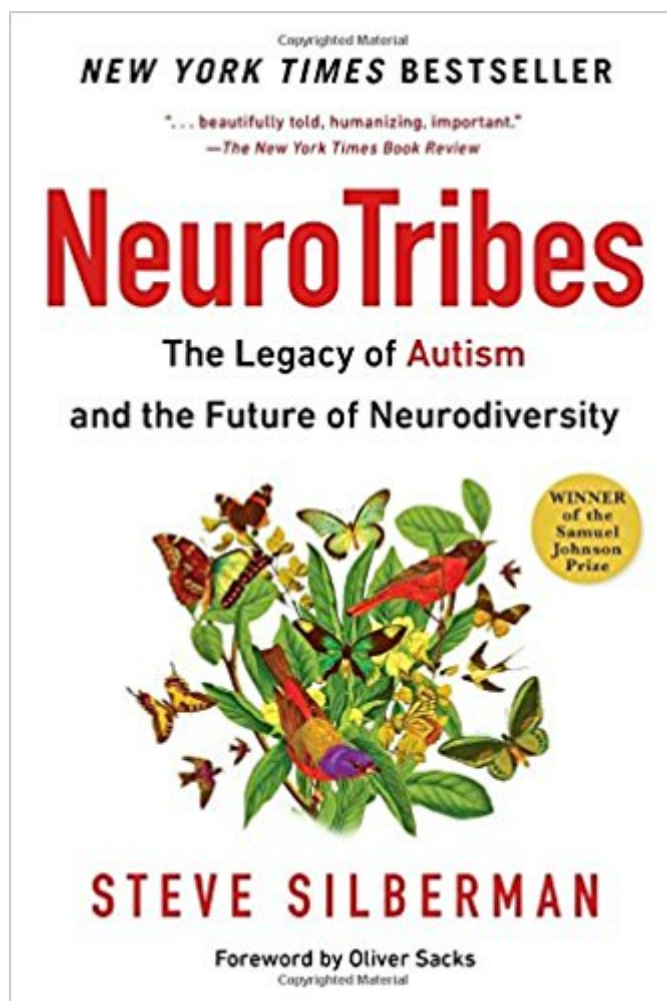


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# Neurotribes: The Legacy Of Autism And The Future Of Neurodiversity



## Synopsis

This New York Times best-selling 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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 Aspergers, or simply a fascination with what makes us tick. —Benison O’Reilly, co-author of *The Australian Autism Handbook*

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.

I pre-ordered this book a few months ago and last week also ordered the Kindle version. My kindle version was delivered promptly this morning and I’ve been reading it since. I have a paperback version that is on its way to be delivered today so I can share a copy with my husband and my doctor. Thus far this book promises to be what I had hoped it would be, another opportunity to understand myself better, and an opportunity to help others understand those of us on the Spectrum. I was diagnosed with Asperger’s last year at the age of 53. Finally, after all of these years, I continue to understand that I am not broken, or in need of repair, just simply different. Thank you Mr. Silberman for your dedication to this topic and for writing what promises to be a very helpful book for the Neurodiverse and Neurotypical world.

Steve Silberman is a journalist and writer for *WIRED* magazine who has written many readable stories on medicine and human health. In this book he brings many years of reporting and training to delve upon one of the most prominent health issues of our time — autism. Silberman’s book is rich in both human and scientific detail and shines in three aspects. Firstly, he meticulously traces the history of autism and the lives of the neurologists,

psychologists and doctors who chased its elusive identity. He focuses especially on two psychologists, Leo Kanner in the United States and Hans Asperger in Nazi-controlled Vienna who identified the syndrome and pioneered its study through observations on hundreds of cases. Asperger was the first one to identify a variety of signs and symptoms that contribute to what we now call autism spectrum disorder, and his studies were expansive and nuanced.

