

# Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD



Addis Ababa University

College Of Education and Behavioral Science

Department of Special Need Education

Character Analysis on Representation of Person with Autism Spectrum Disorder in  
Two Selected Ethiopian Amharic Films

By: Sisay Tufa

June, 2019

Seek wisdom!

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Two Selected Ethiopian Amharic Films

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Thesis Submitted To the Department of Special Need Education In Partial  
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Department of Special Need Education

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# Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

## Declaration

I, the researcher would like to declare that this thesis is my original work. It has not been presented for master of art degree in any other university and that all source of material used for the thesis have been appropriately acknowledged.

Sisay Tufa

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

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# Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to evaluate and analyze the character representation of person with ASD in Ethiopia on two selected Amharic films. The study was conducted based on the data gathered from 6 direct participants of film producers, directors, script writers and actors through interview and direct observation of the two selected films. From the respondents five of them are male and 1 female.

Qualitative research method was used to answer the research questions. The study thematically analyzes data obtained from interview and film observation. The result of the study indicated that, selected films characters are portrayed in correspond to the behavioral characters of persons with autism.

To this research low awareness of film producers and writers related to autism spectrum disorder, least concern of government officials to autism and affecting their role in the provision of quality films to their and as of many films of Ethiopia, too much more role monopoly by one person are some of the factors affecting films related to autism spectrum disorder.

In conclusion, this thesis found out that the two selected Amharic films, ‘Tism’ and ‘Bandaf’, have it’s own strength and limitations in presenting and reflecting an autistic character or traits. The study indicated that these strength and limitations have evolved from lack of adequate knowledge about autism spectrum disorder, and misperception about person with autism. To minimize these limitations and improve the making of qualitatively sound films, some solutions are recommended in this thesis.

Key words: autism spectrum disorder / Asperger syndrome, character representation, selected Amharic films.

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## Abbreviations

AS: Asperger Syndrome

ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorders

DSM: Manual of Mental Disorders

EC: Ethiopian Calendar

HFA: High-Functioning Autism

IQ: Intelligence Quotient

JICA: Japan International Cooperation Agency

PWD: Person With Disability

SNNP: Southern Nation, Nationalities and People

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## Operational definition

*Autism spectrum disorder*: used as a modern name of *autism*.

*Autism spectrum disorder* and *Asperger's syndrome* are used exchangeable.

*Character*: the behavior and action that reflected and performed by represented persons.

*Disability*: any restriction or limitation of a person in day to day activity.

*Filmmakers view on autism spectrum disorder*: participants' orientation on autism spectrum disorder.

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## 1. Introduction

In this chapter the researcher overviewed the background of disability specifically about autism spectrum disorder, background about Ethiopian film production, statement of the problem, objectives and research questions, significances of the study, methods used, scope and limitations of the study will be presented.

### 1.1 Background of The Study

Even if there is no exact agreement on the definitions of disabilities, but there are little internationally comparable information on the incidence, distribution and trends of disability. According to world health organization, disability is ‘complexes, dynamic, and multidimensional’ (WHO, 2011).

However, in Ethiopian contexts disability is defined as any person unable to ensure by himself or herself a normal life, because of deficiency in his or her physical or mental capabilities. Nagarit Gazeta of the Emperor Haile Selassie I, in the Order No. 70 of 1970, described the “disabled” as, people who is unable to earn his livelihood and do not have anyone to support him because of limitations of normal physical or mental health. In addition, shall include any persons who are unable to earn their livelihood because they are too young or too old.

In “Nagarit Gazeta” the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, Proclamation No. 101 of 1994 referred a disabled person as, a person who is unable to see, hear or speak or is suffering from mental retardation or from injuries that limit him or her due to natural or manmade causes. However the term does not include persons who are alcoholic, drug addicts and those with psychological problems due to socially deviant behaviors.(JICA, 2002).

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Like other disorders, autism can't be defined easily. The word *autism* is derived from the Greek word "auto" meaning self, autism is oftentimes mistakenly labeled as a disease. As Snedden (2010) mentioned that autistic individuals are those with a brain that has been developed differently.

Although the physical appearance of persons with autism may vary, one common characteristic of autism can easily be observed. These characteristics are that communicating and establishing relationships may be more of a challenge for someone with autism compared to that of a non-autistic person.

Since its discovery in 1911, the medical term autism applied to a wide range of developmental conditions, which are all known as Autism Spectrum Disorders today. The individual cases of autism spectrum disorder can include both high-functioning and low-functioning autism (Snedden, 2010).

Kerri Rivera (2014) found that autism is a combination of immune disorders that need to be treated bio-medically. There are a lot of things that we still need to understand about autism spectrum disorders: why and how these immune dysfunctions affect our kids' development, causing near complete impairment of their social interaction and communication.

Persons with autism spectrum disorders are represented on media particularly on films, but the representation on film is not simple as such. Because media representations are not simply a mirror of society, rather they are highly selective and constructed portrayals of long life experience. It is the capacity of these portrayals to shape and frame our perception, attitude we have to the person with disability. As Tudor (1974) explains the combinations of audio visual elements in transporting as well as transforming information to the society makes film the most socially significant innovation. This is because film tells stories, expresses information and ideas that affect the way

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people think and act (Jarvie, 1978). This makes film one of the most influential artistic expression; giving it the power to be called the most important of all the arts of modern times (Mwakalinga, 2003). It has a power to reflect the life style and attitudes of the society, express the hidden issues, from one of those different types of disabilities. Film is one of the most influential parts of media, which play its own significant role in awareness creation, in building civilized society, promoting life style or culture and in introducing technology etc.

In Africa, film production took a long decades and the production of films were associated with culture, religion, anti-colonization and so on (Sanson A.2000). ‘Framing people, objects, and events with a camera is always ‘about’ something. It is a way of pointing out, describing and judging. It domesticates and organizes vision’’ (2005: Patrick). It gives us clear visions about things. That’s why the influence of film is significant

### 1.2 Statement of the problem

According to the estimation of UN, Ethiopians populations are estimated near to 110.14 million people, which is more than half of them are under age (<http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/ethiopia-population/>). From this estimation near to 500,000 million individuals are person living with autism spectrum disorders (Mahlet , 2016).

In Ethiopia persons with disabilities are perceived as “weak”, “hopeless”, “dependent”, and “unable to learn” and “subject of charity”. The misconceptions of causal attribution added to the misunderstandings of the capabilities of persons with disabilities have contributed to the low social and economic status (Tirussew, 2005).

