

# PLEASE LISTEN TO MY HEART

PLEASE LISTEN TO MY HEART  
PLEASE FORGIVE THESE CLUMSY WORDS  
JUST HEAR ME FROM MY OPEN HEART TO YOURS  
THE LANGUAGE OF MY HEART SPEAKS ELOQUENTLY  
WHILE MY FINGERS GRAPPLE FOR THE LETTERS ONE AT A TIME.  
MY MOUTH HAS NOTHING TO SAY.

HEART LANGUAGE REMEMBERS THE BEGINNING  
AND FORSEES THE END  
IT HOLDS MY WHOLE LIFE IN ONE SINGLE GLANCE  
AND TRIES TO CONVEY EVERYTHING AT ONCE.

WORDS ON THE OTHER HAND  
BREAK IT ALL UP INTO  
A THOUSAND TINY PIECES  
WHICH NEVER GO BACK TOGETHER AGAIN

*Roy Bedward, Age 29  
Autism  
Madison, WI*

Arts Summit Concurrent Session  
“Teaching the Arts to Students With Autism”

August 26, 2015

Nancy Minshev, MD

With

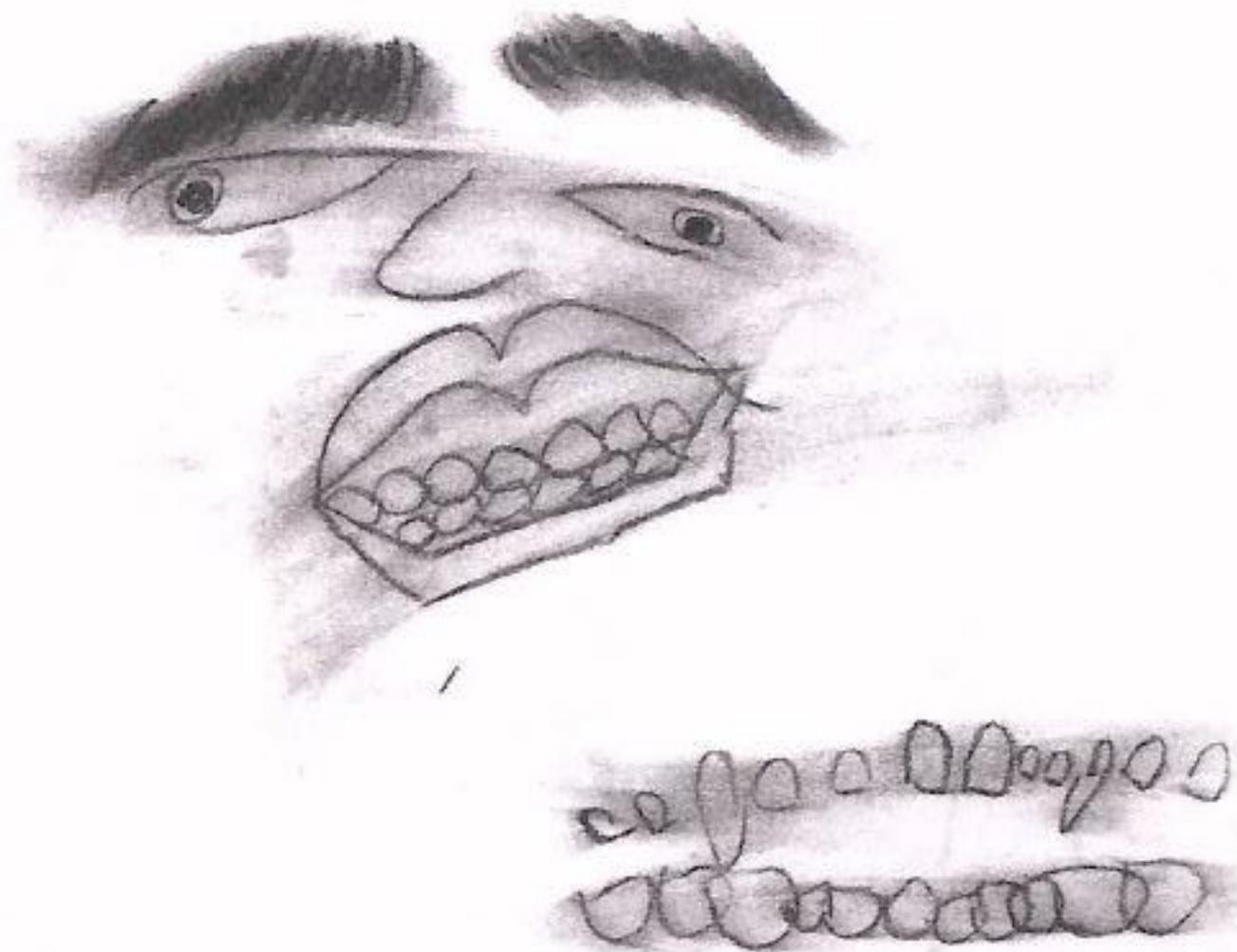
William Rock, Artist Extraordinaire

# Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- Autism Spectrum Disorder is the underdevelopment (child-like state) of the ability to be social, communicate, recognize and regulate emotions, and understand concepts and functioning in a dynamic world.
- Originally called a “Disorder of Affective Contact” (Kanner, 1943)

# Clues that ASD is Present

- Perceived as odd or strange
- Often expressionless face or one expression
- Poor use of eye contact for communication
- Unusual memory for details but poor concepts
- Poor common sense, poor abstraction
- Obsessions/special interests focused on details
- To them, we are illogical, erratic and scary.



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# The “ASD” in Everyone

- Most people in the world do not have ASD but they do have problems constantly or situationally with one or more of these skills for different reasons
- What you learn about ASD students will be applicable to all students and people, and to yourself

# Prevalence: How Common is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

- Prevalence: 1/68, 1/50, 1/35
- Translates to: 1.5%, 2%, 2.9% of population
- Not an overestimate- probably an underestimate

## The Real News:

50% have “normal” IQ scores and language

- **50% have IQ scores >85**
- **Another 23% have IQ scores of 71-85**
- In North Korea: 66% of these normal IQ ASD students are in regular classrooms and unidentified. The same is probably true here.



# Adolescence As A Time of Increased Symptoms

- Most of the rise in prevalence is due to new diagnoses of ASD in adolescents with normal IQ scores

# Double Challenge of Adolescence

Why might adolescence be a time when these children come to attention for the first time?

What skills do they now need that they did not have before? What is different about the world they live in as adolescents?

# Children are simpler than adolescents and life for them is simpler

- Clear rules and authority structure that they respect, value and conform to or try to
- Children value these rules and the opinion of their teachers
- They are child-like in their hearts and spirits
- They have yet to develop the cognitive capacity or desire for deception, manipulation, or retaliation, or choose not to
- **In the ideal world these things are true.**

