

Barry Levison's Autism Insights

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Abstract

From Barry Levinson's *Rain Man*, autism is a condition that affects one's verbal and non-verbal communication, imaginative or creative play and social interaction. Through Raymond, Levinson succeeds in sensitizing the society on the need to accommodate individuals living with autism, as such characters exhibit critical potentialities that may end being unexploited. As such, the article depicts a desirable level of accuracy towards societal sensitization as it focuses on probable causes, features and perceived solutions to autism. Indeed, Levinson gives insight into the issue of autism and its accompanying implications on the victims, their families, close friends and the society as a whole. The element of inclusivity emerges in the article when Levinson points to Raymond's abilities but goes untapped because of limited interest by a significant section of societal members. Indeed, the article is highly relevant and remains desirable in such a way that it depicts the manner in which individuals with autism struggle to fit in the society, pointing to the criticality of formulating intervention mechanisms that would not only seek to highlight the causes and characteristics of autism but also strive to formulate visions and implement missions towards a lasting solution.

Introduction

In the current society, autism awareness has moved from shadows of unknown and shame to the forefront of education and research. This trend is attributed to the increasing number of people and children with autism, gaining attention in all aspects of the families' daily lives¹. Autism refers to the brain's physical disorder that leads to lifelong developmental disability. Symptoms of autism combine with other conditions such as epilepsy, deafness, blindness and mental retardation². In particular, children with autism exhibit variations in behaviors and symptoms. However, broad areas depicting similarity in children with autism include progress delays, unusual responses to sensory stimulation, strange relationships to events and objects, problems in communication, language and speech, and failed development of normal socialization³. Three critical areas that are adversely affected include imaginative or creative play, social interaction and, verbal and non-verbal communication. Indeed, autism forms a condition that prompts attention towards understanding the causes, treatment and probable implications on the general society, as globalization necessitates creativity, innovations and inventions that can only be achieved by a healthy and sound population. This paper examines

¹ American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th Ed.). Washington, DC. 2010

² Mastrangelo, Sonia. Play and the Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder: From Possibilities to Practice. *International Journal of Play Therapy* 18.1(2009), 13-30

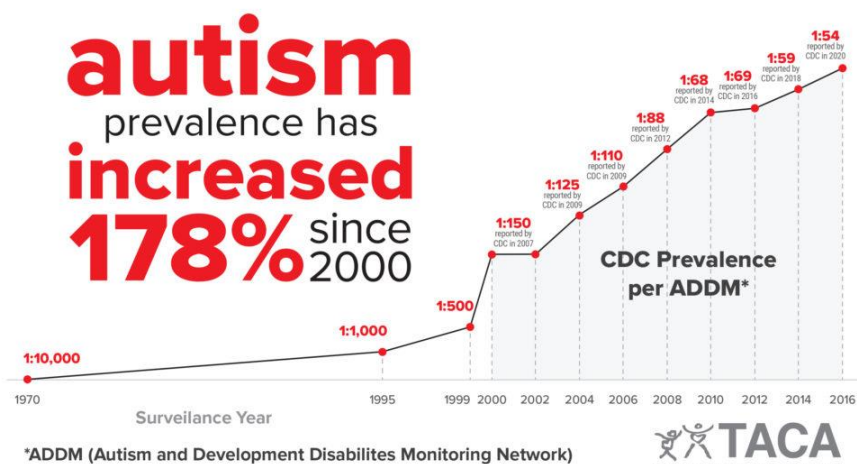
³ Howlin Patricia, Goode Susan, Hutton Jane & Rutter Michael. Savant skills in autism: Psychometric approaches and parental reports. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*. 364.27(2009), 1359-1367

some of the causes and treatment measures of autism, upon which a article analysis of Barry Levinson's *Rain Man* will aid in further understanding the symptoms and related attributes of autism.

Methods

Whereas no specific and direct cause of autism has been identified, the disorder's combination of symptoms and variation in levels of severity points to the fact that multiple causes account for its occurrence. Specifically, causes of autism operate in environmental and genetic factors⁴. One of the causes of autism has been perceived to be poor bonding between parents and children. Through poor bonding, children are exposed to conditions such as bad or indifferent parenting, cold, isolation and neglect⁵. In relation to treatment, parents who fail to communicate with autistic children end up stalling progress. Therefore, close parent-child relationship aids in thriving and moving forward among autistic children. From this observation, facilitated communication aids in teaching autistic children about communication skills and interaction with the rest of the world. In particular, facilitated communication enables autistic children to control their emotions, with parents helping the children towards desensitization from over sensitivity to sounds⁶. Scientific treatment approaches include medications, Floortime, Sensory Integration Therapy, Physical Therapy (PT), Pivotal Response Training (PRT), Occupational Therapy (OT) and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)⁷. Additionally, alternative methods such as Dolphin Therapy, Music and Art Therapy, Social Skills Groups and dietary interventions (using minerals and vitamins) have been used in addressing autism.