Silberman's account of both the foibles and the triumphs of these two individuals is fascinating: while Kanner's fault was in assigning the blame for autism to parents (he coined the phrase "refrigerator mother") and focusing on children, Asperger identified mostly high-functioning autistic savants in his publications for a chilling reason so that the lower functioning cases could avoid the ghastly fate met by victims of the Nazis' euthanasia program which aimed at eliminating "mentally feeble" individuals. Both Kanner and Asperger meant well, and in Asperger's case his withholding of the identities of autistic people literally meant the difference between life and death. And yet as Silberman so adeptly demonstrates, this was one of those cases where the intentions of humane and well-meaning researchers actually caused harm to public perceptions of the syndrome. Kanner and Asperger's story is an instructive lesson in both the vagaries of scientific discovery and human nature and the sometimes unfortunate intersection of science with politics. The selective reporting of high-functioning patients in case of Asperger and children in case of Kanner led to a massive underreporting of autistic cases and the creation of a guilt complex among parents. It also led to a delay in the recognition of autism as a spectrum of disorders (Autism Spectrum Disorders) rather than a narrowly defined condition. It wasn't until 1981 that English researcher Lorna Wing finally publicized Asperger's wide ranging observations; and it wasn't until 1991 before German researcher Uta Frith finally translated his work. Encouraged by Wing's work, when the diagnostic manual DSM-III-R finally classified autism as a widespread and bonafide syndrome with a textured and wide-ranging spread of symptoms and issues, Kanner and Asperger's inadvertent underreporting of cases led everyone to believe that there was a sudden epidemic of autism, a belief that triggered even more soul-searching and the assignment of cause and effect to all kinds of environmental variables including vaccines. Much of the media with its emphasis on sensationalism and simplistic explanations at the expense of subtlety and complexity did not help matters, although ironically as Silberman tells us, it was a movie - "Rainman" - that brought a lot of public attention to autism. It is in the second half of the book that Silberman sternly clamps down on fraudulent claims of connections between autism and vaccination, including the retracted work published by Andrew

Wakefield. Finally, Silberman's detailed account draws up wonderful and sometimes very moving portraits of families and individuals affected by autism. Also included are capsule portraits of famous people with autism and Asperger's syndrome like Nikola Tesla and Temple Grandin. Silberman makes it clear that such people defy easy classification, and we do them and ourselves a disservice when we stereotype and bin them into discrete categories. He interviews hundreds of people who are stricken by the syndrome and tells us the stories of both adults and children who first struggled to cope with the disease and then found solace in meeting similar people and connecting with support networks. He also profiles families from a remarkably wide cross-section of society - from people living below the poverty line to wealthy California families - who are convinced by unverified connections between the environment and autism. Silberman does not agree with them, but he empathizes with their concerns and tries to understand them. Fortunately the stigma associated with autism spectrum disorders is gradually giving way to a more subtle understanding, but as Silberman indicates there is still a long way to go. As the title puts it, his plea is for a world that appreciates neurodiversity; the fact that even people regarded as psychologically different can have very important and valuable perspectives to offer. If I had some minor gripes with the book, they were with the sometimes long-winded digressions on the lives of autism researchers and patients and the relative lack of discussion of cutting-edge biomedical and neurological research on the topic, including work from genomics and drug discovery. But these are minor gripes. Silberman has painted a rich, empathetic portrait of a devastating, baffling but ultimately comprehensible disorder and its history which we all owe ourselves to appreciate. Because ultimately, as the central message of this book reveals, the cure for autism is in understanding and empathy. The cure lies in human nature itself.

As an autistic adult, I pre-ordered *NeuroTribes* with great excitement and read it eagerly when it arrived. I think this is an important book that sheds much needed light on the history of autism research, and on the pitfalls of autism parenting culture, and gives some indication of the direction of autistic culture. However, I'm holding back on a fifth star because I felt that he could have gone much further in clarifying that autistic people do come in a great variety of personalities, abilities and disabilities; that the Kanner's vs Asperger's distinction is in fact meaningless; and most importantly that autistic people do not need to achieve great things to be valuable as human beings.

Steve Silberman may be neurotypical, but he gets the Autism story right. Original research, in-depth and fascinating stories. Definitive. Read it!

There was a reason that this book was featured on the cover of the New York Times Sunday Book Review and that it has been called the "definitive" word on the history of autism ... it's thoroughly researched and intelligently written by an experienced journalist without an agenda. Moreover, this journalist had the audacity to actually speak to Autistic people, (rather than just to their parents or the large corporations that profit from referring to autism as an "epidemic"). Best of all, he afforded them dignity. I don't expect all people to be able to read this book with an open mind, but as the parent of two wonderfully quirky and perfect-in-my-eyes Autistic children, and as a woman who was once that child herself, I thank him for his courage. It took me far too many years to realize that I was different, not less. I want my children to grow up understanding that and this book will help.

Surprisingly engrossing for what I thought was going to be dry information - I couldn't put it down. This book is a fascinating read for anyone. It turned my thinking completely around. It is seriously researched, but reads almost like a novel. Buy it! There is nothing like it anywhere. I have loved all Silberman's writing, but this is the best.

This is the most detailed, comprehensive history of autism and related disorders I have ever read. It reminds us that there have always been people on the spectrum on our planet, and that the so-called "epidemic" is actually a result of awareness and broadening of the diagnosis. It celebrates "finding the child's strengths" and celebrating them rather than emphasizing the deficits ( which, I am sorry to say, is what most schools emphasize). I did not read this book, I inhaled it, and made copious notes.

Very readable, somewhat wandering account of the history of autism--its "discovery," past treatments, etc. Especially enjoyed the section on Dr. Asperger and his work with autistic children that was curtailed by the Nazis.

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