Autism essay

We start with an imagea tiny, golden child on hands and knees, circling round and round a spot on the floor in mysterious, self-absorbed delight.

She does not look up, though she is smiling and laughing; she does not call our attention to the mysterious object of her pleasure. She does not see us at all. She and the spot are all there is, and though she is eighteen months old, an age for touching, tasting, pointing, pushing, exploring, she is doing none of these. She does not walk, or crawl up stairs, or pull herself to her feet to reach for objects. She doesnt want any objects.

Instead, she circles her spot. Or she sits, a long chain in her hand, snaking it up and down, up and down, watching it coil and uncoil, for twenty minutes, half an hour— until someone comes, moves her or feeds her or gives her another toy, or perhaps a book. Excerpted from The Seige By Clara Claiborne Park Autisma mysterious world where the unknowns still outnumber the knowns.

A syndrome whose manifestations are many and whose etiology is suspected of being multi-causal (Toscano, 5).

The word autism still conveys a fixed and dreadful meaning to most peoplethey visualize a child mute, rocking, screaming, inaccessible, cut off from human contact. And we almost always speak of autistic children, rarely of autistic adults, as if such children never grew up, or were somehow mysteriously spirited off the planet, out of society. Or else we think of an autistic savant a strange being with bizarre mannerisms and stereotypies, still cut off from normal life, but with uncanny powers of calculation, memory, drawing, whateverlike the savant portrayed in Rain Man. These

pictures are not wholly false, but they fail to indicate that there are forms of autism which do not incapacitate in the same way, but may allow lives that are full of event and achievement, and a special sort of insight and courage too (Grandin, 12). Autism was first identified as a disorder in 1943 by Dr. Leo Kanner.

It was widely accepted that a childs autistic condition was the result of extremely, cold distant, rejecting and overly intellectual parenting. The childs extreme withdrawal was viewed as a refusal to engage in social or physical contact, rather than inability. The assumption therefore was that the familial environment being hostile was the cause of the childs refusal to become engaged. Professionals labeled this concept the refrigerator mother.

Today, much enlightened thinking, coupled with scientific research has disproved this notion and autism has been the source of much research and ongoing professional debate. Currently, autism is considered a unique disorder that occurs in approximately fifteen out of every 10, 000 births. Autism is four times more common in boys than girls. It has been found throughout the world in families of all racial, ethnic, and social backgrounds (Cash, 22).

Family income, lifestyle, and educational levels do not affect the chance of autisms occurrence.

Researchers all over the world are devoting considerable time, and energy into finding the answer to the critical question, What exactly causes autism? Although a single specific cause of autism is not known, researchers believe several genes as well as environmental factors such as viruses or chemicals,

contribute to the disorder. But finding the genes that cause the disorder has proven far more complicated than originally thought (DeNoon). Scientists estimate that, in families with one autistic child, the risk of having a second child with the disorder is approximately 5%, or 1 in 20, which is greater than the risk for the general population. This genetic basis is believed by researchers to be highly complex, probably involving several genes in combination. CLSA study co-author Susan Santangelo portrays autism as a constellation of deficits. Some may be relatively benign in the absence of others.

I think its relatively unlikely that any one gene will account for disease causation in any one subset of families.

Its likely that more than one gene will be working in concert, although none of these genes themselves may be sufficient. Some of these genes may be causing milder effects in family members of these patients who are autistic. Some traits are much more frequent in family members (DeNoon). Scientists also believe that since all people with autism do not have it for the same reason then some different genes are likely producing the same results. If scientists are able to identify genes for autism then they will be able to understand meaningful subtypes.

Scientist, Dr. Edwin Cook of the University of Chicago suspects a subtle interplay of the DNA we inherit and the experiences we have. He says there must be more to autism than genetics.

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quiescent, not causing any disease until triggered by some event such as brain damage (Springen). Finding the cause of that brain damage represents the next frontier for autism research.

Autism has been considered part of various emotional disabilities, including schizophrenia and has been addressed as a form of mental retardation. Research has shown that approximately 70% of autistic individuals are mentally retarded as determined by a variety of I. Q. tests (Toscano). However, 15-20% of the autistic population tested at or above average intelligence levels on standardized testing, concluding that autism and mental retardation are not mutually inclusive.

Further, the autistic person is normal in physical appearance as compared to the person with mental retardation, who often bears some physical stigmata as in Downs Syndrome, etc. People with classical autism show three types of symptoms: impaired social interaction, problems with verbal and non-verbal communication and imagination, and unusual or severely limited activities and interests. The hallmark feature of autism is impaired social interaction. Many students with autism resist human contact and social interactions, and they have difficulty learning the subtleties of social interactions (Friend, 178). They may fail to respond to their names, avoid making eye contact with others, and seem uninterested in developing social relationships. Individuals with autism also experience problems in both verbal and non verbal communication.