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Recent situational analysis of autism services in Ethiopia (Dejene, et al., 2016) showed that diagnostic and educational services for children with autism are largely confined to Ethiopia's capital city Addis Ababa. Therefore it's unavailable to the majorities of population who live in rural area. The schools for children with autism in Addis Ababa are highly oversubscribed with long waiting lists. The identification, care and treatments of children with autism are further hindered by stigma, negative stereotypes and misconceptions about the causes of child mental illness (Dejene, et al.2016).

According to Getnet (2010), despite the lack of official data in Ethiopia on autism by estimation it is believed that 0.70 % of the total population lives with Autism. Infants often appear an affected as babies, since they will complete the normal developmental targets including early speech but fail to develop normal social behaviors as toddlers. In Ethiopia 75 % of autistic cases have learning disability accompanying there autistic case, that's why most of the children's will change school so many times but fail to reach the expected goal. Autistic cases in Ethiopia face a lot of stigma even by their parents; more than 80 % of these individuals are locked down in dark rooms being chained to control the unusual behavior.

In Ethiopia there is only three autistic centers operating in the capital city Addis Ababa since 2002, giving a special teaching for autistic Children's who are lucky to be there, but still we have a lot of these children looking for special education ( Nia foundation, joy autism center, 2002).According to the description provided by Nia Foundation, the rough estimation of children in Ethiopia that are affected by autism spectrum disorder are reaches up to 500,000 (Nia Foundation, 2002, cited in Mahlet 2016).

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Unlike many other minorities, person living with disabilities are more likely to be misunderstood and inadequately represented in everyday life. This real life inadequately and oftentimes inaccurately represents disabilities in Medias. The problem with media images of disabled members of our society is that there is an increase in able-bodied children and adults relying on media, such as television and film, to expose them to and educate them about various disabilities (Bejoian& Connor, 2006).

As we know film is the combinations of audio visual elements in transporting as well as transforming information to the society makes film the most socially significant innovation. This is because film tells stories, conveys information and ideas that affect the way people think and act. This makes film one of influential artistic expression; giving it the power to be called the most important of all the arts of modern times (Mwakalinga, 2003).

The art of film introduced to Ethiopia in the very early years of the genre that wrote, “Ethiopia comes to learn this visual art next to Egypt and Nigeria in Africa”. (Mehret, 2007). In the history of Ethiopian film production the first Amharic narrative films were made in the 1950s of E.C.

Though the numbers of produced films are too small from the view point of the huge socio-cultural and historical heritage of the country, there is actually a dramatic development in the film production sector of Ethiopia in the last three decades (Masresha, 2009 cited in Minassie 2010).

The purpose of this study will be to examine and bridge the gap of misrepresentation and limited exposure of the person with disability in Ethiopian films. Instead of addressing all disabilities, this research paper will concentrate solely on selected Amharic films that have been produced on Autism Spectrum Disorders. The Analysis on the character representation of Autism spectrum

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disorder in films, the researcher concentrated on the performance in which accepted characters in science about autism spectrum disorder if they are presented in the film appropriately. In addition, the stereotypical elements of autism spectrum disorder and myth have been examined. The way they portrayed the represented character in the films *Tism and Bandaf* has been analyzed.

### 1.3 Research Questions

Based on the objectives the study, the present work is managed to answer the following questions.

- How the characters of persons with autism are represented in selected Amharic films?
- What is the contribution of those two films to the audience?
- What gaps do filmmakers have when they represent a person with autism in their film production?
- What has to be done to fill the observed gaps?

### 1.4 General objective of the study

The general objective of this study was to examine and bridge the gap on character representation of person with autism spectrum disorder in selected Amharic films.

#### 1.4.1 Specific objectives of the study:

- ❖ To examine how the characters of autism are portrayed in selected Amharic films.
- ❖ To examine the contribution of selected films in awareness creation related to autism.
- ❖ In overall the aim of this study is to examine the correctness of selected Amharic films.

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### 1.5 Significance of the study

The researcher hopes that this study will contribute in bridging the gap between a filmmaker and the scientific studies about the character of autism spectrum disorder. Hopefully most people will understand, film is an artistic work which deserves a very detail investigation and it helps to transmit different thoughts, ideologies, beliefs and social values. So as the researcher mentioned before this study evaluate the specific characters of selected Amharic films and illustrate the weakness and strengths of them. Finally, this study will light on the communicative interactions of the characters in terms of autism spectrum disorder that represented in selected films.

### 1.6 Scope of the study

This study has been done on two selected Amharic films that produced in Addis Ababa. As we know Addis Ababa is one of the most populated capital city in Ethiopia and the diplomatic city of Africa as well as the seat of national government. This condition of the city seems an opportunity for filmmakers to communicate with different stakeholders. That's why most of films are produced in Addis Ababa and distributed to different parts of the country. Film is a moving art that impresses anyone in anywhere and it's a very magnificent because it includes artistic features like painting, literature, music, dance and other humanistic disciplines and weaves them together in a coherent way. However, in this particular study, emphasis had been made on the characters of person with autism spectrum disorder in selected film. The study is limited itself to two selected Amharic films: 'Tism' and 'Bandaf'.

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## 1.7 Limitations of the Study

A number of internal and external factors can hinder any study. These factors may limit the researcher (s) from achieving the objectives and attaining the goals. In this study, too, there were a number of limitations. One limitation was the unavailability of sufficient related research studies that are conducted locally on local films in related to autism spectrum disorder. The other limitation of the study has to do with the local film- producers who do not commonly agree to give information. On many occasions, Ethiopian film-makers did not consent to give the scripts of their films; the copy of their film and other related documents. Some did not even agree to give interviews and fill questionnaires. Lack of adequate resources materials had also affected this research considerably.

## 2. Literature Review

There are numerous studies that have been conducted regarding autism spectrum disorder including its diagnosis, symptoms, treatments and its effect on an individual and societal level. As Sally et al. (2012) said “*Children with autism spectrum disorder are unique*” with a personal set of special gifts and challenges. Like each typically developing child, each child with autism spectrum disorder has a unique personality, set of likes and dislikes, talents and challenges. But all young children with autism spectrum disorders, by definitions, have trouble relating and communicating with others and playing with toys in a typical way.

From, decades of research on early development and intervention in children with autism spectrum disorder, we have learned a great deal about the kinds of difficulties that young children with autism spectrum disorder have. It is hard for them to pay attention to the people around them including others language and activities. It is often hard for them to share their feelings happiness, anger,

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sadness, frustration-with other people by sending emotional message to others through their facial expressions, gestures, and sounds or words. They experience a full range of emotions but may not share them in a way that is easy to understand. They may not be very interested in playing with other children and may not respond very well to other children's efforts to play with them. They often do not use many gestures to communicate and don't seem to understand the gesture of others. Many children with autism spectrum disorder enjoy toys, but they often play with them in unusual way, and their play can be very repetitive. Developing speech, and responding to others' speech, can be very difficult for many children with autism spectrum disorder, even for those who learn how to repeat other people's words. It is also not unusual for children with autism spectrum disorder do not respond to the typical ways parents try to teach children how to behave. They may throw tantrums, hit or bite others, destroy objects, and sometimes hurt themselves or shows self-injurious behavior.