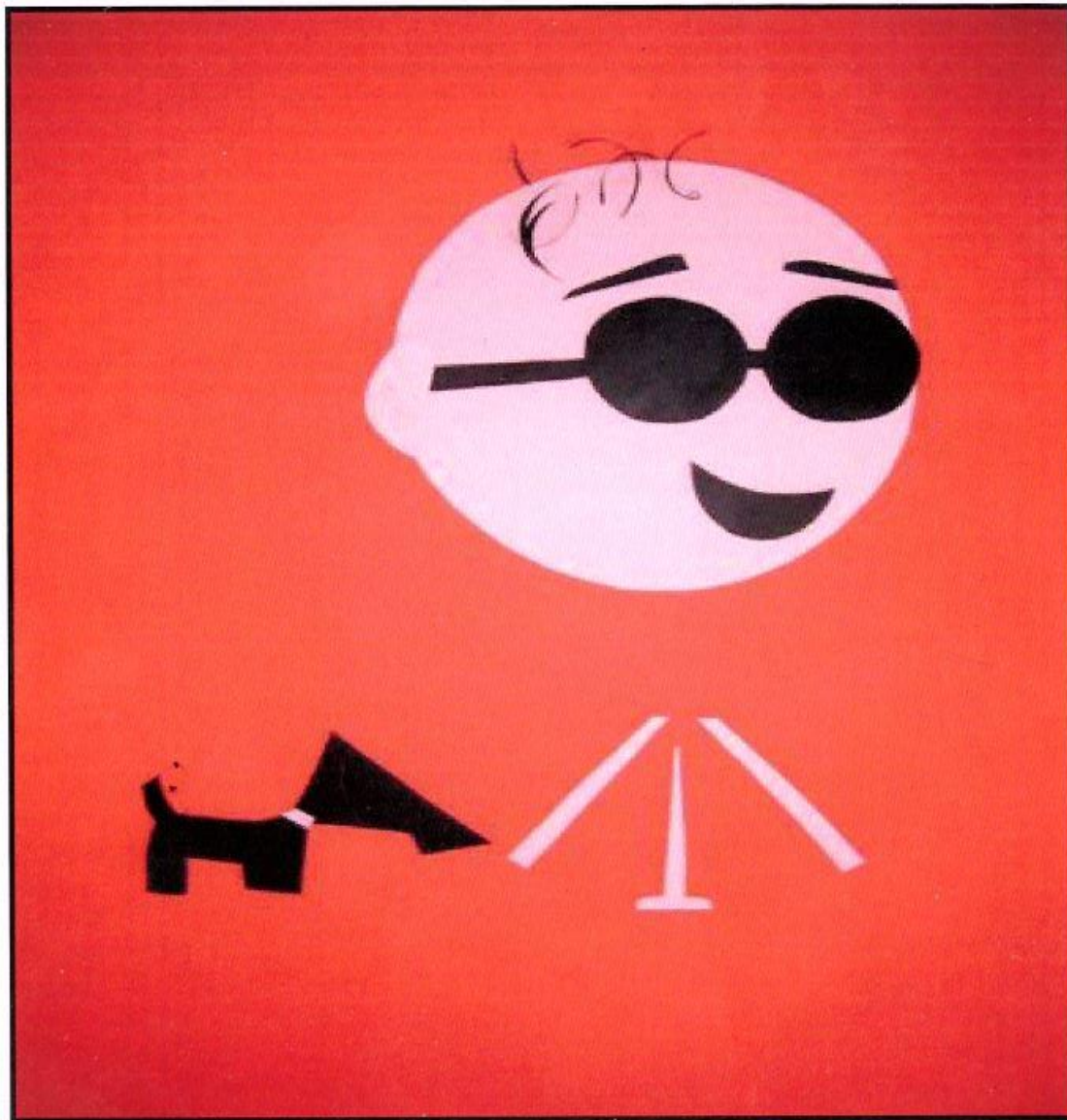
# Adolescents and Adults with ASD May Continue to Be Children At Heart

- Hence, using what worked in childhood may be helpful in supporting their function
- Increased, externally provided structure and organization, simpler language and concepts, external regulation of social conflict, clear simple rules

