



Neurotribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity

By Steve Silberman

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This *New York Times*–bestselling book upends conventional thinking about autism and suggests a broader model for acceptance, understanding, and full participation in society for people who think differently.

What is autism? A lifelong disability, or a naturally occurring form of cognitive difference akin to certain forms of genius? In truth, it is all of these things and more—and the future of our society depends on our understanding it. *Wired* reporter Steve Silberman unearths the secret history of autism, long suppressed by the same clinicians who became famous for discovering it, and finds surprising answers to the crucial question of why the number of diagnoses has soared in recent years. Going back to the earliest days of autism research, Silberman offers a gripping narrative of Leo Kanner and Hans Asperger, the research pioneers who defined the scope of autism in profoundly different ways; he then goes on to explore the game-changing concept of neurodiversity. *NeuroTribes* considers the idea that neurological differences such as autism, dyslexia, and ADHD are not errors of nature or products of the toxic modern world, but the result of natural variations in the human genome. This groundbreaking book will reshape our understanding of the history, meaning, function, and implications of neurodiversity in our world.

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Editorial Review

Review

Winner of the 2015 Samuel Johnson Prize for non-fiction

"Ambitious, meticulous and largehearted history...*NeuroTribes* is beautifully told, humanizing, important."
—*The New York Times Book Review*

"Mr. Silberman has surely written the definitive book about [autism's] past."
—*The Economist*

"A comprehensive history of the science and culture surrounding autism studies...an essential resource." —*Nature* magazine

"*NeuroTribes* is a sweeping and penetrating history, presented with a rare sympathy and sensitivity. It is fascinating reading; it will change how you think of autism, and it belongs, alongside the works of Temple Grandin and Clara Claiborne Park, on the bookshelf of anyone interested in autism and the workings of the human brain."

--From the foreword by Oliver Sacks, author of *An Anthropologist On Mars* and *Awakenings*

"Breathtaking... as emotionally resonant as any [book] this year." —*The Boston Globe*

"A lively, readable book... To read *NeuroTribes* is to realize how much autistic people have enriched the scope of human knowledge and diversity, and how impoverished the world would be without them." —*The San Francisco Chronicle*

"It is a beautifully written and thoughtfully crafted book, a historical tour of autism, richly populated with fascinating and engaging characters, and a rallying call to respect difference." — *Science* magazine

"Epic and often shocking...Everyone with an interest in the history of science and medicine — how it has failed us, surprised us and benefited us — should read this book." —*Chicago Tribune*

"The best book you can read to understand autism" —Gizmodo

"Required reading for every parent, teacher, therapist, and person who wants to know more about autism" —Parents.com

"This is perhaps the most significant history of the discovery, changing conception and public reaction to autism we will see in a generation." —TASH.org

"A well-researched, readable report on the treatment of autism that explores its history and proposes significant changes for its future...In the foreword, Oliver Sacks writes that this 'sweeping and penetrating history...is fascinating reading' that 'will change how you think of autism.' No argument with that assessment." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"The monks who inscribed beautiful manuscripts during the Middle Ages, Cavendish an 18th century

scientist who explained electricity, and many of the geeks in Silicon Valley are all on the autism spectrum.

Silberman reviews the history of autism treatments from horrible blaming of parents to the modern positive neurodiversity movement. Essential reading for anyone interested in psychology.”

--Temple Grandin, author of *Thinking in Pictures* and *The Autistic Brain*

“*NeuroTribes* is remarkable. Silberman has done something unique: he’s taken the dense and detailed history of autism and turned the story into a genuine page-turner. The book is sure to stir considerable discussion.”

--John Elder Robison, Neurodiversity Scholar in Residence at The College of William & Mary and author of *Look Me in the Eye*

“This gripping and heroic tale is a brilliant addition to the history of autism.”

--Uta Frith, Emeritus Professor of Cognitive Development at University College London

“In this genuine page-turner, Steve Silberman reveals the untold history of autism: from persecution to parent-blaming, from *Rain Man* to vaccines, of doctors for whom professional ego trumped compassion, to forgotten heroes like Hans Asperger, unfairly tainted by Nazi links. It ends on an optimistic note, with ‘autistics’ reclaiming the narrative and defining autism in their terms — more difference than disability and an essential part of the human condition. Highly recommended for anyone with an interest in autism or Asperger’s, or simply a fascination with what makes us tick.”

--Benison O’Reilly, co-author of *The Australian Autism Handbook*

About the Author

Steve Silberman has covered science and cultural affairs for *Wired* and other national magazines for more than twenty years. His writing has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Time*, *Nature*, and *Salon*. He lives in San Francisco.

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In a room on a high ridge overlooking the Santa Cruz Mountains in California, Leo Rosa is waking up. The sun breaks through a bank of coastal fog, filling his window with streaks of orange and crimson. A cherubic eleven-year-old with hazel eyes under a tuft of russet curls, he climbs out of bed to give his father a hug.

