrian pediatrician Hans Asperger who, in 1944, studied and described children in his practice who lacked nonverbal communication skills, demonstrated limited empathy with their peers, and were physically clumsy. Fifty years later, it was standardized as a diagnosis, but many questions remain about aspects of the disorder. For example, there is doubt about whether it is distinct from high-functioning autism (HFA); partly because of this, its prevalence is not firmly established. It has been proposed that the diagnosis of Asperger's be eliminated, to be replaced by a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder on a severity scale.

Discussion

An experienced facilitator will begin by laying down ground rules for respecting each other's opinions and each other's privacy. Some participants may be vulnerable because of their personal experience as an individual on the autism spectrum, other's might have a relative or child on the spectrum; having all participants agree to maintain confidentiality can help protect everyone and encourage them to contribute. The facilitator should establish a safe and welcoming environment, and keep the discussion on track.

Before Viewing: Questions

1. What do you know about autism?
2. Do you know anyone on the autism spectrum? If, so, describe their personality.
3. Have you ever had social anxiety?
4. Are you obsessed by a particular topic?
5. Are you negatively affected by certain sounds, smells or tastes?
6. Do you have any behaviors when you are nervous, such as, twirling hair or biting nails?

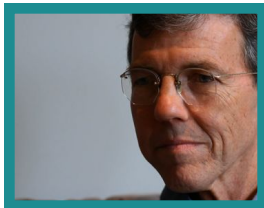
Before Viewing: The following 10 questions were asked of the interview subjects in the film. The questions for the interviews were devised by adults on the spectrum in collaboration with the director.

- 1- How did you discover your autism?
- 2- When you were a child did you feel different?
- 3- Were you bullied?
- 4- What are your social challenges being a person in this society?
- 5- Do you have sensory challenges? If so, describe them.
- 6- Have you had any difficulty in the workplace?
- 7- What is good about being on the spectrum?
- 8- What would you tell other adults who are just discovering they are on the spectrum?
- 9- Do you have any advice for parents or teachers?
- 10- What do you think society needs to do?

After Viewing: Questions

It may be helpful to begin the discussion by reconstructing the content of the film. Below are pictures of each person interviewed. The facilitator should outline the documentary's major themes. Then move on to some general questions.

1. Did you relate to any of the experiences of the individuals in the film?
2. What preconceptions of autism did you have before you watched the film? Did the film change your views?
3. Which (if any) person in the film resonated the most with you on a personal, intellectual or emotional level.



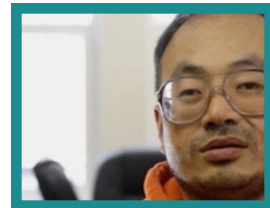
GREG



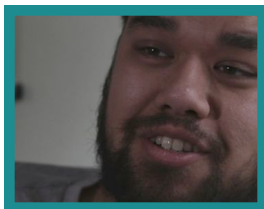
JANIS



FRANK



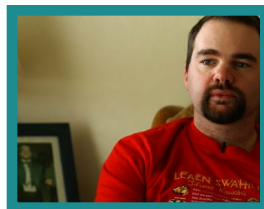
JACOB



WOODAH



DON



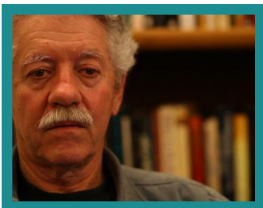
ANDREW



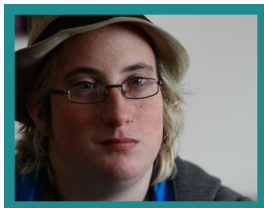
KEVEN



RUDY



JIM



ROBYN



KAMAL

Notes For the Classroom

Screen TOO SANE FOR THIS WORLD for grades 6-12, college or teacher education classes.

Teachers can develop lesson plans incorporating the film for a unit on differences and disabilities.