Results



⁴ American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th Ed.). Washington, DC. 2010

⁵ Mastrangelo, Sonia. Play and the Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder: From Possibilities to Practice. *International Journal of Play Therapy* 18.1(2009), 13-30

⁶ Howlin Patricia, Goode Susan, Hutton Jane & Rutter Michael. Savant skills in autism: Psychometric approaches and parental reports. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*. 364.27(2009), 1359-1367

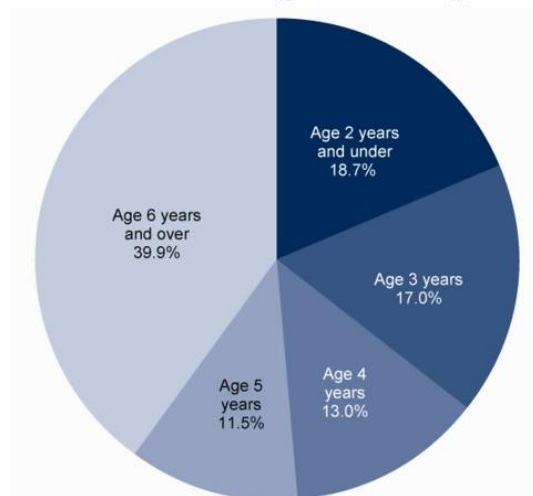
⁷ American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th Ed.). Washington, DC. 2010

Barry Levinson's article, *Rain Man* succeeds in dispelling various misconceptions about autism. As such, the article is critical in enhancing public awareness about agency failures to accommodate autistic individuals and exploit their abilities. In particular, Dustin Hoffman's performance (known as Raymond in the article) aids in understanding the disorder. In the article, Raymond is diagnosed with autism savant. From a Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) checklist, Raymond's characteristic fall into three main categories, with each category described by four characteristics of autism.

The first category sees Raymond exhibit impaired social interaction. In this category, Raymond demonstrates three of the four characteristics on the DSM checklist⁸. Imperatively, Raymond is characterized by non-verbal behaviors. In addition, Raymond is unable to look anyone in the eyes, and remains slouched down in situations where he carries on a conversation or, is spoken to. Features of autism are revealed further when Raymond dislikes being touched in any way. This feature is depicted in situations where he does not like when Charlie attempts to touch or hug him. Whereas some social situations are normal, they make Raymond nervous. Some of these situations include being in large groups of people or, being around loud noises. An autistic character is also portrayed when a fire alarm is set off and Raymond freaks out, hitting himself until the beeps stop⁹.

The second category concerns communication impairment. This feature is evident in a significant number of Raymond's performances. For instance, he exhibits critical difficulties in carrying on conversations. Upon approach for comment or verbal response, Raymond would often answer with short answers or even resort not to speak back. The impairment is also portrayed in such a manner that Raymond is unable to start up conversations, as well as failing to express interest in being around others. Instead, he stands back and keeps to himself. In situations where he becomes nervous, Raymond talks about baseball statistics in each moment a conversation that he is uneasy about starts up¹⁰. Stalled developed in communication is further illustrated when Raymond uses many repetitive phrases, depicting a similar trend in a nearly entire article. The notable and repetitive phrase is "I don't know"¹¹.

Autism Diagnosis Age



⁸ Levinson, Barry. *Rain Man* [Motion picture]. United States: Mirage Entertainment. 1988

⁹ Ibid 17

¹⁰ Ibid 9

¹¹ Ibid 13

The third category of impairment concerns repetitive patterns of activities, interests and behavior. In the article, Raymond shows interest in memorizing material and numbers. For instance, he memorizes the phonebook and even recalls people's numbers to Charlie. In addition, Raymond follows many routines and rituals such as eating the same food and preparing each task at similar times each day¹². A specific example of repetitive behavior is a situation in which Raymond eats his pancake while the syrup is on the table and, insists on eating the pancakes with toothpicks. Additionally, Raymond expects to eat the same meals from the same place at the same time of each day. Further repetitive behavior is seen when he wants to be in bed at 11 every night, and avoids closed space, as well as loud noise¹³.

Conclusion

From Barry Levinson's *Rain Man*, autism is a condition that affects one's verbal and non-verbal communication, imaginative or creative play and social interaction. Through Raymond, Levinson succeeds in sensitizing the society on the need to accommodate individuals living with autism, as such characters exhibit critical potentialities that may end being unexploited. As such, the article depicts a desirable level of accuracy towards societal sensitization as it focuses on probable causes, features and perceived solutions to autism. Indeed, Levinson gives insight into the issue of autism and its accompanying implications on the victims, their families, close friends and the society as a whole. The element of inclusivity emerges in the article when Levinson points to Raymond's abilities but goes untapped because of limited interest by a significant section of societal members. Indeed, the article is highly relevant and remains desirable in such a way that it depicts the manner in which individuals with autism struggle to fit in the society, pointing to the criticality of formulating intervention mechanisms that would not only seek to highlight the causes and characteristics of autism but also strive to formulate visions and implement missions towards a lasting solution.

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¹² Levinson, Barry. *Rain Man* [Motion picture]. United States: Mirage Entertainment. 1988

¹³ Ibid 23