

Sex On the Spectrum



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“If I could snap my fingers and be non-autistic, I would not. Autism is a part of whom I am.” – Temple Grandin, PhD

“Why Fit in when you were born to standout?” – Dr. Seuss

Disclaimer

We are not:

- Licensed social workers/counselors/therapists

Who we are:

- Scott: Autistic adult/adult on the autism spectrum spouse
- April: ADHD spouse and “supernurturer”

Our advice is not based on any religious or moral tenets

Sex on the Spectrum

What We Will Be Covering

1. Reflecting on sexual expression and making a plan for achieving self-fulfillment
2. Strategies for keeping life in balance and keeping sex “sexy”

Sex on the Spectrum

1. Reflecting on sexual expression and making a plan for achieving self-fulfillment

Preparation: “the action or process of making something ready for use or service or of getting ready for some occasion, test, or duty”

<https://www.merriam-webster.com>

Part of preparation IS planning!

Failing to plan = planning to fail

We'll talk more about this later!



Sex on the Spectrum

1. Reflecting on sexual expression and making a plan for achieving self-fulfillment

Self-reflection: “self-examination”, “self-understanding”

Koopman & Hakemulder (2015) - Journal of Literary Theory

“Effects of Literature on Empathy and Self-Reflection”

- “thoughts and insights on one’s self, often in relation to others or society”

The Logic

↑ Self-Reflection leads to ↑in understanding ourselves
↑in understanding ourselves leads to ↑in knowledge
↑in knowledge leads to being better prepared to experience
desire and participate in sexual expression



Sex on the Spectrum

1. Reflecting on sexual expression and making a plan for achieving self-fulfillment

Self-Reflection

“It is about questioning, in a positive way, what you do and why you do it and then deciding whether there is a better, or more efficient, way of doing it in the future.”

- <http://www.open.ac.uk/choose/unison/develop/my-skills/self-reflection>

Sex on the Spectrum

1. Reflecting on sexual expression and making a plan for achieving self-fulfillment

Desire: “to long or hope for, to express a wish for”

<https://www.merriam-webster.com>

Sexual expression:

“...a central aspect of being human throughout life encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships.

(World Health Organization, 2006)

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1. Reflecting on sexual expression and making a plan for achieving self-fulfillment

What does this all mean?

Examining ourselves (self-reflection) by going through the processes and actions necessary to becoming ready (preparation) with expressing our hopes, wishes, and longings (forms of desire) to ourselves and others as sexual beings in various ways (forms of sexual expression).



Sex on the Spectrum

1. Reflecting on sexual expression and making a plan for achieving self-fulfillment

Barriers to full expression of sexuality

- Religious programming
- Family influences
- Economic restrictions
- Dichotomous thinking
- Cultural acceptability
- Peer pressure
- Physical concerns
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of knowledge

Sex on the Spectrum

1. Reflecting on sexual expression and making a plan for achieving self-fulfillment

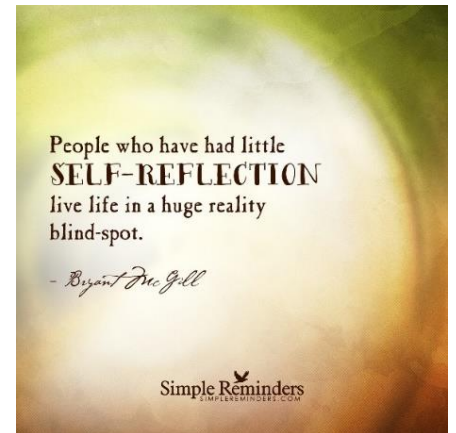
Barriers to full expression of sexuality

- Autism can result in diminished self-reflection and impairments in
 - Theory of Mind
 - social communication
 - empathy

Lombardo et al. (2007) – “Self Referential Cognition and Empathy in Autism”

Frith (2003) – “Autism: Explaining the Enigma”

Does this quote sound familiar when related to the autism community in regard to Theory of Mind?



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1. Reflecting on sexual expression and making a plan for achieving self-fulfillment

Barriers to full expression of sexuality

- Religious programming
Belief systems, doctrine
- Cultural acceptability
What does a society or culture deem as acceptable?
- Family influences
What is the family's role in the role of sexual expression?