They often have significantly delayed language development, and if they have language skills, they struggle to maintain a conversation with another

person. In writing about her experiences of being autistic, Temple Grandin provides a clear example of her communication problems (Grandin, 1984). She explains that once when her mother wanted her to wear a hat while riding in the car, she didnt have the words to refuse. Instead, she screamed and threw the hat out the window, causing her mother to hit another car. Another characteristic of students with autism is a very limited range of interests, such as a student who is fascinated with motorcycles to the exclusion of nearly everything else. When they have such an interest, students with autism can spend literally hours upon hours absorbed in a private world of exploration.

They might act bored with every activity unless it relates to their special interest.

Sean Barron, in his book Theres a Boy in There describes his fixation with chains, One of my favorite things was chains; I loved the texture of chains. Each link looked the same and even felt the same as all the others. Because the chains on our garage were too high for me to reach, they were very mysterious to me- I wanted so much to touch them, but I had to use a stick instead.

Since I couldnt reach them with my hands, I made them swing. I really loved the repetition of the swinging movement- I wanted to see the chains from all different heights and angles. The more I saw them swing, the more entranced I became, and the more I wanted to do nothing but watch them. It was what I loved. It was my routine.

My mother kept trying to interrupt me, but that never stopped me (Barron, 32). Students with autism have a low threshold for and difficulty in dealing with stress (Grandin, 1984). Many children become overly insistent on routines; if one is changed, even slightly, the child may become upset and have a tantrum. Some common examples are: lining up toys or objects, drinking and/or eating the same food items at every meal, wearing certain clothing or insisting that others wear the same clothes, insisting on the same patterned way of reading a book or other activities, and going to school using the same route.

One possible reason for insistence on sameness may be the persons inability to understand and cope with new situations and a need to stay in their comfort zone. People with autism may have abnormal responses to sounds, odors, touch or other sensory stimulation.

Sean Barron recounts his problem with specific foods as a child, I liked to eat things that were bland and uncomplicated. My favorites were cereal-dry with no milk-bread, pancakes, and potatoes.

Because these were the foods I ate early in life, I found them to be soothing. I didnt want to try anything new. I was supersensitive to the texture of food, and I had to touch everything with my fingers to see how it felt before I could put it in my mouth. I hated it when food had things mixed with it, like noodles and vegetables or bread with fillings in it to make a sandwich. I could never put any of it in my mouth because I knew I would get violently sick (Barron, 96).

Many students with autism respond to stress with stereotypic behaviors. They complete the action again and again. For example, they may rock rapidly in their chairs, spin an object repeatedly, or twirl themselves or their arms. Think of the components of autism- social phobia, compulsive behavior, trouble communicating- as the colors on a childs paint palette. Different mixes of red, blue, and yellow produce a rainbow of hues.

Similarly, different combinations of autisms components produce the array of conditions known by the umbrella term autism (Springen). Autism is often referred to as a spectrum disorder because it ranges in severity across a wide range of conditions.

Every person with autism is an individual, and like all individuals, has a unique personality and combination of characteristics. Therefore, there is no standard type or typical person with autism. Parents may hear different terms used to describe children within this spectrum, such as: autistic-like, autistic tendencies, autism spectrum, high-functioning or low-functioning autism, more-abled or less-abled.

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About 5% of people with autism are autistic savants, with unusual abilities that involve rote memory or visual skills. Maybe youve heard of the autistic savant that can play a Beethoven sonata after hearing it just once, or can do complex mathematical equations, or tell you whether December 3, 1956, fell

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According to Dr. Pratt, what these savants have in common is a very strong, specific talent. Even though parts of their brains are not working normally, one section is supercharged. Its as if a high-intensity beam of light was aimed at one area of the brain but left the rest in the dark (Riccio).

Therefore, two children with the same diagnosis can act very differently from one another and have varying skills.

Websters dictionary defines cure as follows: a method or course of medical treatment for restoring health. In the medical sense, there is no cure for the differences in the brain which result in autism. A generation ago, the vast majority of the people with autism were eventually placed in institutions. Professionals were much less educated about autism than they are today. Today the picture is brighter. Better understanding of the disorder has led to the development of better coping mechanisms and strategies for the various manifestations of the disability.

Various types of therapies are available including applied behavior analysis, auditory integration training, dietary interventions, discrete trial teaching, medications, music therapy, physical therapy, etc With appropriate treatment, some behaviors associated with autism may change or diminish over time.

Many individuals with autism enjoy their lives and contribute to their community in a meaningful way. People with autism can learn to compensate for and cope for their disability, often quite well. Someday it may be possible to cure autism- perhaps even before a child is born. That day remains but doctors have recently made great strides in the field of brain research, both using psychology and through highly sophisticated technology.