### 2.1 History and definition of autism

The word autism, derived from the Greek word 'autos,' refers to self. The word is reported to have been used since the 1900s. Various scholars used the concept of autism linking it to other mental health issues such as schizophrenia. However, the credit of introducing the concept of autism goes to Leo Kanner, who in 1943 conducted a study that marked the difference between autism and schizophrenia. The study Kanner conducted with children revealed clinical conditions such as being aloof and having a language difficulty manifested at an early age of 3 which he termed as infantile autism (Kita & Hosokawa).

Currently, mental health professionals define autism as defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) prepared by the American Psychiatric Association. With the emergence of more research about the symptoms of autism, the definition of autism has been

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revised. The DSM has updated several diagnostic criteria of autism and other mental disorders. The first and second publications of DSM published in 1952 and 1968 respectively, classified autism under a mental disorder termed as a schizophrenic reaction of childhood type that is characterized by symptoms such as disturbances in reality, stream of thought and intellectual abilities (American Psychiatric Association, 1952). The third publication of DSM provided more tangible diagnostic criteria than the previous two publications. This publication categorized autism under disorders of infancy, childhood and adolescence (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). The fifth edition of DSM classifies autism under a group of neurodevelopmental disorders and describes the diagnostic features of autism as impairment in social interactions and communication skills. Impairment in social interactions includes abnormal use of non-verbal behaviors, lack of developing peer relationships, lack of regards for others, etc. Impairments in communication skills involve delay or lack of spoken language development, inability to sustain conversation, use of stereotyped and repetitive language (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This edition of DSM uses the term autism spectrum disorder. This term is an umbrella term that includes four separate disorders; autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder and the catch-all diagnosis of pervasive developmental disorder.

### 2.1.1 Asperger's syndrome

Asperger syndrome is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition which is part of the autism spectrum disorder but individuals with Asperger syndrome do not have an intellectual impairment. Research (Brugha et al., 2012) has found that around 1.1% of the general population has an autism spectrum disorder, including Asperger syndrome (that's around 1 in every 100

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people). More men than women are diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. It can be difficult to recognize and diagnose women with autism spectrum disorder because the characteristics can be masked.

### 2.2 Person with autism spectrum disorder and communication problems

All persons diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder have problems with communication, but their type and degree of problems are varies from person to person. According to different scholars though, communication is the process of exchanging information in different forms with other people. It is not limited to language, it includes: facial expressions, gestures and body Language as well as non-verbal communication and understanding of symbols (Heflin & Alaimo, 2007). Essentially, communication is decoding a message and being able to code a message for others. The process is complex, but it happens very rapidly (Noens & van Berckelaer-Onnes, 2005).

Characteristically developing person's progress through the following three phases of communication. The first one is Intentional communication it is the use of gestures or vocalizations to get attention or attempt to meet a need or a want. The second one is symbolic communication which is the use of early language to interact with others, gain attention, and meet needs. Linguistic communication is the final and most sophisticated phase of communication. This is the ability to engage in full discourse with another using many different forms of communication (Noens & van Berckelaer-Onnes, 2004; Prizant, Wetherby, Rubin, & Laurent, 2003).

Persons who receive a message must determine the intention of the sender, the context of the message, and then successfully translate the information before resolving the next steps to take

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(Velentzas & Broni, 2014). These skills are fundamentals for learning and for developing social bonds with the society.

As mentioned above communication skills include non-verbal and verbal language skills which are critical in learning and developing social bonds between the community and person with autism spectrum disorder. However, persons with autism spectrum disorder have limited communication skills. They face challenges with communication and language, as well as social interactions (Cadette, 2015 cited in Alokla. Sh). In addition, there is a relationship between non-verbal communication skills in person with autism spectrum disorder and language development at later developmental stages. In fact, shortages in imitation skills are partly responsible for person with autism spectrum disorder having difficulty with getting hold of language through normal means. When person with autism spectrum disorder are trained non-verbal communication skills at an early age, they become better able to express their emotions and feelings in more than one way such as through body gestures and pointing (Alshurman & Alsreaa, 2015 cited by Alokla Sh.A, 2018).

### 2.3 Autism spectrum disorder and Emotional Attachment

According to (Attwood, 1997) a man or a woman with Asperger's syndrome can develop intimate personal relationships and become a life-long partner. Emotional attachment or bonding is the deep, enduring emotional connection between us and specific people that we know and that are important to us. This emotional attachment, or bonding, is one of the most important phenomena in our emotional and social experience. Children internalize their attachment experiences with their parents or primary caregivers, and these internalized parental attachments then serve as the foundation for all future relationships. When our attachments or emotional

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bonds are joy based, we want to be near the people we are attached to, and we go to them for comfort and protection in times of distress.

### 2.4 Film as sources of Education

The impact of media on society can be easily observed in the trends of everyday life and measured by consumer spending in the marketplace. This is a statement in which media producers are probably proud to take pride. However, when it comes to those same producers acknowledging the actual impact media have on society, they are often hesitant to do so (Klobas, 1988).

For many, media, such as film and television, are often perceived as a reflection of reality. Therefore, if misrepresentations are present, they can have a major impact on shaping audience's attitudes and behaviors towards the disabled (Bejoian & Connor, 2006). According to authors Lynn Bejoian and David Connor, most adults and children spend more time learning about the real world through media such as film and television than through the print media (Bejoian & Connor, 2006). As a result, information about disabilities is more likely to reach this mass audience through those media than through a printed research journal. One fact that makes this statement true is that media have had growth in access and popularity.

The popularity of motion pictures and the convenience of movie viewing in the home have made film an important medium for educating society about disabilities. As noted by author Stephen Safran, "For many citizens with limited exposure to individuals with specific impairments, film, regardless of its accuracy, serves as a major source of information on the very nature of disabilities" (Safran, 1998).

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In his article *Disability Portrayal in Film: Reflecting the Past, Directing the Future* (1998), Safran focused on the role films could play in serving as a tool for awareness and education for shaping the knowledge and attitudes of teachers and students (Safran, 1998). This same notion of using films for awareness and educational purposes can be applied to the general society to help and educate the society on disabilities such as autism spectrum disorders and reduce stereotyping.

### 2.5 Stereotyping and “Othering”

Autism can be one of the most difficult diagnoses to accept for parents. It is particularly due to the challenging symptoms associated with autism spectrum disorder. As with many things that society doesn't understand, autism also has certain stigma attached to it. The negativity can make it quite difficult for families struggling to cope with an individual who has the diagnosis (Getaneh Abera, 2017).