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1. Reflecting on sexual expression and making a plan for achieving self-fulfillment

Barriers to full expression of sexuality

- Peer pressure

What pressure exists to conform to one's peers?

- Economic restrictions

How does a person's financial situation restrict that individual?

- Physical restrictions

How does a person's physical limitations or differences restrict that individual?

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1. Reflecting on sexual expression and making a plan for achieving self-fulfillment

Barriers to full expression of sexuality

- Dichotomous thinking
“Black and white thinking” (i.e. My Way or the Highway)
- Lack of confidence
Not trusting “what you know”
- Lack of knowledge
Not knowing “what to do”

Sex on the Spectrum

1. Reflecting on sexual expression and making a plan for achieving self-fulfillment

The Importance of Sexuality

“...a central aspect of being human throughout life encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships.

“While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.” (*WHO, 2006a*)

Sex on the Spectrum

1. Reflecting on sexual expression and making a plan for achieving self-fulfillment

You have much so much to offer that money can't buy. You have unique skills and talents. You have a whole different way of seeing the world.

And you might think, “Yep...right...whatever!”



Sex on the Spectrum

2. Strategies for keeping life in balance and keeping sex “sexy”

Ineffective Strategies

- A. “Jumping Into It” Randomly
- B. Overplanning
- C. Not Being Yourself/Not Speaking Up
- D. Ungratefulness/Unthankfulness

Effective Strategies

- A. Intellectual Foreplay
- B. Planned Spontaneity
- C. Rigorous Honesty
- D. Rituals



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Ineffective Strategy A - “Jumping Into It” Randomly

- no thought involved, no “rhyme or reason”, “just because”

Stokes, Newton, & Kaur (2007) found that “individuals with ASD were more likely than their neurotypical peers to engage in inappropriate courting behaviors; to focus their attention on celebrities, strangers, colleagues, and exes; and to pursue their target for longer lengths of time (i.e., stalking)”.

Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, v37 n10 p1969-1986 - Nov 2007

“Mars and Venus On A Date” – John Grey, PhD

Attraction → Uncertainty → Exclusivity →

Intimacy → Engagement

Men like rubber bands (pgs. 102-104)

my life has
become this
one big
“I DON'T
KNOW”

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Ineffective Strategy A - “Jumping Into It” Randomly

Earlier, we said that failing to plan → planning to fail

Planning helps to reduce anxiety (unless overanalyzing)

Let's think about this....

- Couldn't plan the other person's expression
- Couldn't predict what he/she was going to do
- Things didn't go as planned
- Frustration sets in

How many of you can relate to this?



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Effective Strategy A – “Intellectual Foreplay”

- AKA “The Process of Getting To Know Someone”
- Using an ineffective strategy does not allow getting to know someone well

How To Be Effective?

Ask a lot of questions (1000 Questions for Couples – Michael Webb)

- Take time getting to know that person

What rituals could be added to our relationship on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis that would help us to remain close?

Do you need to hear "I love you" or similar words on a regular basis from your partner?

What does my family do that annoys you?

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Ineffective Strategy B - Overplanning

- AKA “Overanalyzing”, “Overthinking”, Too Much Planning
- Can’t be in the current moment, an enemy of feeling
- Challenge with being an autistic adult/adult on the autism spectrum

How to be make it more effective? A pair of dice (we’ll discuss this more a little later...)

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Effective Strategy B – Planned Spontaneity

Virtual Sex/Role Playing

- Involves “teasing out the sensitivities”
- Not an end of itself, but preparing for an interpersonal relationship

Can be done between two people (not recommended with a stranger).
In the same room, over the phone, on a laptop, instant messaging, etc.



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Effective Strategy B – Planned Spontaneity

Virtual Sex/Role Playing

Importance for couples with ASD partner to understand how the partner can be affected by intimate sensory and touching experiences. Should all be examined. Challenges can arise if one partner has a greater need for intimate contact, hugging or touching than the other partner.

Tavassoli et al. (2014) – “Sensory Over-Responsivity in Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders”

Note: Increased sensory sensitivity linked to more self-reported autistic traits

* Robertson and Simmons (2012) study in Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders

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Effective Strategy B – Planned Spontaneity

“The Love Dice”

- * The dice take the pressure of planning off.
 - Don't have to think (thank goodness)
 - It's a game, fun, surprise
 - Play as long or short as you want
 - Responsibility/pressure (what is this about?)
- * Helps with communication.
 - Really important
 - Really difficult (communication challenges on the autism spectrum)



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Effective Strategy B – Planned Spontaneity

Cosplay

- Merriam-Webster: the activity or practice of dressing up as a character from a work of fiction (such as a comic book, video game, or television show)
- Sending of positive thoughts/feelings/comfort to another person

AAARGH!



