

Approach to an Autistic Experience: a Collage

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Some Thoughts on the Research

Intention: Making experiences of and with autism accessible for science
Two Perspektives: own experiences – experiences with others other-awareness
Research Field: groups of autistic people (here: Camps, Workshops „Autistic Skills“)
Approach: Develop theory by successive and reproducible abstraction
Ziel: Collage out of findings and discussions of theory

Workshops „Autistic Skills“

by autistic people for autistic people
ca. 120 workshops with ca. 800 participants since 2009
The participants are
open-minded, interested, nonjudgemental
The workshops
focus on an exchange of the participants own experiences
function like group-based introspections
enhance other-awareness
are an environment for explorative researches

Design of the Research

Grounded Theory; Ethnomethodology
Juliet Corbin, Anselm Strauss; Harold Garfinkel
Perspektives:
guided interviews with 6 young autistic persons
brochures on the workshops „Autistic Skills“
one workshop „Autistic Skills“ with 6 young participants
the author's introspection based on his own publications
Sample: 11 autistic persons, 8 male, 3 female,
aged between 14 and 24 years

Findings / Results

Being Different

Being autistic means being different:
experiencing social environments as strange and inappropriate
being excluded
But autistic environments are
regarded as familiar
experienced as barrier-free
seen as a suitable social environment

To Understand and to Be Understood

Difficulties in understanding others:
irony and jokes are hard to understand
contexts are often not clear
Feeling not understood by others:
misunderstood
misjudged
Two worlds – two kinds of understanding:
Social and communication experiences logically and rationally
Experiences with objects intuitively

Thinking and Perceiving Differently

The autistic way of being different:
is hard to understand
has to do with thinking and perceiving
means translating thoughts
Autistic thinking:
Inside and outside perspectives are not clearly distinguished from each other
Within communication (intrinsische) associations and synchrony of activities are vital

Autistic Spectrum

Identified coordinates of a spectrum related to thinking and perceiving:
Speaking: correct, like literary language or cumbersome and reduced
Speakers perspektive: unplausible or (logically) comprehensible
Interests: pictures and objects or rather structures and functions
Basic perception: visual or rather auditory

Abstraction of Findings

To Judge and To Be Judged

strange:	external perspective
	behaviour
	deviation
selbst:	internal perspective
	thinking and perception
	own personality
autistisch:	external perspective
	thinking and perception
	variation

Incompatible social environment?

To Process Experiences

non-autistic	social world: intuitively („Theory of Mind“)
	world of objects: logically, rationally
	thinking: verbal, based on concepts
autistic	social world: logically, rationally
	objects: intuitively („Theory of Function“)
	thinking: based on perceptions, associative

Objects related approach to the world?

Thinking and Language

Translating thoughts	
different modes of thinking	
lingual	perceptual
concepts	associations
joining	synchronizing activities
attention	internal perspective
external	social world
	world of objects

Language and Thinking detached?

Thinking-styles

Characteristics depending on **interaction**, **dominance** and **structure** of each thinking-mode
Lingual thinking
language processing speaking and writing
Perceptual thinking
visual perception object (picture) structure (pattern) auditory perception
A variation of thinking-styles?

Embedding Within a Theoretical Context

Stigma

Erving Goffman*

damaging social identity (stigmatised)
confirming social identity (stigmatising)
Autistic (self-) Wahrnehmung:
rather objects than social aspects
rather own body than social role
Autism: violation of taboos
trait of personality
Ethnos
Harold Garfinkel, Damian Milton
specific similarities within interaction and communication
sense of self and the world

Sign Systems

Jacques Lacan, Martin Feuling

Thinking takes place within sign systems, of which a couple exist. They structure thinking in different ways respectively.
Language: term and logic
Linkage: concepts
Reference: other sign systems
Self-reference: social environment inside & outside detached
Pictures: object and structure
Sounds: oscillation and rhythm
Linkage: associations
Reference: perception
Self-reference: own body inside & outside blurred

Consciousness and Personality

Temple Grandin, Hajo Seng

entangled thinking:
Language completely covers the other sign systems. Those appear as unconscious eg within dreams, where they appear to be structured like language.
Self- and worldsperception: holistic
Reference: social environment
detached thinking:
The sign systems cover each other only partially and are all part of the consciousness. Autistic humans don't have a unconscious which is structured like language.
Self- and worldsperception: fragmented
Reference: world of objects

Functional Connectivity

Uta Frith, Laurent Mottron et al.

Neurobiological findings are quite heterogeneous, but finding on **functional connectivity** match well:
other neurological findings
neuropsychological approaches:
Theory of Mind
Central Coherence
Executive Functions
The areas of language processing and visual perception processing have a **high neuronal plasticity**. **Variations within**
connectivity between brain areas
configuration on a neuronal level
on a psychic level
of sign systems

The names listed here are not complete and should only give an idea of the source of these ideas.

To Grow Up and to Live Within a Social Environment

to be excluded, to be discriminated
disease, disorder, handicap or otherness?
framings determine limits of development
unable to mirror in others
thinking, perceiving, learning differently
missing models
being isolated, alienated, excluded
unsuitable social environment

To Understand Autism and Autistic Individuals

autism is a multidimensional spectrum
autistic thinking is a variation of human thinking
autism means not to be understood
barriers of understanding are on both sides
autism means thinking differently and thereby
learning, developing and socialising differently
autism means exclusion
socialising within a difficult environment

Suggestions to Autism Research

participate autistic individuals
change perspectives
develop interdisciplinary research layouts
social, psychological and biological aspects together
dare a variation of methods
in particular explorative approaches
question notions and pre-assumptions
think of framings and stigmatising