

Life in Code: A Personal History of Technology

The history of autism begins in 1911, when Swiss psychiatrist Paul Eugen Bleuler coined the term, using it to describe what he believed to be the childhood version of schizophrenia. Since then, our understanding of autism has evolved, culminating in the current diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and informed by many notable events impacting autism clinical research, education, and support.

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Timeline

1920s

1926: Grunya Sukhareva, a child psychiatrist in Kiev, Russia, writes about six children with autistic traits in a scientific German psychiatry and neurology journal.

1930s

1938: Louise Despert, a psychologist in New York, details 29 cases of childhood schizophrenia, some who have symptoms that resemble today's classification of autism.

1940s

1943: Leo Kanner publishes a paper describing 11 patients who were focused on or obsessed with objects and had a "resistance to (unexpected) change." He later named this condition "infantile autism."

1944: Austrian pediatrician Hans Asperger publishes an important scientific study of children with autism, a case study describing four children ages 6 to 11. He notices parents of some of the children have similar personalities or eccentricities, and regards this as evidence of a genetic link. He is also credited with describing a higher-functioning form of autism, later called Asperger's syndrome.

1949: Kanner proclaims his theory that autism is caused by "refrigerator mothers," a term used to describe parents who are cold and detached.

1950s

1952: In the first edition of the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), children with symptoms of autism are labeled as having childhood schizophrenia.

1956: Leon Eisenberg publishes his paper "The Autistic Child in Adolescence," which follows 63 autistic children for nine years and again at 15 years old.

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1959: Austrian-born scientist Bruno Bettelheim publishes an article in Scientific American about Joey, a 9-year-old with autism.

1960s

1964: Bernard Rimland publishes *Infantile Autism: The Syndrome and Its Implications for a Neural Theory of Behavior*, challenging the "refrigerator mother" theory and discussing the neurological factors in autism.

1964: Ole Ivar Lovaas begins working on his theory of Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) therapy for autistic children.

1965: The Sybil Elgar School begins teaching and caring for children with autism.

1965: A group of parents of autistic children have the first meeting of the National Society of Autistic Children (now called the Autism Society of America).

1967: Bruno Bettelheim writes *Empty Fortress*, which reinforces the "refrigerator mother" theory as the cause of autism.

1970s

1970s: Lorna Wing proposes the concept of autism spectrum disorders. She identifies the "triad of impairment," which includes three areas: social interaction, communication, and imagination.

1975: The Education for All Handicapped Children Act is enacted to help protect the rights and meet the needs of children with disabilities, most of whom were previously excluded from school.

1977: Susan Folstein and Michael Rutter publish the first study of twins and autism. The study finds that genetics are an important risk factor for autism.

1980s

1980: The third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) includes criteria for a diagnosis of infantile autism for the first time.

1990s

1990: Autism is included as a disability category in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), making it easier for autistic children to get special education services.

1996: Temple Grandin writes *Emergence* "Labeled Autistic", a firsthand account of her life with autism and how she became successful in her field.

1998: Andrew Wakefield publishes his paper in the *Lancet* suggesting that the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine triggers autism. The theory is debunked by comprehensive epidemiological studies and eventually retracted.

1999: The Autism Society adopts the Autism Awareness Puzzle Ribbon as the universal sign of autism awareness.

2000s

2003: The Global and Regional Asperger Syndrome Partnership (GRASP), an organization run by people with Asperger's syndrome and autism spectrum disorders, is formed.

2003: Bernard Rimland and Stephen Edelson write the book *Recovering Autistic Children*.

2006: Ari Ne'eman establishes the Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN).

2006: Dora Raymaker and Christina Nicolaidis start the Academic Autistic Spectrum Partnership in Research and Education (AASPIRE) to provide resources for autistic adults and healthcare providers.

2006: The president signs the Combating Autism Act to provide support for autism research and treatment.

2010s

2010: Andrew Wakefield loses his medical license and is barred from practicing medicine, following the retraction of his autism paper.

2013: The DSM-5 combines autism, Asperger's, and childhood disintegrative disorder into autism spectrum disorder.

2014: The president signs the Autism Collaboration, Accountability, Research, Education and Support (CARES) Act of 2014, reauthorizing and expanding the Combating Autism Act.

2020: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention determines one in 54 children have been identified with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Autism research and advocacy continues to build on these past events, and researchers have now identified nearly 100 different genes and various environmental factors that contribute to autism risk. In addition, they're learning more about the early signs and symptoms so kids can get screened and start treatment sooner.

Reference

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