

Student

Core 7

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18 Mar. 2022

### Autism Spectrum Disorder vs. Synesthesia

A car zooms by, and nobody notices it. Except, however, for two people. One looks at it casually, and stares into space for a while before resuming their work. Another person shouts and screams at it randomly – perfectly fine one moment, but then suddenly acting very differently. The first person has a condition called *synesthesia*, where they might perceive sounds, images, and smells as colors – basically, their senses get mixed up in their brain. The second person has a very similar mental challenge, called autism. This affects language and emotional development (Centers for Disease Control). To start, both of these affect the brain, but autism affects speech and emotion, while synesthesia affects senses, and how people perceive them. Furthermore, they both have no immediate remedy, or treatment. However, therapy works for both of them, with synesthesia's treatment expanding to socializing with other synesthetes.

In addition, both affect learning, but autism is an overall inability to learn certain things at a regular speed, while synesthetes might be excellent in some subjects, like spelling ([A Mango Shaped Space](#), pg. 105). At the same time, autistic people can face heavy discrimination and ignorance depending on their challenge, while synesthetes receive fairly normal treatment. However, there is one big difference, which is the rarity, but in this difference, there are some nuances that bring some similarities as well. Lastly, synesthesia can be completely unnoticeable, and only requires other people to take small steps to make them feel better, and autism can also

be very mild, but at the same time, because it is a spectrum disorder, there are various levels of severity, and some cases require extreme measures to help them out, heavily affecting people around them. While autism and synesthesia both affect the brain, they do so very differently. At the same time, they also have various similarities in how they carry out their actions and the treatments that people with these challenges use.

Autism and synesthesia are both overall similar and different in many ways at the same time. Firstly, both affect the brain, but however, autism affects processing words and emotions, while synesthesia affects processing senses and the world around them. In the book [A Mango Shaped Space](#), by Wendy Mass, the main character, Mia Winchell, suffers from these conditions and sees colored numbers. In the book, they explain that the condition's name is synesthesia, which means "senses coming together" (103), which is exactly what happens for synesthetes. Furthermore, autistic people might have trouble expressing their emotions and thoughts, so they might act in different ways. On the contrary, synesthetes are perfectly fine with emotions and thoughts, but they might perceive senses much more differently than a neurotypical (a person with no mental challenges) differently. To summarize, while both affect the input and output of information, they both control different types of information.

Both autism and synesthesia have very similar treatments. To start, both of them include therapy, but synesthesia has a greater focus on socializing with other synesthetes (213). In addition, autistic people also need to socialize with other people, however, the greater focus on therapy sessions are there to improve their ability to communicate. In the film "The Life Autistic Documentary," twelve cases of ASD were shown, with varying levels of severity. In the film, it showed many people with severe cases recovering extremely well over recovery. However, these

were severe cases, and milder ones usually go away as time goes on, so there is no real treatment. On the contrary, Synesthetes have just as much of an ability to communicate as neurotypical people, and socializing is important mainly when they are talking to other synesthetes, so that they don't feel left out or "different" compared to everyone else. Therapy sessions for them are mostly to understand their condition and how to control it. In terms of treating synesthesia, there is no cure for it, but it is not considered a disability by patients as the condition does not affect many aspects of their life. To conclude, both of these conditions have similar therapies that help tone down the symptoms, but neither completely cure it.

There are many different symptoms for both diseases, but autism has a more predictable pattern in terms of what symptoms patients have. To begin with, both autism and synesthesia have many symptoms associated with them, but autism has different conditions for each symptom, whereas synesthesia symptoms vary upon each person. autism is described as a "spectrum disorder" according to the DSM-5. This means there are many different types of ASD (autism Spectrum Disorder), such as Asperger's Syndrome, Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD), and Classic autism. Synesthesia, on the other hand, has almost 80 different types (WebMD). For example, one synesthete, Carol Crane, says she thinks of the calendar like "the cars on a ferris wheel, with July at the top, December at the bottom" (APA). To sum up, both of these conditions have many different symptoms, but the medical world takes organizing these symptoms very seriously when it comes to autism.