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We start with an imagea tiny, golden child on hands and knees, circling round and round a spot on the floor in mysterious, self-absorbed delight. She does not look up, though she is smiling and laughing; she does not call our attention to the mysterious object of her pleasure. She does not see us at all. She and the spot are all there is, and though she is eighteen months old, an age for touching, tasting, pointing, pushing, exploring, she is doing none of these.

She does not walk, or crawl up stairs, or pull herself to her feet to reach for objects. She doesnt want any objects. Instead, she circles her spot.

Or she sits, a long chain in her hand, snaking it up and down, up and down, watching it coil and uncoil, for twenty minutes, half an hour— until someone comes, moves her or feeds her or gives her another toy, or perhaps a book. Excerpted from The Seige By Clara Claiborne Park Autisma mysterious world where the unknowns still outnumber the knowns.

A syndrome whose manifestations are many and whose etiology is suspected of being multi-causal (Toscano, 5). The word autism still conveys a fixed and dreadful meaning to most peoplethey visualize a child mute, rocking, screaming, inaccessible, cut off from human contact. And we almost always speak of autistic children, rarely of autistic adults, as if such children never grew up, or were somehow mysteriously spirited off the planet, out of

society. Or else we think of an autistic savant a strange being with bizarre mannerisms and stereotypies, still cut off from normal life, but with uncanny powers of calculation, memory, drawing, whateverlike the savant portrayed in Rain Man. These pictures are not wholly false, but they fail to indicate that there are forms of autism which do not incapacitate in the same way, but may allow lives that are full of event and achievement, and a special sort of insight and courage too (Grandin, 12).

Autism was first identified as a disorder in 1943 by Dr. Leo Kanner. It was widely accepted that a childs autistic condition was the result of extremely, cold distant, rejecting and overly intellectual parenting.

The childs extreme withdrawal was viewed as a refusal to engage in social or physical contact, rather than inability.

The assumption therefore was that the familial environment being hostile was the cause of the childs refusal to become engaged. Professionals labeled this concept the refrigerator mother. Today, much enlightened thinking, coupled with scientific research has disproved this notion and autism has been the source of much research and ongoing professional debate. Currently, autism is considered a unique disorder that occurs in approximately fifteen out of every 10, 000 births. Autism is four times more common in boys than girls. It has been found throughout the world in families of all racial, ethnic, and social backgrounds (Cash, 22).

Family income, lifestyle, and educational levels do not affect the chance of autisms occurrence.

Researchers all over the world are devoting considerable time, and energy into finding the answer to the critical question, What exactly causes autism? Although a single specific cause of autism is not known, researchers believe several genes as well as environmental factors such as viruses or chemicals, contribute to the disorder. But finding the genes that cause the disorder has proven far more complicated than originally thought (DeNoon). Scientists estimate that, in families with one autistic child, the risk of having a second child with the disorder is approximately 5%, or 1 in 20, which is greater than the risk for the general population. This genetic basis is believed by researchers to be highly complex, probably involving several genes in combination.

CLSA study co-author Susan Santangelo portrays autism as a constellation of deficits. Some may be relatively benign in the absence of others.

I think its relatively unlikely that any one gene will account for disease causation in any one subset of families. Its likely that more than one gene will be working in concert, although none of these genes themselves may be sufficient.

Some of these genes may be causing milder effects in family members of these patients who are autistic. Some traits are much more frequent in family members (DeNoon). Scientists also believe that since all people with autism do not have it for the same reason then some different genes are likely producing the same results. If scientists are able to identify genes for autism then they will be able to understand meaningful subtypes.

Scientist, Dr. Edwin Cook of the University of Chicago suspects a subtle interplay of the DNA we inherit and the experiences we have.

He says there must be more to autism than genetics. Almost no autistics have children so any genes that directly caused autism would disappear from the population. Unless that is, they remained quiescent, not causing any disease until triggered by some event such as brain damage (Springen). Finding the cause of that brain damage represents the next frontier for autism research. Autism has been considered part of various emotional disabilities, including schizophrenia and has been addressed as a form of mental retardation. Research has shown that approximately 70% of autistic individuals are mentally retarded as determined by a variety of I.

Q. tests (Toscano).

However, 15-20% of the autistic population tested at or above average intelligence levels on standardized testing, concluding that autism and mental retardation are not mutually inclusive. Further, the autistic person is normal in physical appearance as compared to the person with mental retardation, who often bears some physical stigmata as in Downs Syndrome, etc.

