

# SPECTRUM LIFE

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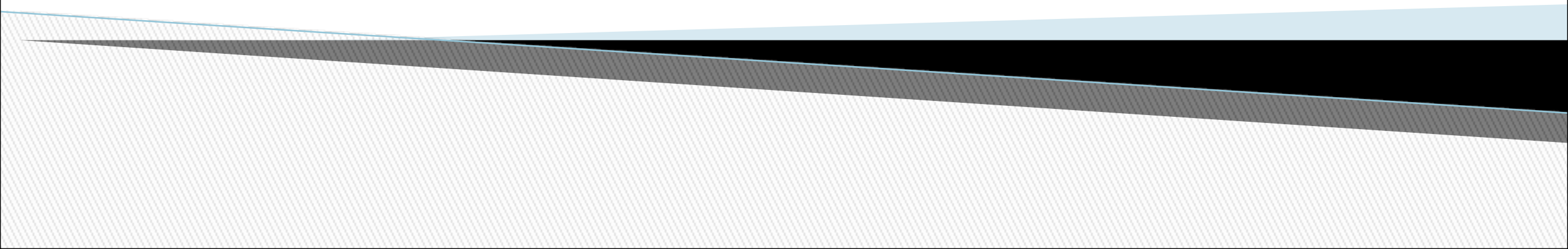
## Different, Yet Still The Same

- ▶ We are all different but are on the spectrum. We experience life differently but have obstacles.
- ▶ Despite obstacles, you can still act towards reaching goals. We have the potential to do this.

# **PRESENTATION OVERVIEW**

- **MY LIFE ON THE SPECTRUM**
- **WHAT MAKES US UNIQUE**
- **BARRIERS**
- **OVERCOMING BARRIERS**
- **STRENGTHS AND BARRIERS OF BEING AN  
AUTISTIC THERAPIST AND HOW TO OVERCOME  
THEM**

# MY LIFE ON THE SPECTRUM



I CANNOT SPEAK FOR  
EVERYONE ON THE  
SPECTRUM BUT FROM LIVING  
THROUGH IT AND KNOWING  
OTHERS ON THE SPECTRUM.

# *My Life On The Spectrum*

- **Always Felt Different**
  - **Focus on interests**
  - **Social Skills**
  - **Co-occurring**
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# TRAUMATIC AND LIFE CHANGING MILESTONE



- High Anxiety in High School
- President's Day Weekend 2005
- Hospitalized in Crisis Psych Ward

# DISCOVERING MY DIAGNOSIS

- Being Diagnosed
- High functioning Autism (Aspergers at the time)
- Learning what it is
- All making since
- I am not the only one



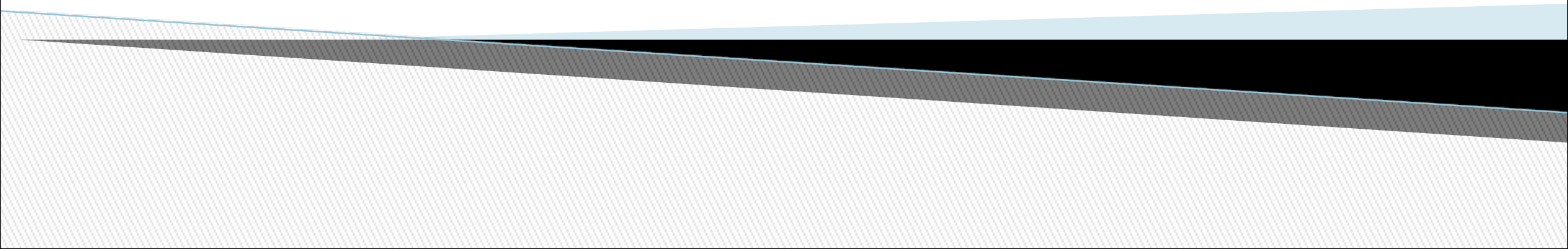


# WHAT HAPPENED AFTERWARD

- Learning of self
- College life
- Other issues that I had (dating, social, vocational)