With so many similarities, you would think that their treatment would be similar. In reality however, autistic people can be heavily mistreated. First, milder conditions of autism can be completely ignored, and the same with synesthetes applies. However, more severe cases of

ASD are noticeable, and they can be faced with heavy discrimination and stigma put on by society. On the other hand, synesthetes are pretty much never discriminated against, except in the rare scenarios that they are unable to do certain things that neurotypical people can. This usually happens when they are faced with a math problem or something that they're not used to seeing. To conclude, mild cases of autism and any case of synesthesia can be easily ignored in most scenarios, but severe cases of autism are much more noticeable and can be heavily discriminated against.

Similar to how they were treated, how others are affected depends heavily on the condition and the person. To begin with, cases of ASD that are mild and only result in some adjustments in a few areas exert a very light toll on the families, and with a condition such as Asperger Syndrome, it can actually make some things easier for the patient and their family. However, severe cases can be extremely hard to treat, with their family having to put more time into teaching the victim basic skills and taking care of them. In addition, therapy sessions cost around \$120 per hour, and the recommended amount per week is around 40 hours, so that's around \$4,800 per *week* (AB Spectrum). In the case of poorer communities, as stated in the movie "Emmanuel's Gift," when people earn around two dollars a day, almost \$250,000 can be unimaginable, and even for people with a regular income, this is an extreme amount of money. Synesthesia is a milder condition and affects others like how milder cases of ASD affect others. In total, autism and synesthesia both don't need treatments when it comes to mild cases of ASD and any synesthesia case, but severe cases of ASD do require long and expensive therapy sessions.

One large difference between the two challenges is rarity. To start, since ASD is a spectrum disorder, there are multiple types, and some are rarer than others. However, since they are all classified under one umbrella disorder, it is counted as one mental challenge and the “rarity” of the disability includes all types (which are 3 main types according to WebMD). For example, according to Nature Pediatric Research, around two in 100,000 children (0.002%) have Asperger’s, making it a very rare challenge. Nevertheless, the website *Autism Speaks* states that “1 in 44 children have ASD,” which equates to around 2.3%. This is because ASD includes various types of autism in one umbrella disorder. On the other hand, synesthesia is far rarer, with the APA saying that around “one in two thousand people have the condition.” The same article also states that there may be significantly more undiagnosed cases, bringing the rarity up to one in 300 people, or around 0.3%. In other words, ASD is much more common than synesthesia, but the individual types of autism can be very rare.

In conclusion, both autism and synesthesia are similar and different in many ways, mainly because of autism’s broad range of disabilities inside the spectrum. To begin with, both affect their victim’s brain, but in different ways and with varying severity. Moreover, they both do not have a direct treatment, but they do have various types of therapies, but in these therapies, there are many differences. In addition, both impair their learning, but autism focuses more on language development. And yet, they both face discrimination, but ASD as a spectrum disorder faces varying levels depending on severity. Another large difference with varying answers relying on slight changes in criteria is rarity, with synesthesia normally being the rarer challenge. Finally, similar to everything else, varying levels of ASD can affect others too, while synesthesia usually doesn’t exert a heavy toll, just like milder cases of autism. In [A Mango Shaped Space](#),

Doctor Jerry Weiss (a fictional character based in a realistic environment) asks Mia about her condition. Her answer: ““Just like everybody else...you know, when you’re sitting on top of a Ferris wheel at the amusement park. If the wheel were a clock, January would be twelve. Then as the days go by, the wheel turns to the left, and February is at eleven. By the time summer comes around I’m sort of at the bottom of the wheel, but the wheel is sort of lying flat on the ground now. Then in August it starts to rise again,” (pg. 105). This explains that any mental disability is simply a different way of looking at the world, and any disabled person can be just as smart, just as able as any person. The next time you look at a disabled person, you might think of that person differently, or rather, ordinarily, as you would a normal person.

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