In the chapter the concept of the stereotype of the book *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation*, the author (Michael Pickering 2001) discussed possible reasons for stereotyping and the various dilemmas that surround these reasons. The problematic foundation of stereotyping is that it is a narrow perception of the whole. This narrow perception is often used to help the majority obtain a sense of dominance, security, and order in society (Pickering, 2001). The narrowness of most stereotypical perceptions enforced by the majority can limit flexibility, openness, and overall acceptance of people.

Stereotyping, as discussed by Pickering, it's often a tactic used by the majority for convenience. Placing those that are different into categories, regardless of accuracies, is a method used to ensure the existence of continued control by the majority (Pickering, 2001). This placement is an element of Pickering's definition of 'othering'. Pickering stated that “While they occur in all sorts

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of discourse, and can draw various ideological assumptions, stereotypes operate as a means of evaluative placing, and attempting to fix in place, the people or cultures from a particular and privileged perspective” (Pickering, 2001). In essence, othering is used to make a certain individual or groups of people feel isolated and different from the whole. This isolation can be observed in everyday life and easily transferred to media.

### 2.5.1 Stereotypes on Autism Spectrum Disorder

In order to form an impression of a person based on their group membership, people often use ‘stereotypes’. These are knowledge, beliefs and expectations of social groups and their members (Sherman, Stroessner, Conrey et al., 2005 cited in Caroline et al, 2018). Stereotypes develop as part of social and cognitive development, where the environment is instrumental in shaping the development of beliefs about others, especially in relation to how people identify others and categorize them into groups. The ubiquity of stereotypes is also explained by their resource-saving nature. Stereotypes save cognitive resources by accessing existing group schemas already stored in long term memory, thus simplifying people perception (Kirchner, Schmitz and Dziobek, 2012; Macrae, Milne and Bodenhausen, 1994 cited in Caroline et al, 2018).

People with learning disabilities are often stereotyped as having low intelligence (May and Stone, 2010 cited in Caroline et al, 2018), found that disabled people are often stereotyped as being warm, but incompetent. One way in which stereotypes can be reinforced is through the media. Media representations of autistic people, for example, often portray them in a negative way (Anjay, 2011 cited in Caroline, 2018). Other stereotypes depict autistic people as either dangerous and uncontrollable or unloved and poorly treated, in addition to having a range of negative traits such as

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being disruptive and distracting to others (White, Hillier, Frye et al., 2016 cited by Caroline et al, 2018),

### 2.6 Myths on Autism Spectrum Disorder

Myth is in definition it's a traditional story which embodies a belief regarding some fact or phenomena of experience, and in which often the forces of nature and of the soul are personified, it is a commonly held but false beliefs and misconception that exaggerates or idealizes reality.

According to the institute of autism there are lists of myth, to see some of them:

1. Myth: People with autism don't want friends.

*Truth:* If someone in your class has autism, they probably struggle with social skills, which may make it difficult to interact with peers. They might seem shy or unfriendly, but that's just because he or she is unable to communicate their desire for relationships the same way someone do.

2. Myth: People with autism can't feel or express any emotion—happy or sad.

*Truth:* Autism doesn't make an individual unable to feel the emotions you feel, it just makes the person communicate emotions (and perceive your expressions) in different ways.

3. Myth: People with autism can't understand the emotions of others.

*Truth:* Autism often affects an individual's ability to understand unspoken interpersonal communication, so someone with autism might not detect sadness based solely on one's body language or sarcasm in one's tone of voice. But, when emotions are communicated more directly, people with autism are much more likely to feel empathy and compassion for others.

4. Myth: People with autism are intellectually disabled.

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*Truth:* Often times, autism brings with it just as many exceptional abilities as limitations. Many people with autism have normal to high IQs and some may excel at math, music or another pursuit.

5. Myth: People who display qualities that may be typical of a person with autism are just odd and will grow out of it.

*Truth:* Autism stems from biological conditions that affect brain development and, for many individuals, is a lifelong condition.

6. Myth: People with autism will have autism forever.

*Truth:* Recent research has shown that children with autism can make enough improvement after intensive early intervention to “test out” of the autism diagnosis. This is more evidence for the Importance of addressing autism when the first signs appear.

7. Myth: Autism is just a brain disorder.

*Truth:* Research has shown that many people with autism also have gastro-intestinal disorders, food sensitivities, and many allergies.

8. Myth: Autism is caused by bad parenting.

*Truth:* In the 1950s, a theory called the “refrigerator mother hypothesis” arose suggesting that autism was caused by mothers who lacked emotional warmth. This has long been disproved.

9. Myth: The prevalence of autism has been steadily increasing for the last 40 years.

*Truth:* The rate of autism has increased by 600% in the last 20 years. In 1975, an estimated 1 in 1,500 had autism. In 2014, an estimated 1 in 68 had an autism spectrum disorder.

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10. Myth: Therapies for people with autism are covered by insurance.

*Truth:* Most insurance companies exclude autism from the coverage plan roughly half of the 50 states currently require coverage for treatments of autism spectrum disorders.

Autism Speaks 11 Myths About Autism. [www.AutismSpeaks.org/U](http://www.AutismSpeaks.org/U).

### 3. Research Method

#### 3.1 Research Design

The main focus of this research is to explore the representation of person with autism in Ethiopian feature films that produced in Amharic language. The data of this thesis were collected through

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interviews with professionals, and audiovisual materials based on qualitative research method. The researcher implemented qualitative media content analysis which was suitable to this study. Data were obtained through structured interview questions from film producers, script writers, actors and directors of the films.

Media content analysis is a specialized sub-set of content analysis, a well-established research methodology. Neuendorf (2002) it's used to study a broad range of 'texts' from transcripts of interviews and discussions in clinical and social research to the narrative and form of films, television programs and the editorial and advertising content of newspapers and magazines. Media content analysis was introduced as a systematic method to study mass media by Harold Lasswell (1927), initially to study propaganda.

Media content analysis became increasingly popular as a research methodology during the 1920s and 1930s for investigating the rapidly expanding communication content of movies. In the 1950s, media content analysis proliferated as a research methodology in mass communication studies and social sciences with the arrival of television. Media content analysis has been a primary research method for studying portrayals of violence, racism and women in television programming as well as in films.

Lasswell, Lerner and Pool (1952) said: "...content analysis operates on the view that verbal behavior is a form of human behavior, that the flow of symbols is a part of the flow of events, and that the communication process is an aspect of the historical process ... content analysis is a technique which aims at describing, with optimum objectivity, precision, and generality, what is said on a given subject in a given place at a given time.