# Golden Hands

*Matthew McCollough, Age 15, Developmentally Delayed*





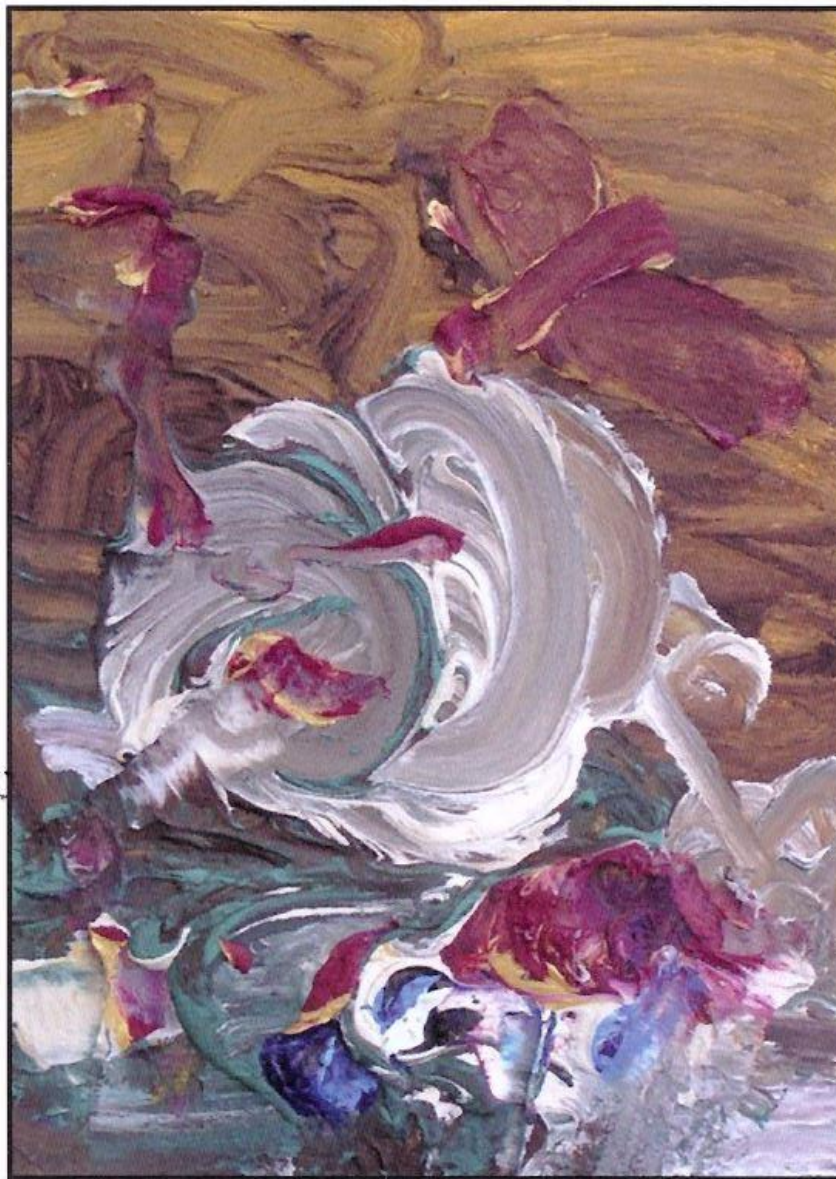
## Boy and Dog

*Wil C. Kerner, Age 13, Autism, Renton, WA*

# Life gets much more complicated and real world-like in adolescence

- Adolescence is a time of greatly increasing social, emotional and cognitive demands
- Students with ASD do not have the typical growth in advanced social, emotional and thinking skills that other students do
- Many students without ASD will exhibit impaired social, emotional, communication and problem solving skills for different reasons but the same approach may help them