People with classical autism show three types of symptoms: impaired social interaction, problems with verbal and non-verbal communication and imagination, and unusual or severely limited activities and interests. The hallmark feature of autism is impaired social interaction. Many students with autism resist human contact and social interactions, and they have difficulty learning the subtleties of social interactions (Friend, 178). They may fail to

respond to their names, avoid making eye contact with others, and seem uninterested in developing social relationships.

Individuals with autism also experience problems in both verbal and non verbal communication. They often have significantly delayed language development, and if they have language skills, they struggle to maintain a conversation with another person. In writing about her experiences of being autistic, Temple Grandin provides a clear example of her communication problems (Grandin, 1984). She explains that once when her mother wanted her to wear a hat while riding in the car, she didnt have the words to refuse. Instead, she screamed and threw the hat out the window, causing her mother to hit another car.

Another characteristic of students with autism is a very limited range of interests, such as a student who is fascinated with motorcycles to the exclusion of nearly everything else.

When they have such an interest, students with autism can spend literally hours upon hours absorbed in a private world of exploration. They might act bored with every activity unless it relates to their special interest. Sean Barron, in his book Theres a Boy in There describes his fixation with chains, One of my favorite things was chains; I loved the texture of chains. Each link looked the same and even felt the same as all the others. Because the chains on our garage were too high for me to reach, they were very mysterious to me- I wanted so much to touch them, but I had to use a stick instead.

Since I couldnt reach them with my hands, I made them swing. I really loved the repetition of the swinging movement- I wanted to see the chains from all different heights and angles. The more I saw them swing, the more entranced I became, and the more I wanted to do nothing but watch them. It was what I loved. It was my routine.

My mother kept trying to interrupt me, but that never stopped me (Barron, 32). Students with autism have a low threshold for and difficulty in dealing with stress (Grandin, 1984). Many children become overly insistent on routines; if one is changed, even slightly, the child may become upset and have a tantrum. Some common examples are: lining up toys or objects, drinking and/or eating the same food items at every meal, wearing certain clothing or insisting that others wear the same clothes, insisting on the same patterned way of reading a book or other activities, and going to school using the same route.

One possible reason for insistence on sameness may be the persons inability to understand and cope with new situations and a need to stay in their comfort zone.

People with autism may have abnormal responses to sounds, odors, touch or other sensory stimulation. Sean Barron recounts his problem with specific foods as a child, I liked to eat things that were bland and uncomplicated. My favorites were cereal-dry with no milk-bread, pancakes, and potatoes. Because these were the foods I ate early in life, I found them to be soothing.

I didnt want to try anything new. I was supersensitive to the texture of food, and I had to touch everything with my fingers to see how it felt before I could

put it in my mouth. I hated it when food had things mixed with it, like noodles and vegetables or bread with fillings in it to make a sandwich. I could never put any of it in my mouth because I knew I would get violently sick (Barron, 96). Many students with autism respond to stress with stereotypic behaviors. They complete the action again and again.

For example, they may rock rapidly in their chairs, spin an object repeatedly, or twirl themselves or their arms. Think of the components of autism- social phobia, compulsive behavior, trouble communicating- as the colors on a childs paint palette. Different mixes of red, blue, and yellow produce a rainbow of hues. Similarly, different combinations of autisms components produce the array of conditions known by the umbrella term autism (Springen). Autism is often referred to as a spectrum disorder because it ranges in severity across a wide range of conditions. Every person with autism is an individual, and like all individuals, has a unique personality and combination of characteristics.

Therefore, there is no standard type or typical person with autism. Parents may hear different terms used to describe children within this spectrum, such as: autistic-like, autistic tendencies, autism spectrum, high-functioning or low-functioning autism, more-abled or less-abled.. There are great differences among people with autism. Children and adults can exhibit any combination of the behaviors in any degree or severity. The range of intelligence extends from mentally challenged to highly gifted and sometimes includes savant abilities (Cash, 23).

About 5% of people with autism are autistic savants, with unusual abilities that involve rote memory or visual skills. Maybe youve heard of the autistic savant that can play a Beethoven sonata after hearing it just once, or can do complex mathematical equations, or tell you whether December 3, 1956, fell on a Tuesday or Wednesday (Riccio). Child psychiatrist Fred Volkmar of Yale knows one autistic boy who has an IQ of about 60 but can recite the daily lottery numbers for the past several years. Some people with autism have amazing abilities and are indeed very bright. Others may actually be mentally retarded. According to Dr.

Pratt, what these savants have in common is a very strong, specific talent. Even though parts of their brains are not working normally, one section is supercharged. Its as if a high-intensity beam of light was aimed at one area of the brain but left the rest in the dark (Riccio). Therefore, two children with the same diagnosis can act very differently from one another and have varying skills. Websters dictionary defines cure as follows: a method or course of medical treatment for restoring health. In the medical sense, there is no cure for the differences in the brain which result in autism.

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