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Lasswell's better known statement which succinctly summarizes what media content analysis is about, published in 1948, (cited in Shoemaker and Reese, 1996), and describes it as: Who says what? Through which channel? To whom? With what effect?

Qualitative studies start from the assumption that in studying humans we are examining an artistic process whereby people produce and maintain forms of life, society and systems of meaning and value. This artistic activity is grounded in the ability to build nations from symbols that express this will to live together and assert meanings to life. Humans live by interpreting their perception. They do not simply react or respond but rather live by interpreting experience through their long life. This effort at recovering the fact of human the ways persons live by intentions, purposes, and values – that is what qualitative studies are dedicated. The researcher do not ask: “how do the media affect us”, but “what are the interpretations of meaning and value created in the media and what is their relation to the rest of life is more valuable question?

Therefore, qualitative research method is more preferable to study media content analysis in selected Amharic films instead of using quantitative research method.

### 3.2 Area of the Study

The study was carried out on two selected Amharic films which are produced in Addis Ababa. Addis Ababa is the capital city of Ethiopia and the diplomatic capital of Africa with the estimated population of more than 5 million. And also it is the seat of the federal government of Ethiopia. We can say it is the home of heterogeneous types of people who represent various nations and nationalities of Ethiopians. This condition of the city seems an advantage for filmmakers to select different characters and situations. In the last 10 years the film industry in Ethiopia was expanding rapidly in terms of number (Tigist, 2016). Most of these films are produced in Addis Ababa and

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distributed to different region and generates an employment opportunity for many employers for those of around art.

Some additional reasons: Addis is politically more stable and peaceful city than other cities, it is well known city in film production and art industry, accessibility of materials for film production make Addis more preferable for filmmakers, it's also a home of many script writers, producers, actors and directors, to communicate directly with different stakeholders easily, most of the government and private cinema houses are found in Addis Ababa compared to other places and cities in Ethiopia. Those and other reasons make Addis Ababa the famous city in the film industry.

### 3.3 Sampling Technique

In this study, the researcher chooses purposive sampling techniques to gather information for the study. According to the report that the researcher gained from Addis Ababa Culture and Tourism Office, 115 films were produced in 2008 E.C. The year selected because it is recent to observe the current situation of local films production and the film selected for the analysis are also produced in 2008 E.C. However from those 115 produced films, two of them are selected for this study. Consequently the researcher focus on two films that produced on ASD and currently available via VCD/DVD in film renting houses.

### 3.4 Methods of Data Collection

#### 3.4.1 Interview

Interview allows face to face conversation that can lead to increase understandings in to respondents' thoughts, feelings and behavior on important issues of Films and autism spectrum disorder. Another advantage that can be derived from the interview is its flexibility in expressing

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different viewpoints on the subject under study. Lindolf (1995) suggests that "these sorts of interviews are better described as discussions with a purpose". Because structured interviewing was good as guide to focus on the main point of the issue than the other types of interviewing methods. Structured interviews were conducted with the producers, directors, script writers and actors of the selected films. Since they are very important and key persons for the films to produce or not in terms of profession, money and others reasons. Participants are interviewed in using structured questions during their appropriate interview times. The researcher used open ended sets of questions to explore participants' experiences through interview. During the interview, the researcher can further clarify the questions in order to straight the participants for further explanation.

The interview was conducted with a total of 6 (six) film makers (2 producers, 2 directors and script writers and 2 actors). The researcher used suitable sampling method to select the participants for interview on the basis of the researcher's judgment and prior knowledge to get the required data because they are directly concerned to the issues. This method helped the researcher to set an appointment and communicated in the interview with them easily. The interview were mainly focused on character representation of person with autism spectrum disorder on two selected films, and its correctness of the films to create positive awareness on society and challenges they face to produce films in order to be effective in delivering the planned message. All interviews were conducted in English officially international language as well as local Ethiopian language Amharic, and the researcher carried out the transcription and translation process. The important parts of the exact transcripts that could show the focus of this study were translated in to English and included in to analysis chapter.

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### 3.4.2 Audiovisual Materials

The primary data of this research was gathered through observation of two VCD players of selected Amharic films through the above observation checklist. As the researcher mentioned before, the study were focused on observing the characters representation of person with autism spectrum disorder in selected films. The information collected from these audio visual materials helped to identify the types of autism spectrum disorder. Also it helps to observe the strength and weakness/gaps of selected characters, how they were represented and portrayed in selected Amharic films, which pointed out on the above research objectives.

### 3.5 Coding Categories

The most important feature of media content analysis is to define a set of scopes to be considered during the analysis. As Hansen (1998) strongly argued the ‘task’ of content analysis is to examine a selected body of the content and to classify according to a number of planned measurements. Conceptually the most demanding aspect of any media content analysis is to define the dimensions or characteristics could be categorized. As some scholars argued, any researcher that conducting media content analysis needs some familiarity with the content, structure and general nature of the material to be analyzed in order to be able to set up categories that will be sufficiently sensitive to capture the natures of the message that planned to deliver. After examining the content of the films under study and referring back to some communication, studies on the characters of person with autism spectrum disorder are tried to develop a coding category.

### 3.6 Methods of Data Analysis

Following the completion of data collection, data processing was conducted through filtering inaccuracy, inconsistency, incompleteness and illegibility of the raw data collected from the

Seek wisdom!

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interview material to make analysis very easy. To solve such problems, first hand written document editing, coding, thematically categorizing data entry and consistency checking were done. To analyze the data qualitative techniques were employed. The qualitative data obtained through interviews were analyzed in sentence form. Finally, the results were discussed and interpreted to draw important conclusions, and implications.

### 3.6.1 Media Content Analysis

As the researcher mentioned before, the main purpose of this research is to assess the characters of person with autism spectrum disorder how they are represented in selected Amharic films. Therefore, media content analysis is the main instrument that applied to carry out the study. By definition media content analysis is a technique that used for gathering and analyzing the content of films, television programs and documentaries to know how they are collective.

Content refers to: Words, Meanings, Pictures, Symbols,

Ideas and any message that can be communicated (Deacon, 1999). As (Fairclough 1995) argues, the analysis should also identify what is included, what is excluded, and what processes and types are drawn upon to represent events. Each of the films divided in to five minute intervals in order to check characters representation and communication were portrayed. During the course of each films paused at each of five minutes intervals, there was job to code the content.

As Neuman (1997) says media content analysis is a technique for gathering and analyzing the content of text, television program and Films. As mentioned before the “content” refers to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any message that can be communicated.

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### 3.7 Ethical Considerations of the Study

In the first place, the researcher followed logical procedures in every stage of data collection processes. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study with consent form to involve in the study. Participants were asked their permission to interview them about the subject under the study. Therefore, on the basis of these ethical philosophies, efforts made and confidentiality was assured and kept throughout the process of this research work.