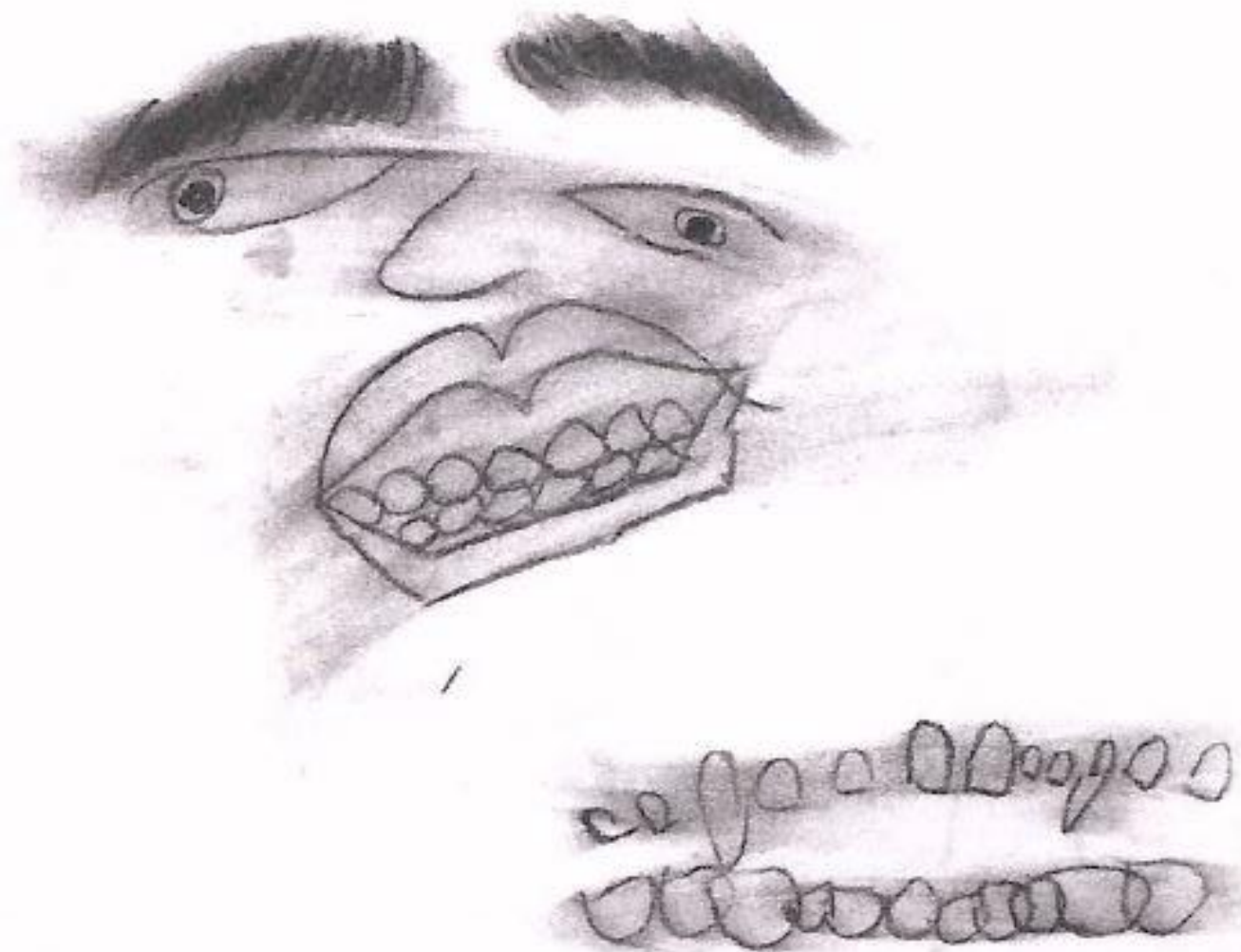


**Flight of Chaos** *Andrew Randall, Age 22,  
Autism and Bipolar Disorder, Seekonk, MA*



# Three Basic Features of ASD Students

- They have lots of information in the form of details and facts but their minds do not connect them into a meaningful schema. It is like having thousands of unmatched socks.
- They don't understand how the facts they know relate to how they would function in the external world or even what the facts mean about themselves (internal world).
- Slower processing speeds