# **STRENGTHS AND BARRIERS OF SPECTRUM LIFE**



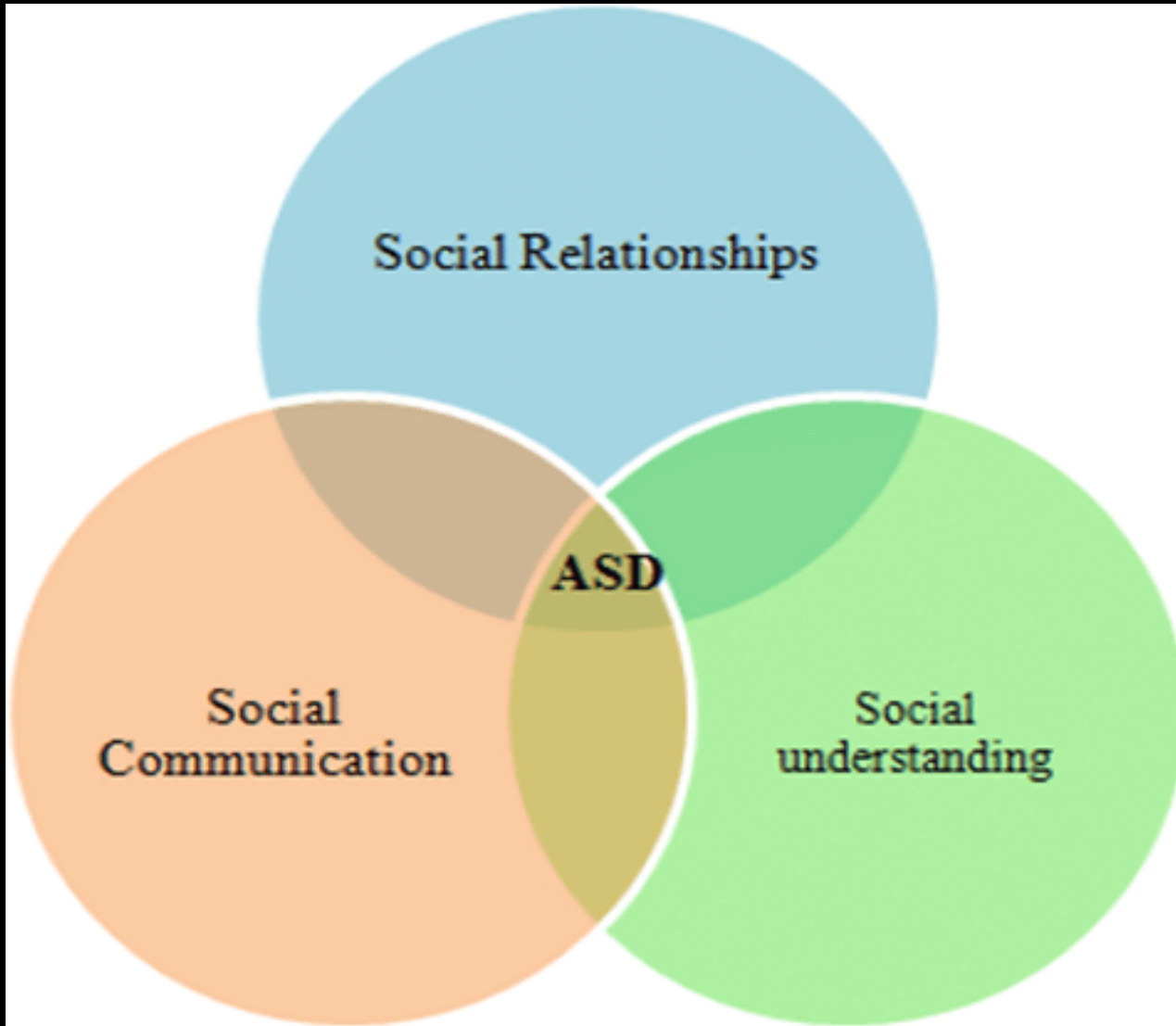
# WHAT MAKES US UNIQUE



- We all have things that make us unique
- Interests that make us happy
- Quirks that we have (ex. stimming) that help us and give us strength
- We have community
- Interests can become strength
- Each one of us is different, hence becoming Neurodivergent



# Barriers of Spectrum Life



## *Social Barriers of Spectrum Life*

- Social Cues
- Establishing Friendships
- Maintaining Friendships
- Dating and Relationships
- High Cause of Anxiety
- The Horrors of Masking



# MASKING



## What is this?!

- Also known as camouflaging, is the practice of artificially performing certain social behaviors in order to fit in with the neurotypical world.
- Mimic social behaviors of neurotypicals and repressing certain autistic behaviors, such as stimming.
- Was seen as a way to help autistics assimilate into society.

## Does it help?...No!!

- Does more harm than good.
- Prevents autistics from using coping skills.
- Studies shown masking to lead to loneliness, depression, and anxiety (Hull et al. 2017).
- Autistic women affected by masking, especially those misdiagnosed (Bargiela 2016).

# Educational Barriers

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- Difficulty adjusting to new schedules
- Adjusting to new environments
- Social issues
- School Services
- Certain Schools Not Knowing How to Support Autistic Students

# Vocational Boundaries



- ▶ “Falling off the cliff”
- ▶ Seeking services
- ▶ Job interviews
- ▶ Understanding cues