History: Throughout history there have been individuals who had various physical or intellectual differences. Einstein was purported to have dyslexia and other challenges. Have students research historical figures that had some type of difference or disability and have them do a multi-media presentation.

Teacher Education: Have teachers create a short video, where they are to interview someone on the autism spectrum.

Social Skills: Have students answer the following questions, which are a modification of the questions from the film:

1-Do you feel different?

2-Have you been bullied?

3- What are your social challenges?

4- Do you have sensory challenges? If so, describe them.

5-What is difficult for you?

6-Name your good traits.

7-Do you have any advice for your teacher?

Autism Resources (selected)

The Autism Society improves the lives of all affected by autism through education, advocacy, services, research and support.

<http://www.autism-society.org/>

The Autistic Self Advocacy Network seeks to advance the principles of the disability rights movement with regard to autism.

<http://www.autisticadvocacy.org/>

Autism Woman's Network is dedicated to building a community of autistic girls and women, their families, friends and supporters.

<http://autismwomensnetwork.org/>

Wrong Planet is the web community designed for individuals (and parents / professionals of those) with Autism, [Asperger's Syndrome](#), ADHD, PDDs, and other neurological differences.

<http://www.wrongplanet.net/>

The Autism Acceptance Project works to promote acceptance of and accommodations for autistic people in society.

<http://www.taaproject.com/>

AASCEND unites adults of all ages on the autism spectrum, their families and friends, academics and professionals in the autism field unite as a community in AASCEND. Our members sit down at the table as peers to support one another and work together to achieve AASCEND'S goals of Education, Networking and Development.

<http://www.aascend.net/>

Autism Network International is an autistic-run self-help and advocacy organization for autistic people.

<http://www.autreat.com/>

Suggested Reading (selected)

Thinking in Pictures: and Other Reports of my Life with Autism by Temple Grandin. (New York: Bantam, 1995). Not really an account of Temple's life so much as her explanation of autism, particularly her own, citing examples from her own life and others she has talked to and read. It also discusses education and treatment. One reader calls it terrific: better than *Emergence*....

Nobody Nowhere: The Extraordinary Autobiography of an Autistic by Donna Williams. (Random, 1992). Doubleday, 1992. 219 pages. Also Corgi Books. The autobiography of an autistic woman; bestseller in early 1993. Shows an autistic person surviving an abusive family situation; painful to read. List member reactions: some describe it as truly amazing and very valuable; others don't recommend it at all.

Emergence: Labeled Autistic by Temple Grandin & Margaret M. Scariano. (Navato, California: Arena Press, 1986). Since updated in 1991. This is an autobiographical book by Temple Grandin, with Margaret Scariano. It offers insight into the frustrations that people labeled autistic have during the time they are trying to develop an ability to communicate. This is considered a rare autobiographical account in as much as the majority of the people with autism have not developed such sophisticated communication abilities.

Somebody Somewhere: Breaking Free from the World of Autism by Donna Williams. (1993). Also Doubleday, 1994. Donna explores the four years since her diagnosis and her attempts to leave her 'world under glass' and live normally. Shows some of the distortions of perception an autistic person may have, and possibilities for un-learning them. But hard to read without having 1st read the other book, as it refers to events in that book.

There's a Boy in Here by Judy Barron & Sean Barron. (Chapmans, 1993). Sean Barron and his mother, Judy Barron report on their experiences with autism. Sean has autism. His is one of very few autobiographical accounts. And it gives unusual, exceptionally clear insights into the disability and its many manifestations. There is much in this book that supports what has been seen through facilitated communication.

Acknowledgements and Credits

TOO SANE FOR THIS WORLD was produced by William Davenport and Sean Sullivan

**To purchase a DVD: Send \$35.00 to
Talk Story Films
P.O.Box 523
Brisbane, CA 94005
or www.talkstoryfilms.com
make check payable to Talk Story Films**

Credits

Discussion guide written by William Davenport