

AUTISM

IN

METAPHORS

met·a·phor (noun)

UK /'met.ə.fɔːr/ US /'meɪ.ə.fɔːr/

An expression, often found in literature, that describes a person or object by referring to something that is considered to have similar characteristics to that person or object.

While Autistic people tend to prefer clear, literal language, neurotypicals often use figurative, comparative language.

With that in mind, here are some metaphors to help the neurotypical in your life (or perhaps even you) understand the Autistic mind.



"You can't understand someone until you've walked a mile in their shoes."

What if you can't walk in someone's shoes, though? What if their shoes are so different from yours that you can't figure out how to walk in them, or that they even are shoes?

Autistic people are stereotyped as lacking the ability to feel empathy. This is not true - we feel deeply and passionately. We also feel differently, though, which can make it seem like we're unfeeling. This is referred to as **the Double-Empathy Problem**: our feelings and experiences differ so much that they are misunderstood by neurotypicals, and vice-versa.



Imagine yourself as a bottle of soda, and go about your day...

Wake up feeling tired? Shake the bottle.
Internet connection problems? Shake the bottle.
Sore back? Shake the bottle.
Never-ending meeting? Shake the bottle.

All that pressure remains hidden, but it builds up... Open the bottle at the end of the day and it's likely to explode.

Autistic people face much more pressure due to sensory sensitivity and social/communication differences. These stressors build up, hidden, and we bottle things up as long as we can. This makes the corresponding explosion - the **meltdown or shutdown** - seem more dramatic because it appears to come out of nowhere. Down time is crucial to let the pressure subside slowly and safely.





Get up

Shower

Get dressed

Prepare food

Eat

Take medication

Christine Miserandino's Spoon Theory uses the common household object to illustrate the energy people with disabilities often need for basic tasks. Your day's worth of energy is represented in these 12 spoons, and tasks typically taken for granted can easily overwhelm us.

Executive functioning, the ability to plan, problem-solve, manage time, pay attention (and more), often lacks in Autistic individuals, and running low on spoons only makes it worse. Downtime also helps to replenish spoons, and mindfulness can help build awareness of our reserves.



Round peg, round hole. Round peg, round hole.
Square peg? We can't afford a square hole, it'll have to make do with the round hole. Maybe we can cut one corner out.

Autistic people are often treated as an afterthought or a burden. Sometimes we can mold ourselves or carve off our edges, but this **masking** is a great harm. We're also not all square - we come in an infinite number of shapes.

We don't need an infinite number of holes to match, just enough flexibility to let us keep our edges.



Scoop yourself some ice cream and top it with whatever you like. Your sundae won't look exactly the same as anyone else's.

It's yours, though, and it's perfectly suited to you!

Contrary to popular depictions of Autism, we're not all the same. While differences in social communication, sensory processing, and information processing are common, there can be huge differences in how we show them. **The Autism Spectrum** encompasses this multitude of traits and as many variations within them. It's multidimensional, just like us. Historical concepts of Autism lead to a lack of diagnosis and support for women and racial minorities, and it's important to remember that we aren't all Rain Man or Sheldon.



ARTIST'S STATEMENT

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Autism in Metaphors approaches the topic of education as educator. It invokes a concept often foreign to Autistic people, figurative thinking, to illustrate common Autistic issues. Themes are expressed in images and words, with the rainbow depicted in various forms as a representation of neurodiversity.

Autistic life is often a struggle to understand how the world works and what we're supposed to do in it. COVID-19 has spread that uncertainty on an unprecedented scale, and it's been a massive challenge. It is also an opportunity for compassion and understanding, which we will continue to need as we reckon with the proverbial cracks laid bare by this upheaval. I look forward not to a return to normal, but to a new normal that honours our sacrifices and our losses.

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