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Ineffective Strategy C – Not Being Yourself/Not Speaking Up

- AKA “Keeping Up With Society”, “Being Someone Else”
- Always needing to impress someone (e.g. a dozen roses on the first date)
- Going “Over the Top” (Intentional Relationships talk)

The mistake of doing something you think someone else wants instead of finding out what that person wants

- “I Felt Like a Shell of Myself”

Not being yourself/speaking up = complexities

“Simplicity is the glory of expression” →

(Walt Whitman, American Poet)

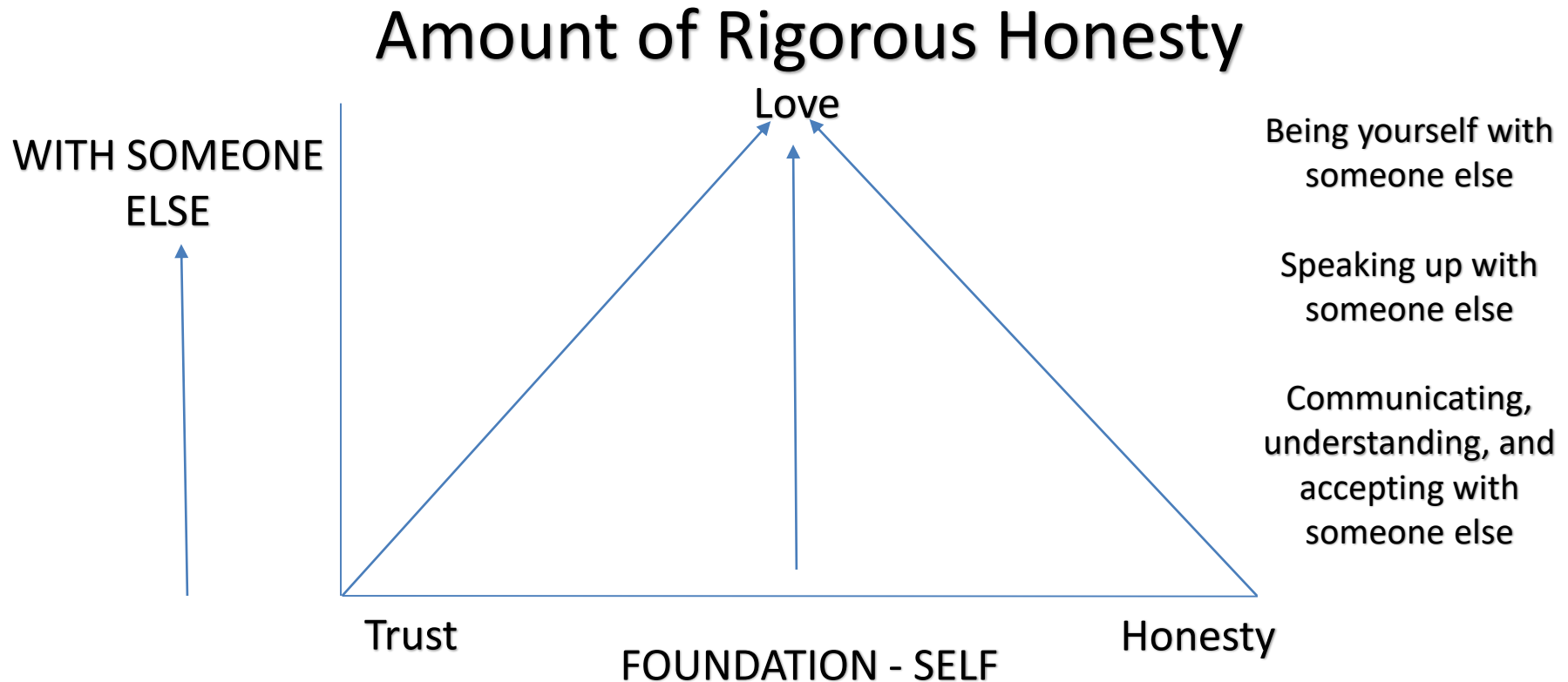
K.I.S.S. (Keep It Simple, Stupid)