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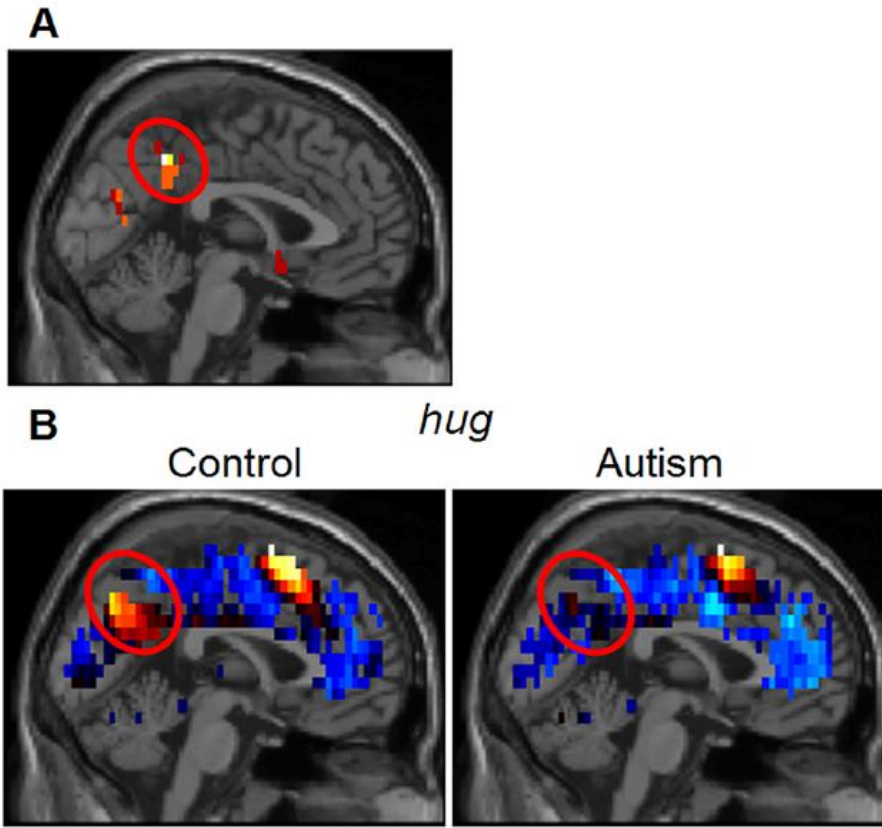
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# Not understanding what information means about and to themselves

- Brain imaging studies show that people with ASD lack a brain representation of “self”
- So social interactions like hugging others or being hugged are facts about the external world but not ones they experience in relation to themselves.





**Figure 2. Posterior midline *self* factor location.** A. Location of the voxels (circled) derived from the factor analysis of the Control Group that defined the posterior cingulate/precuneus sphere of this group's *self* factor. Voxels in this cluster (with MNI x-coordinates extending from 0 to  $-9$ ) are shown projected on the mid-sagittal plane. (The coordinates and radii of all 6 spheres associated with this factor are shown in Table S1 in File S1). B. Mean activation in midline brain structures for the verb *hug* (averaged over agent and recipient roles) for the two groups, differing in posterior cingulate/precuneus. The verb *hug* was chosen for illustration here because of the salience of hugging as a social interaction in autism, where enveloping pressure is sometimes desired but without physical contact between oneself with another person, as in Temple Grandin's squeeze machine [40]. The depiction of the activation in this slice for all of the other verbs was very similar to *hug*, for both groups.

# Potential Teaching Goals

- Learning to identify their own and others' emotions- feelings, naming them, strategies for dealing with them internally
- Learning to tolerate them and to express them in appropriate ways: beginning of mindfulness
- Feeling heard by others
- Learning the perspectives of other people
- Accepting that other people have different thoughts, ideas, and feelings that are valid
- Giving and receiving respect- personhood

# Teaching Strategies

- Provide structure: small, manageable pieces
- Be explicit- don't assume understanding of anything and be succinct-give the bottom line
- Model the desired activity/product
- Assume that if they don't do what you want, they do not understand or they need more support to do it
- Be sure no one is bullied or disrespected



# Other Tips

- Use fewer words and give the bottom line
- Say it slower and pause for it to sink in
- Write it down- “Campbell Soup” instructions
- Give them space- may mean not looking at them when you talk, no drama
- Give them a space to retreat to- a creative or thinking space- when they have had enough talking and group contact
- Ask each student to say what they liked, what was done well, and one suggestion for improvement of the work of others

# Website for Slides and Videos

Dr. Nancy Minshew

Center for Autism Research (CeFAR) at the  
University of Pittsburgh

[www.pittautismresearch.org](http://www.pittautismresearch.org)

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# William Rock, Artist Extraordinaire

## websites

- [www.centurymountain.com](http://www.centurymountain.com)
- [www.artandinspiration.org](http://www.artandinspiration.org)