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Adapted 8/17/15 from *Autism Communication Tool* created by Maureen Turner, Psy.D.

Character name: Tism film

## Observation checklist for autism spectrum disorders

	Yes ✓	No X
Deficits in understanding of social communication and social interaction	✓	
Delay in speaking first words	✓	
Delay in combining words	✓	
Delay in current language ability (quantity or quality)	✓	
Does not make small talk (just to be friendly)		X
Rarely/never initiates conversation		X
Difficulty sustaining conversation	✓	
Difficulty discussing topics chosen by another person	✓	
Says inappropriate things		X
Doesn't understand sarcasm/humor	✓	
Repeats what others say often (e.g., movies, people, etc.)		X
Uses incorrect pronouns (e.g., she instead of I)		X
Speaks in an overly formal way		X

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Unusual volume, rate, or pitch		X
Doesn't imitate (e.g., vacuuming, phone, etc.)	✓	
No/limited pretend play (e.g., doll, action figure, etc.)	✓	
No imaginary play (e.g., pretending an object is another, etc.)	✓	
Restricted, repetitive, stereotyped behaviors / movements	✓	
Interests those are narrow in focus, intense, or unusual		X
Nonfunctional play with toys (e.g., lining up toys)		X
Repeatedly watching individual scenes in movies		X
So focused on one thing to the exclusion of others	✓	
Rituals/routines that need to be done in a particular way/order	✓	
Difficulty with minor change in routine	✓	
Upset if objects are rearranged	✓	
Difficulty with transitions		X
Hand flapping or wringing		X
Toe walking		X
Head banging		X
Playing with parts of toys (e.g., doors, wheels, strings)		X

# Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

Character name: Bandaf film

## Observation checklist for autism spectrum disorders

	Yes ✓	No X
Deficits in understanding of social communication and interaction		X
Delay in speaking first words	✓	
Delay in combining words	✓	
Delay in current language ability (quantity or quality)	✓	
Does not make small talk (just to be friendly)		X
Rarely/never initiates conversation		X
Difficulty sustaining conversation		X
Difficulty discussing topics chosen by another person		X
Says inappropriate things	✓	
Doesn't understand sarcasm/humor	✓	
Repeats what others say often (e.g., movies, people, etc.)		X
Uses incorrect pronouns (e.g., she instead of I)		X
Speaks in an overly formal way		X

## Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

Unusual volume, rate, or pitch	✓	
Doesn't imitate (e.g., vacuuming, phone, etc.)	✓	
No/limited pretend play (e.g., doll, action figure, etc.)	✓	
No imaginary play (e.g., pretending an object is another, etc.)	✓	
Restricted, repetitive, stereotyped behaviors / movements	✓	
Interests those are narrow in focus, intense, or unusual	✓	
Nonfunctional play with toys (e.g., lining up toys)		X
Repeatedly watching individual scenes in movies	✓	
So focused on one thing to the exclusion of others	✓	
Rituals/routines that need to be done in a particular way/order		X
Difficulty with minor change in routine		X
Upset if objects are rearranged		X
Difficulty with transitions		X
Hand flapping or wringing	✓	
Toe walking	✓	
Head banging	✓	
Playing with parts of toys (e.g., doors, wheels, strings)	✓	

# Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Background Information of Selected Films

The research focuses on two selected Amharic films that produced in 2008 E.C. Those are revolving on autism spectrum disorder and love. According to their titles and posters, the selected films were, Tisim and Bandaf.

The settings of those films were on different areas. Tism is solely in Nehmiah autistic center that produced in Addis Ababa and Bandaf is also produced in Addis Ababa different at different places like at school, at home and some parts of it casted at Hawassa the capital city of SNNP regional state. According to their titles and posters, the selected films were named “Tism” instead of saying autism and “Bandaf” which mean you said once. The word Bandaf is Amharic but not a formal word. Both films Tism and Bandaf are demonstrated about autism spectrum disorder.

Film theories, like other theories, they concern with the social, political, philosophical, scientific, educational and related issues. These approaches are mainly used for analyzing films from different points of view and for different purposes. Some of the theories are used for finding out whether the films are realistic or not, some are used for interpreting films from the point view of structure, other theories are used for investigating the films from the perspective of the writer, the ideology and the philosophy of the filmmaker, also from the interest of the audience, and from the form of the whole film producers. Therefore, analyzing a film requires having such knowledge of the art and patience. However, as the researcher mentioned above, the emphasis of this thesis is to evaluate the character representation of person with autism spectrum disorder in two selected Amharic films.

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### 4.2 Demographic Data of Participants

The demographic characteristics of each participant who were selected and participated as interviewee are explained below. In this study six individuals were participated. Two play writers and directors two producers, and two actors. Among the study participants, five of them are male and one of six is female. This analysis showed a dominance of males over their female counterparts among the script writers, producers, directors and actors of Bandaf and Tism films respondents.

According to educational background of the directors, actors, writers and producers of Bandaf and Tism films, one of them is participated on short term training of film making and developed their profession through experience. However, in the good side 4 of them have first degrees in different fields.

### 4.3 Challenges of producing autistic characters films

As respondents were asked to show their response on to what extent Ethiopian film industry deliver quality films related to autism spectrum disorder, respondents replay as “the extent delivery of quality Ethiopian films related to autism spectrum disorder is low”. Only one of them is agreed the delivery is at medium extent.

In the interview, respondents were asked to list some factors which they perceived as affecting their role in the provision quality films to their audiences, they listed as follows: “low awareness of film producers and writers related to autism spectrum disorder, least concern of government officials to autism spectrum disorder” are points they raised. Film directors, script writers, actors and producers shared a common goal to promote the use of films in presentation to create awareness about autism spectrum disorder but they are foregrounded themselves only on urban

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life and for the reason that their themes and settings are confined to towns while 85 percent of Ethiopian populations are rural occupants.

Even if they foreground themselves in urban, but they have a limitation on translating the film in to different languages for other language speakers. For example Bandaf film is portrayed only through Amharic language. Tism is translated in to English with foot note, but with a lot of grammatical error. The signature tune of the film clearly manifests the racial problems of Ethiopian film production standard. At least it needs a minimum of English subtitles to other audiences and to the researchers who want to study the films; unfortunately the researcher didn't get that opportunity.

As of many films of Ethiopia, there is also much more role monopoly by one person. As the researcher remark in both films the script writer and directors of two films were same person in each film. The film Bandaf is written and directed by Leul Sefefe, Tism is written and directed by Sophonnias Taddese even though story by the executive producer Kalkidan Getaneh. Kalkidan herself play as an actor, producer and story by. The researcher suspect this dominancy were decreased the chance of alternative editing, changing and developing acts of performers and other related elements of the film character in any different perspectives.