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Effective Strategy C – Rigorous Honesty

- Starts with being honest and truthful to yourself



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Ineffective Strategy D – “Being Ungrateful/Unthankful”

- AKA “The Attention Is Continually Focused on Me/My Situation”
- Allowing society to determine how much you can contribute
- Negative vibe develops/deepens
- Focusing on things outside your control

“BITTERNESS AND RESENTMENT ONLY HURT
ONE PERSON, AND IT’S NOT THE PERSON WE’RE
RESENTING - IT’S US.”

ALANA STEWART

© Lifehack Quotes

Oh, woe is me.
Should any one being face such
suffering?
Shall I be forced the fate that
hath been laid before me?



Sex on the Spectrum

Effective Strategy D – Rituals

- Merriam-Webster: done in accordance with social custom or normal protocol
- Sending of positive thoughts/feelings/comfort to another person

“Sex is not just what the body does, but is more importantly between the ears”

- April Jagger

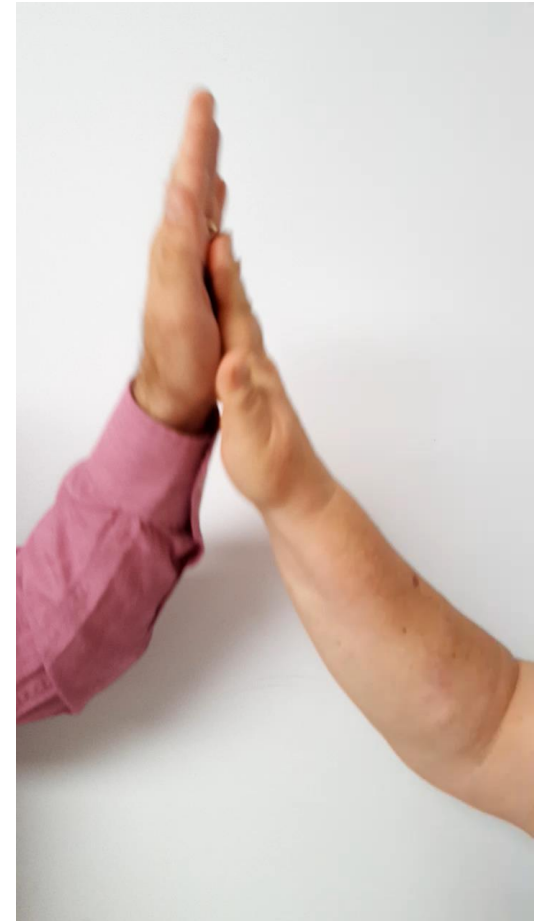
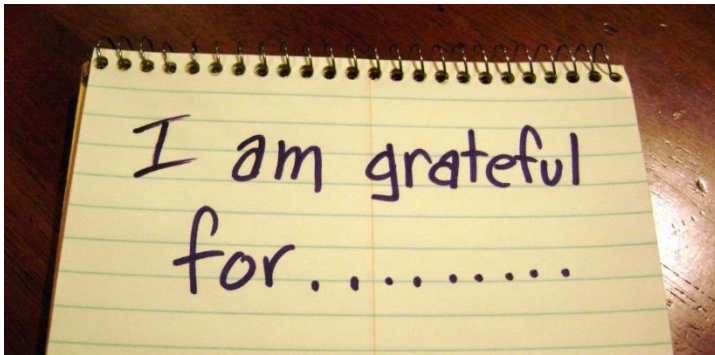
“Sex is 90% mental and 10% physical” - Unknown



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Effective Strategy D – “Rituals”

- Develop an “Attitude of Gratitude”
- Volunteer (Places Focus on Someone Else)
- Keep a Thankfulness/Gratitude Journal



Sex on the Spectrum - References

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Inaugural Tri State Adult Autism Symposium Conference

Inaugural Tri-State

Adult Autism Symposium

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- By an autistic adult/adult on the autism spectrum for the adult autism community

To register:

www.gcaspies.org/conference

Online registration is open! Waivers available!

Any Questions?

Please see us afterward for any additional questions or comments you have.

Thank you for listening to our presentation!

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