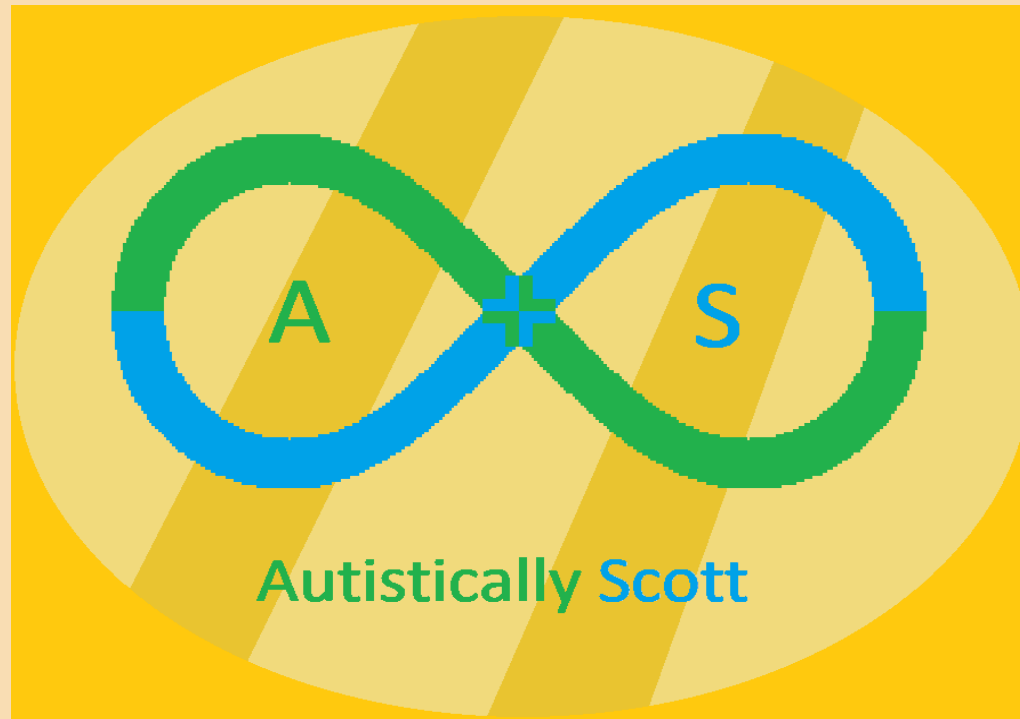
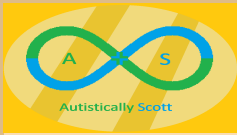


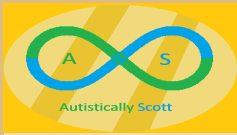
Exploring Autistic Empathy





Main Topics

- Empathy theories
- Autistic-led research
- How Autistics can express empathy
- Self-care and boundaries
- Double Empathy Problem
- Content warning: mentions of abuse, suicide, mental health

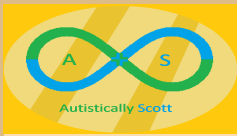


Who am I?



Scott Neilson (he/him)

- Autistic trainer, mentor and consultant.
- The need for Autistic training
- Promoting Autistic identity and culture
- References and visuals by Autistic people



EMPATHY VERSUS COMPASSION

Ability to identify and understand another person's feelings

Evokes understanding

Implies that you understand the other person's situation

Doesn't necessarily mean that you are motivated to help a person

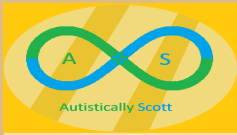
Feeling of sympathy, pity, and concern for the misfortune and suffering of others

Evokes feelings like pity, sympathy, and concern

Does not imply that you understand the other person's situation

Implies that you are motivated to help that person

Pediaa.com



Debunking Empathy Theories





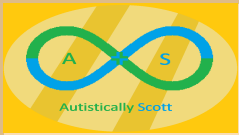
Theory of Mind (1983)	Problems with this theory
<p>Definition - Understanding people have different thoughts. Knowing their beliefs, feelings, intentions.</p>	<p>Not everyone 'failed' the tests (and it was only children tested) Does not take into account Autistic communication.</p>
<p>Sally Anne Task (Uta Frith, Simon Baron-Cohen, 1985) Assumes Autistics have no empathy</p>	<p>Autistic people masking contradicts "lack of" theory of mind.</p> <p>No differences in ToM in Masking Study (Hannah L. Belcher, 2021)</p>
<p>"biologically set apart from the rest of humanity in lacking the basic machinery" - Simon Baron-Cohen</p>	<p><u>Failures by - Morton Ann Gernsbacher and Melanie Yergeau (2019)</u></p>

References - <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/0010027785900228>
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17694374/> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34342806/>
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6959478/>



Extreme Male Brain Theory (1999)	Problems with this theory
Empathising - Systemising (Simon Baron-Cohen)	There are no gendered brains.
More 'male brains' with systemising (mechanics, maths engineering)	Excludes Autistic people of other genders.
Presumes Autistic people struggle to feel empathy.	Not all Autistic people focus on systemising more.