Leo’s father, Craig, produces science videos for KQED, a public TV station in San Francisco. Shannon Rosa is a blogger, editor, and software consultant. Each morning, they take turns helping their son get ready for school. The first thing that Leo does each day is read a list of icons taped to his door, which Shannon made for him by downloading and laminating clip art from the Internet. This list—his “visual schedule”—is written in a pictorial language that is easier for his mind to absorb than words. An image of a boy putting on his shoes prompts Leo to get dressed, followed by the likeness of a toothbrush, and then an icon of a boy making his bed.

Leo’s visual schedule parses the sprawling unpredictability of an eleven-year-old’s life into a series of discrete and manageable events. This helps him regulate his anxiety, which is a challenge for people on the spectrum at every age.

In a cluttered room down the hall, Leo’s sisters are also getting ready for the day. Zelly (short for Gisela, the name of Craig’s aunt) already has the poised, self-possessed air of the thoughtful young woman she’s becoming at thirteen. In a family of brazen eccentrics, she’s taken on the job of being the “normal” one. India, who is five years younger, exudes her own potent brand of charisma, but it’s more antic and subversive, with mischief and drama perpetually brewing in her bright green eyes behind thick glasses. While Zelly is generally reserved, India will walk right up to a stranger in a restaurant and say, “My, what a pretty dress you have!” She instinctively knows how to make herself the center of attention and work a crowd.

While eating breakfast with his sisters in the kitchen, Leo suddenly jumps down from his chair as an alarming expression—between terror and exhilaration—takes possession of his face. He bolts for the door but his father doesn't flinch; instead, Craig calls after him in his softest voice, "Where ya goin', buddy?"

Leo immediately sits down again and resumes eating as if nothing had happened. His first spoonful of yogurt this morning contains a crushed tablet of Risperdal, an atypical antipsychotic developed for the treatment of schizophrenia in adults. His parents don't like the idea of giving him this powerful drug, but for now, it seems to be helping him get a handle on his most distressing behavior, which is teasing and bullying India. Leo has never quite forgiven her for being an unexpected intrusion into a world that he was just getting used to himself. One of the downsides of the drug is that it amplifies Leo's already considerable appetite. His uncanny ability to snatch food from distant plates has earned him a family nickname: the Cobra. When Shannon brings bowls of oatmeal to the table, India quietly slides hers out of Cobra range and mutters under her breath, "This is mine."

Suddenly Leo jumps up from the table again and says to his father, "Green straw?" It is not yet time for his first green straw of the day, but he will get one before the school bus pulls into the driveway—one of tens of thousands of wide, bright green Starbucks straws that Leo has used over the years for the purpose of stimming (self-stimulation), one of the things that autistic people do to regulate their anxiety. They also clearly enjoy it. When nonautistic people do it, it's called fidgeting and it's rarely considered pathological.

A red straw from Burger King can occasionally fit the bill, or a blue one from Peet's. Clear straws from Costco just don't cut it. But a green straw from Starbucks is Leo's Platonic stim. If Shannon allowed him to do so, he would take a green straw to bed with him, or even better, a pair—one between his lips and the other in his toes. He would stim in the bath, on the toilet, and jumping on the trampoline.

Leo's fascination with straws is a wonder to behold. First, he tears the coveted object free of its paper wrapper; then he wets his lips and starts nibbling along its length, palpating the stiff plastic to pliability; finally, he masticates it to a supple L-shaped curve. All the while, he's twiddling the far end in his fingers, making it dance with a finesse that would be considered virtuosic if he was performing sleight-of-hand tricks. Watching Leo's Ritual of Straws is like seeing one of W. C. Fields's vaudeville routines with a hat and cane run at hyperspeed.

A few years ago, Shannon pulled the family minivan up to the entrance of Zelly's summer camp, when Leo, with his usual exquisite timing, made it known that he had to pee. There were no bathrooms in the vicinity, so Shannon escorted her son behind a convenient bush and urged him to do his business as India and her pal Katie pretended not to watch. She assured the girls that peeing on school grounds was tolerated under certain circumstances, and even kind of cool. "Sometimes, when you're a boy, it's great," she said. "You can pee in bushes all over the world!"

"And sometimes, when you're a girl, you have a brother with autism," India shot back. "And then your whole world changes."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Paul Greenblatt:

This *Neurotribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity* book is simply not ordinary book, you have it then the world is in your hands. The benefit you obtain by reading this book is definitely

information inside this e-book incredible fresh, you will get information which is getting deeper you read a lot of information you will get. This particular Neurotribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity without we understand teach the one who studying it become critical in contemplating and analyzing. Don't always be worry Neurotribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity can bring when you are and not make your tote space or bookshelves' grow to be full because you can have it in your lovely laptop even telephone. This Neurotribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity having fine arrangement in word as well as layout, so you will not truly feel uninterested in reading.

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