All participants of the interview were mentioned that they are very eager in trying to incorporate their profession with autism spectrum disorder in order to address what they know about it and they are trying to create awareness about the issue.

According to Henok which is the producer of Bandaf film, *“producing such kind of film is not making us beneficiary in finance, but it gave us mental satisfaction. We did it in our own financial risk, because it is not displayed in cinema as expected to stay long there. Unfortunately people in*

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*our country don't want to watch such kind of films in cinema. They come to see only a romantic comedy films. But, there are a good thing, know a days there are various television channels in our country, that's why our film displayed on the popular channels namely, EBS and Fana television channels. Which means people can access easily without thinking the amount of money they spent to watch films in cinema".* Furthermore, Sophonias (director and script writer of Tism) asserted that *"when we come to cinema people don't want to pay money to watch such kind of films which don't entertain them. Our audience always they need romantic comedy films in cinema".*

### 4.4 What's the contribution of those films?

Both producers of Tism and Bandaf also mentioned that they didn't get adequate merit as they cost for film production, what they get is mental satisfaction. They got a lot of calls from people after the film was broadcasted on EBS and Fana television. *"At the moment our film displayed on television, many people perceived it as their own issue and they start thinking about the treatment for such kind of child with autism spectrum disorder, there was a lot of calls after it displayed on television. Even if the film were produced three years ago but it got the chance to displayed for the public".* As they said this is what they were working for and they are proud of it by being part of this history.

The production of this film changed peoples mind concerning autism spectrum disorder. Film director and script writer Sophonias himself is a good testimony for this. Before the production of this film he has no idea about autism spectrum disorder, and what does it mean as well. *"It's a science fiction for me and I don't know what does it mean even, but the production of this film gave me a chance to know about autism spectrum disorder. Because I said before production of this film gave me chance to meet special need educators, expertise and film producer Kalkidan Getaneh too".* Kalkidan is well familiar and experienced woman that guide him for better understanding about

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autism spectrum disorder in this film production. He said *“I believed that the production of this film Tism changed my mind and fills my knowledge gap concerning to autism spectrum disorder.”*

The two actors were also inspired in performing on these films. On the interview they told to the researcher they were lucky, because they got good opportunity to observe a person with autism spectrum disorder in their working areas. Which is it makes their job very easy. Even though they are familiar with the behaviors and characters of person with autism spectrum disorder on their surround, but it was challenging to imitate the characters. The emotions and feelings of person with autism spectrum disorder were difficult for them to perform. Because every moment in their acting it needs their real emotion to convince their audience, and reflecting their real feelings is one of the most challenging. But it was the film that gave them an opportunity to feel what autism spectrum disorder persons feel and know their emotion.

### 4. 5 Character representation (portrayals) in Tism and Bandaf films

The researcher defined Audiovisual observation as the combination of various digital media types such as images, sound and video, into an integrated multi-sensory interactive application or presentation to transfer a message or information to an audience.

#### 4.5.1 Character representation in Tism film

Tism film is one of the few films that focus on a key character with autism spectrum disorder. The film is just a love story deliberately produced; the researcher supposed to create awareness about autism to viewers. The setting is solely in Nehmiah autistic center. Elias Wosenyeleh's portrayal of Surafel (autistic character) starring in this film is falling in love with Linsho (Netsanet Aytenfisu). Surafel shows genuine and authentic in representing the character with

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mild autism spectrum disorder called Asperger's syndrome. A person with Asperger's disorder might be very intelligent and able to handle his daily life properly. Besides he can focus on topics that interest him and discuss them nonstop. (2018, WebMD, LLC) Surafel as well is fond of flowers (gardening), has a broad knowledge about various types of flowers and he really wants to talk about them without ceasing.

The character has shown a little bit delay in speaking first words which is very obvious. However, the researcher has observed that the character didn't delay in combining words as well as delay in current language ability.

As a matter of fact, as far as holding conversation is concerned the character doesn't have any difficulty especially when he talks about flowers rather frequently initiates conversation, doesn't have difficulty sustaining conversation, yet has difficulty discussing topics chosen by another person. Even though the researcher hasn't observed saying any inappropriate things doesn't understand sarcasm or humor of any kind.

Concerning unusual or repetitive language, the character/ Surafel hardly conveyed in repeating what others say often, use incorrect pronouns, speak in an overly formal way or unusual volume, rate, or pitch.

On the contrary, movement interests those are narrow in focus, intense, or unusual behavior Asperger's do love...most individuals are hardwired to achieve a mutually satisfying solution because they can step into another's shoes. But Asperger are not. They can't read their partner's signals they have mind blindness. Asperger don't comprehend the meaning of the traditional gesture of love and romance. They don't set out to hurt their love by withholding affectionate

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words and actions.(Kathy J. Marshack,ph.D,2018) That's what the character: Surafel portrays in the film shows.

### 4.5.1.1. Unreasonable insistence on sameness/routines

Surafel exhibited that frequently gives a bouquet of fresh flower to Linsho so as to express his love and change the spoilt flowers from the vase by fresh ones. Due to this the researcher notifies that the character publicized routines (changing fresh flowers) behavior that need to be done in a particular way, he has difficulty with minor change in routine. Besides, he got upset if objects are rearranged especially with regard to gardening. He fixes his life with his flower, fetching the flower and sometimes washing parts of each flowers leave. Once on a film a person urinate on his flower. Linsho the girl he love came to him and ask why he washes the leave of his flower? He answers in this way:

Linsho Sure-ye what are you doing?

Surafel a rude vandal ...when I came to water to my flowers, he peed on them.

Linsho So why you wash it know?

Surafel eh! If someone pees on you, don't you wash it? They are like us we aren't different, they breathe out oxygen... we inhale oxygen. We live for them, they live for us.

As mentioned above he is non-stoppable while start talking about flower and how much want have them. He is not tiered of talking about it wherever at home with his brother and at his work place with staff. His brothers (the character named Estifanos) ask him why he is not fad-up of always treating flowers.

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Estifanos Sura (when calling in short form) you don't want some food?

Surafel this flower has been growing within 45 days. Look his brothers ask him for food but he answers it in his way. In seven days I will give it to Tsions mom.

Estifanos Do you not get tired of flowers? Seedlings, samplings, flowers, everyday?

Surafel Tulip flowers from Holland in old days are worth gold, Holland. Now I want to find that flower.