<https://sillyolyou.wordpress.com/2019/05/16/the-illusion-of-neurosex-your-brain-is-not-male-nor-female/>



Harm of these Theories

Poor media representation

Autistic people going unrecognised

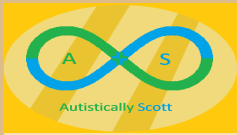
Services assume we lack emotions

Presumed as uncaring

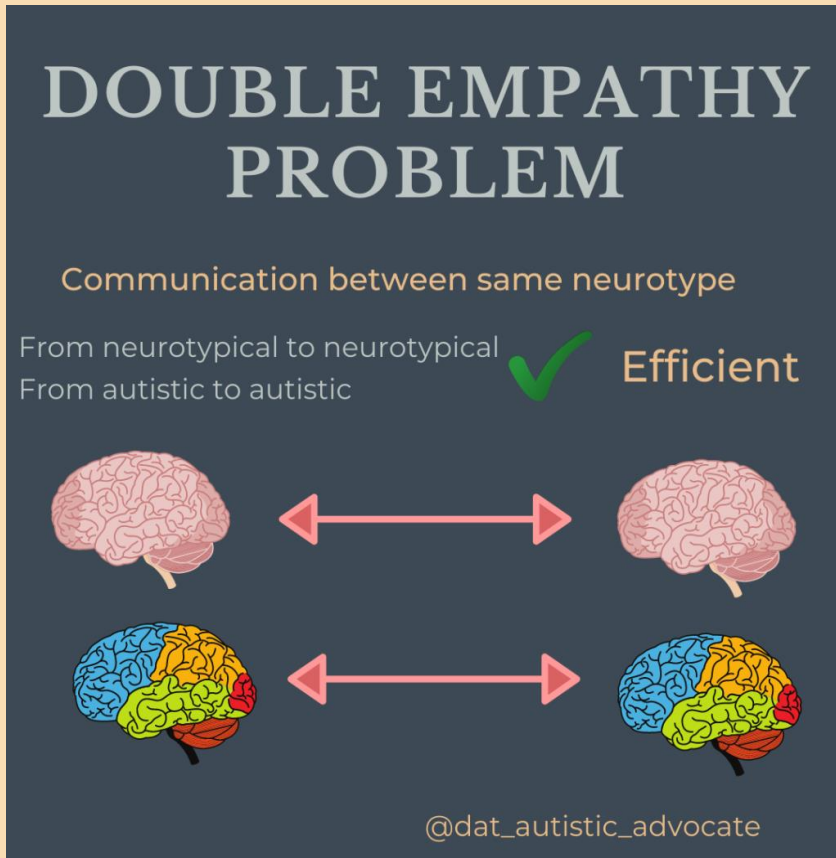
Job or study rejections

Confirmation bias

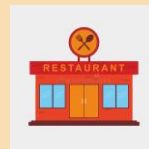




Double Empathy Problem



- Autistic and non-autistic people can struggle to understand each other - Damian Milton
- Neurotypical privilege
- Autistic interactions better with fellow Autistics - Catherine Crompton (2019)
- Non-autistic struggle to read Autistic facial expressions.
- Culture clash



- <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.586171/full> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26603886/>
- <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1362361320919286>
- Image - <https://dataactivism.wordpress.com/tag/doubleempathyproblem/>



on my way home from work today,



on the sidewalk ahead, there was a scarf on the ground.



the guy in front of me paused and looked at it -



I thought maybe he'd pick it up, but he just kept walking.



how long had it been on the ground, being passed by and not picked up?



it deserved better.

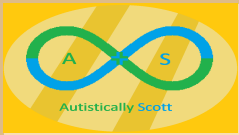


I tied it neatly on a bike post, in hopes that it's owner would find it



I nearly teared up as I left - maybe it's stupid, but I felt so sorry for that scarf.

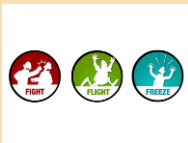
<https://mobile.twitter.com/memilluu> @memilluu



Empathy Expressions



Hyper-Empathy Challenges



- Meltdowns and shutdowns
- Lack boundaries (saying no)
- Second hand embarrassment
- Exposure anxiety
- "What's wrong with me?"
- Fawning - pleasing others
- Autistic burnout

I'm hypersensitive to what others are feeling or (at least to what I think they are feeling). If I feel like someone hates me, I feel hatred too, If they are angry, I'm angry too. That's why when someone gets mad at me and screams, I often scream back and I'm often having a meltdown from emotional overload. I know that screaming back will only make things worse but I can't control myself. And when someone is explicitly sad, I'm sad too.

