

## The Role of Theatre in Representing and Treating Autism

In my capstone project, I will explore the relationship between theatre and autism, analyzing current representations of the autism experience on Broadway and the potential benefit of incorporating aspects of theatre into treatment for people with autism. I will highlight how autism has been primarily situated in the medical model both in societal perceptions and in clinical intervention settings, which has emphasized ASD as an affliction necessitating a cure, and suggest that one of the first steps in moving towards a better attitude regarding people with autism on a therapeutic level is by increasing awareness and acceptance of autism on a societal level. I will argue that representations of autism in theatre play a pivotal role in educating the masses and eliminating stigma to reveal shared humanity despite symptoms that may be determined different from the norm – I will accomplish this through an analysis of *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, a Broadway play that features a protagonist with autism and has received great critical acclaim, including a Tony Award for the actor portraying the lead with autism. Although I will argue that the depiction of autism in the show allows neurotypical audiences to identify with the autism experience and neurodiverse audiences to have the stories represented on stage, I will also explore the heated discussion currently occurring among self-advocates who criticize the lack of self-representation for actors with autism in the theatrical community. Finally, I will compare different strategies used in research settings that use theatrical techniques during treatment of clients with autism, conveying the benefits of creative engagement in social skills interventions. I hope to impact the field of disability studies by promoting more discussion regarding the importance of increased representations of autism, both in the stories told and the actors performing, and by encouraging a more holistic approach to

treatment that not only serves to work on the social skills of individuals with autism, but also encourages their empowerment through the arts.