

## **Known for exceptions not exceptionality!**

I'm wondering how many of us feel like our ASD partners have an opinion of us that is different or opposed to who we believe we are, or the feedback we usually receive from other family members and friends who know us?

I've been wondering this for a while and have been analysing hard to try and work out how this could be happening. I found myself placing myself in my partner's shoes or trying to see things through his eyes (that good ol' empathy thing!) and trying to imagine things from his perspective. I know this empathy thing tends to be far too one-sided than would be necessary in a "healthy" relationship, but in this situation it wasn't about altering my responses yet again to defer to him or his needs, it was just about my "investigation".

We've discussed before the likelihood that they only seem to recognise a quality about us if it's something they actually value or can measure on their own scale. This could mean that they may be blind to, or that they discount, the many qualities we possess and live out every day = blank space (from their perspective). Additional to this, they do not appear to recognise the part they are playing in every interaction or dynamic of a situation and do not seem to be able to tell when their behaviour is offensive or hurtful or inappropriate, in fact they may not be recognising that they are behaving at all, good bad or indifferent = blank space (from their perspective).

So what do they notice? Is it possible that they are only noticing the comments we make or behaviours we display when we are seeking to address their "unacceptable" or hurtful behaviours?

Are they building up an analysis of us only according to our responses or reactions to their hurtful or poor social behaviour? We painfully understand that certain behaviours or deficits are part and parcel of the Autism Spectrum, but the impact on us cannot be minimized or rationalized away just by saying "it's how Autism is".

To respond or react in some way to offensive behaviour is instinctive; logical and "normal" in relationships in an effort to eliminate harm and maintain healthy boundaries and respect. It is only right for us to want to address offences for the purpose of seeking change and improvement and an opportunity to grow and deepen the relationship, mutually. The ability of couples to do this respectfully is part of a loving, reciprocal "healthy" relationship, and love supplies the motivation to make changes to our behaviour, all within reason of course.

It's frightening to think that our efforts to improve the relationship might actually be undermining it. This hits us yet again with that awful sense of helplessness to nurture and grow this relationship even though we are investing our souls into it every moment of every day. From our perspective our gestures of love and nurture far outweigh any negative. We know in our hearts that this is a fact, but perhaps in our partner's eyes this is not so.

It's confronting and devastating to think that our partner's filter is only allowing him/her to pick up negative feedback from us, and that this over-rides every other positive thing we do or say, and who we actually are.

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Is this yet another gaping hole of loss, with the overwhelming sense of grief that comes with it? Every moment of every day we care and give and function relentlessly according to who we really are, our values, character, priorities, mode of loving, living, giving, and our partners benefit directly from these qualities, constantly. We cannot help being who we are, this is part of being true to our own integrity.

Once again, I am writing these things to acknowledge and validate the experience of partners. It is difficult to know what solutions or strategies to suggest, apart from just being aware. Our experience in the ASPIA support group is that partners are intelligent and constantly seeking to learn, so everything I write is with the hope that it adds to the knowledge base of each and everyone of us. Part of sharing.

But the message we can draw from this, once again, is to ensure you do not allow yourself to lose who you are because of this one relationship. It may be your primary relationship, but it doesn't need to lead to you depriving the rest of your family, your friends, your colleagues, the rest of the world, yourself, of the "you" that you really are. Continue to have the courage to live this.

Carol Grigg, October 2014