@stimmy__autie

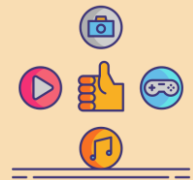
<http://www.donnawilliams.net/index7a3e.html?id=exposureanxiety>

Self-care



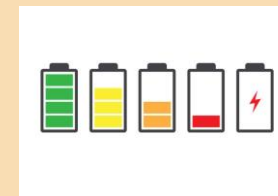
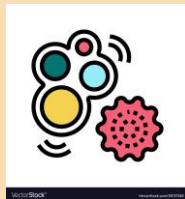
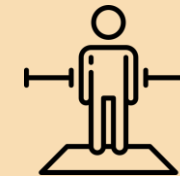
Trust our gut

Learn boundaries

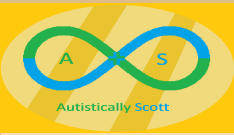


Taking breaks

Adapt environment



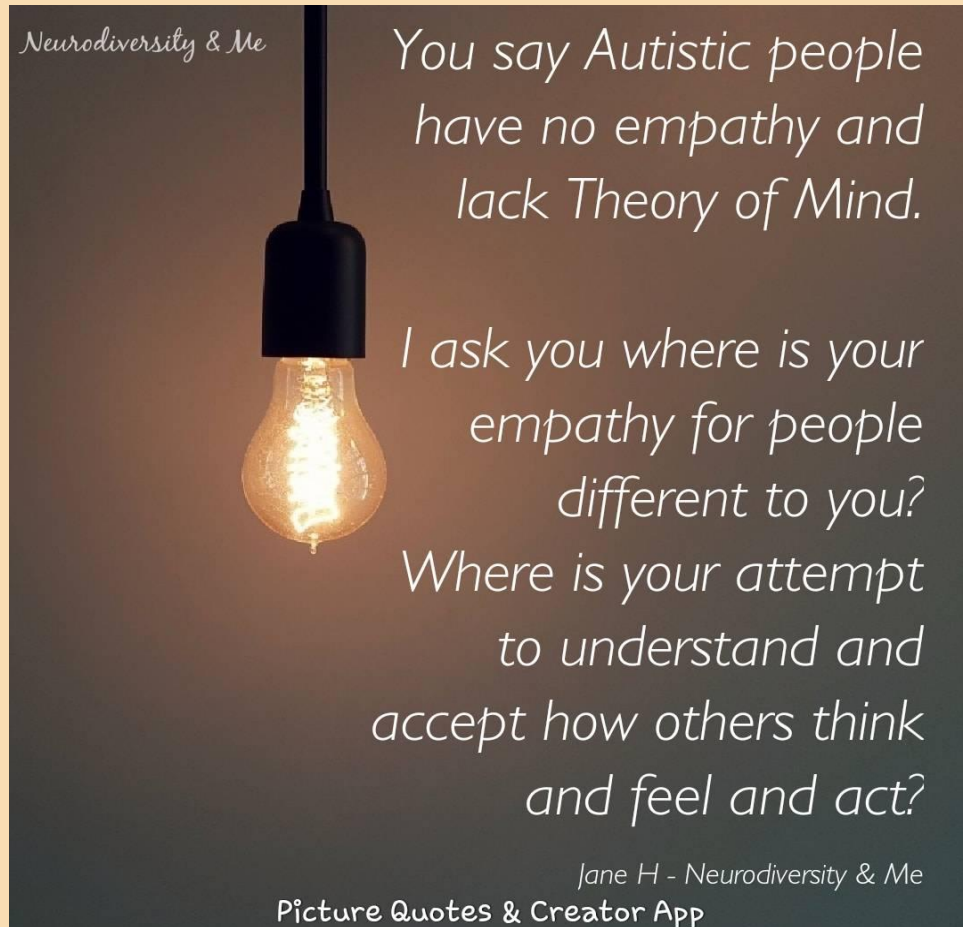
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnbeh.2022.852203/full>



Where is the Empathy and Compassion for Autistic people?



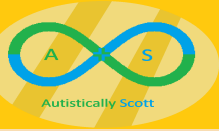
- Employment barriers
- Healthcare barriers
- Harmful therapies
- Bullying
- Interpersonal victimisation
- Criminal justice system
- Suicide - 9 times more likely



<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0011287211054733?journalCode=cadc>

<https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/autistic-adults-experience-high-rates-of-negative-life-events>

<https://theconversation.com/autistic-people-are-six-times-more-likely-to-attempt-suicide-poor-mental-health-support-may-be-to-blame-180266>



Ways to solve the Double Empathy Problem

Co-production

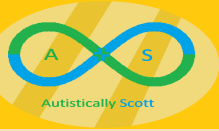
- Autistic-led training & projects.
- Autistic people lead way with policies and legislation.

Listen to Autistic people

- Books, videos, blogs (including further marginalised groups)
- Understand Autistic communication and expressions.

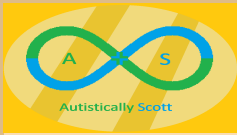
Treat us as Human Beings

- Treat us with kindness
- Avoid 'othering' us
- Treat us as equals.



“ Autistic empathy is
no less compassionate,
no less thoughtful,
no less ‘human’ than
non-autistic empathy:
it is simply different.”

Reframing Autism, 2020



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