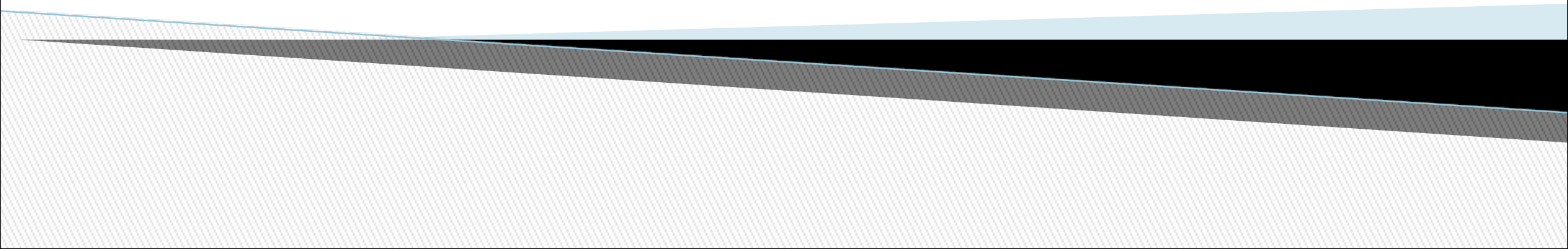
# LIFE SKILLS BARRIERS

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- Finding independent living
- Accessing resources (ex: healthcare)
- Maintaining independent living



# OVERCOMING BARRIERS





## **SOCIALLY**

- Building social skills
- Building community
- To help with friendships and relationships
- To help with interacting with those who are not on the spectrum



# EDUCATION

- School Services
- Individualized help
- Socialization skill building
- Educating the educators
- Community is key

# Vocational




- ▶ Job Coaching
- ▶ Implementing employment skills
- ▶ Training for employers
- ▶ Community awareness

# LIFE SKILLS

- Life coaching
- Brokering and implementation of resources
- Community
- Using interests as a positive tool for success





# Strengths of a Spectrum Therapist

## What Makes Us unique

- ▣ We all have things that make us unique
- ▣ Interests that make us happy
- ▣ Quirks that we have (ex. stimming) that help us and give us strength





# We can bring in the experience

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- When working with those on the spectrum we can bring in our experience.
- Empathy is a strength.
- Bring on the glorious coping skills!!

# We can bring the experience

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- Can be a source of guidance for families.
- Can be great leaders in communities and in working environments.
- Our stories are similar.





# Barriers of a Spectrum Therapist

# Transference



- ▶ Unconscious redirection of feelings unto others.
- ▶ This could lead to counter transference.

# Own Worst Enemy

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- Trying to be too much of the hero
- Might take things too much to heart when mistakes are made.



# Difficulty with Helping Clients

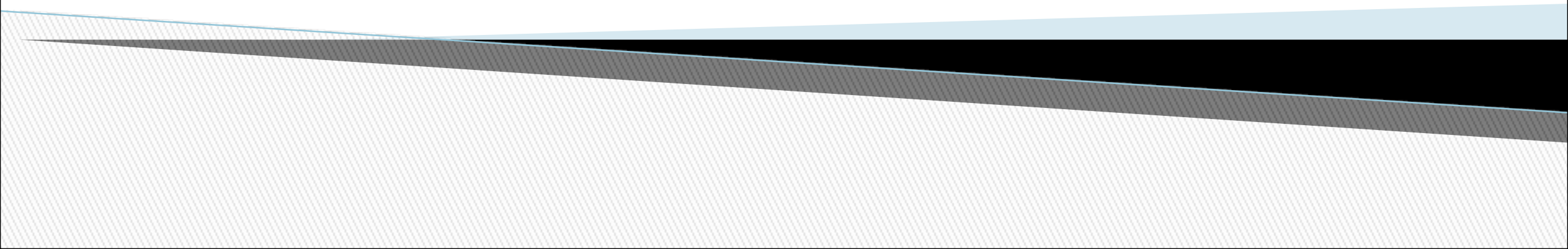
- ▶ Might have clients who might manipulate
- ▶ Hard time understanding them
- ▶ Difficulty with obtaining resources

# Side Effects!!!

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- Doubtful and Distrusting of Self
- Stress and Anxiety
- Ultimate Burnout

# Overcoming Barriers





# Boundaries

- ❑ Understand each person is different
- ❑ Know what to tell them and not to tell them
- ❑ This will help with maintaining professional relationship and with empathy



# Be Mindful

- Be mindful of yourself and what you can accomplish
- Know that you are human
- Its okay to make mistakes
- Selfcare is key



# One Step at a Time With Clients

- ▶ Meet them where they are at
- ▶ See about getting training
- ▶ Ask supervisors for help
- ▶ Also seek assistance from peers



# How This Helps!

- ❑ Help to maintain professionalism
- ❑ Helps to maintain a rapport
- ❑ Helps yourself



**CONCLUSION**

# FINAL WORDS

- Review of basic learning objectives
- More and more of us are entering the adult world



# Where I Am Now

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- Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW)
- Clinical role
- Able to utilize interests for good
- Gained friendships
- Marriage
- Continue to grow professionally and personally

# REFERENCES

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- Bargiela, S., Steward, R. & Mandy, W. The Experiences of Late-diagnosed Women with Autism Spectrum Conditions: An Investigation of the Female Autism Phenotype. *J Autism Dev Disord* 46, 3281–3294 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-016-2872-8>
- Hull, L., Petrides, K. V., Allison, C., Smith, P., Baron-Cohen, S., Lai, M. C., & Mandy, W. (2017). "Putting on My Best Normal": Social Camouflaging in Adults with Autism Spectrum Conditions. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, 47(8), 2519–2534. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-017-3166-5>