According to the studies on asperger syndrome, such kind of misunderstanding and communication gaps will lead in to conflict, problematic behaviors in children with high-functioning autism or asperger syndrome span a wide range and tend to vary according to the child's development and intellectual ability. Although stereotyped, repetitive behaviors (e.g., body rocking or hand flapping) do occur in individuals with high-functioning Asperger/Asperger syndrome; they occur infrequently and most likely arise during highly stressful, unpredictable situations or when the child does not understand the expectations for behavior. Most often, children with high-functioning Asperger /Asperger syndrome engage in rigid patterns of behaviors and/or display restricted patterns of behaviors in the context of an all-absorbing preoccupation with a circumscribed topic of interest (Howlin, 1998; Myles & Simpson, 2003 cited by Cowan J. et al. 2010).

The researcher have not seen an exaggerated motor mannerism such as hand flapping, toe walking as well as head banging rather he exhibits no eye contact while conversing with others.

The character name Surafel displayed in the film as a matured as sufficient knowledge about flowers and did not play with parts of toys (e.g., doors, wheels, strings).

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Autism spectrum disorder is not always easy to understand. But these days many people are familiar with autism spectrum disorder through the way the disorder is depicted in television and films. However, there are good and bad portrayals of both people with autism spectrum disorder and with the effects the disorder has on their families and lives. The bad portrayals limit on misrepresentation and plant aggressively misleading perspectives in people heads...the good ones improve understanding and spread empathy for both those with autism spectrum disorder and the caregivers and family members who deals with the disorder. (appliedbehavioranalysis.org, 2019)

Rendering to work examined mediated storied representations of characters with autism spectrum disorder in light of what they repeatedly “suggest” reality to be. Young (2012) concluded that since movies serve to reflect reality, misrepresentations can have a major impact on the behaviors and attitudes of audiences towards those with disabilities. Recent publications by Carr (2010) and Turkle (2011) also recognized the positive and negative aspects of media and technology on perception and acquisition of social skills and attitude towards autism spectrum disorder. Notably absent from this conversation is investigation into the growing emergence in popular press revealing a “pecking order” regarding what popular press considers someone on the autism spectrum disorder to “be.” For example, such representations may appear to focus on what might be referred as the “higher functioning,” perceived by some as a “metaphoric construct of ‘mental retardation’” (Gilling, 2012,).

On the contrary, there is a supporting actress Beimnet Getasew’s portrayal of Selam depicted the severe autism joined Nehmiah autistic center from countryside. Selam has speech and language challenges, sensory dysfunction, and wandering and eloping (running away with no obvious

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cause and no particular destination). The caregivers of the village as she is an orphan, believed what the shaman (a traditional faith healer) claimed. He affirmed that her ancestors displeased the spirit. She also exhibits some signs and symptoms such as restlessness, biting fingers frequently. The neighbors tied her up in a dark room ever since her childhood. She is now almost teenager.

To wrap up, the film is about how to approach empathically a person with autism spectrum disorder and grasp the suffering of parents or care giver in growing up the child with autism spectrum. Issue of morality, commitment, religion, happiness, love, and spirituality's are reflected in this films.

### 4.5.2 Character representation in Bandaf film

Bandaf film is one of the first full time films in Ethiopian context to capture the life of an autistic individual. This film is presented from Henok film production by Henok Tolchisa, written and directed by Leul Sefefe in 2008 E.C. The central story of this film is mainly about a person with autism spectrum disorder in a family and the challenges they face.

The film Bandaf teaches paying the price of an unavoidable cost if we don't sufficiently understand how to help as well as take care of those who are in need. A boy whose mother is dead and his father is physically disabled was autistic. In this film the boy named by the character Thomas which is played by Andualem Dejene: his mother at her deathbed insisted her neighbor Kal which is played by the famous actress Selam Tesfaye to make a vow to take good care of Thomas. Due to the vow, she always tried to be on his side. Because at the early age, Thomas age mate a village children were playing as a husband and wife but ignoring Thomas. She asked the village girls why they are not playing Thomas.

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Why don't you play with Thomas?

Village Girl Ehe (a kind of being surprised) we are playing husband and wife, he is foolish how can I marry him?

After thorough observation kal told Thomas to play with her a game that is pretending to be husband and wife.

Kal leave them I will play you as a wife and you play as a husband ok?

Thomas head moving

Kal so when husband came from job he will kiss her hand like this (she give him her hand and he kiss).

Kal clever!

They start walking and on their walk she starts telling him story stoery.

Kal Story story

Thomas ok!

Kal long a go there has been husband and wife called Thomas and Kal.

It's how the story starts. For Thomas the mere game isn't just a game rather it is something real. For this reason she broke up with her many boyfriends. For her boyfriends, for her brother and mother Thomas was perceived as a source and center of conflict for all. She was stucked with Thomas and unknowingly she conditioned him not to live without her.

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**Selam:** “I was wondering, a man can go outer space. Lions and Hyenas can be tamed. However, a fish...”

**The sailor:** “You’re right. A fish can’t ...because its life is closely associated with water. As a result,...a fish can’t...if it jumps out of water it abruptly cease its life. Since the necessary nutrients it needs for its life are all found in the water. The water can live without a fish. But if a fish didn’t get adequate water it will soon passed away.”

According to the above excerpt of the film, the connotation is the author personifies the fish by Thomas. He highlighted that Thomas can’t live without kal. It vividly portrayed Thomas is solely dependent on her. Eventually he falls in love with her. Even if she is pretending with Thomas but there has been a gossip behind their friendship. While she was pretend, she was expecting he cannot fall in love with her. On her understanding Thomas is not conscious and capable to fall in love with her. But from that moment on they start talking the game about husband and wife, he keeps thinking, talking and singing his personal song about her (*kaliy kaliy yene fikregna*) literary (*kal kal my love*) he was thinking about wedding with Kal the girl he fall in love with.

In the character, Thomas displays some unusual challenges that affect people with milder form of autism spectrum disorder such as self-injury (eg. head banging, aggressive and anti-social behavior). Actually aggressive behaviors in children with autism spectrum disorders often cause a great deal of difficulty for families. Hitting, kicking, biting, throwing objects, and other behaviors are expected during a temper tantrum or destruction can exist and increase parent stress (<https://www.google.com.et/>). Restricted and repetitive behaviors vary greatly across the autism spectrum disorder. They can include: Repetitive body movements (e.g. rocking, flapping, spinning, running back and forth) routine motions with objects (e.g. spinning wheels, shaking

## Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

sticks, flipping levers). Sometimes, excessive anger can also be a symptom of some mental health problems.' Unfortunately some people with autism spectrum disorder might become angry and aggressive very quickly and find it hard to deal with. The speed and intensity of their anger can be extreme. While observing this kind of behavior first and most important thing is to stay calm. Most aggressive outbursts or tantrums happen because the person has feelings building up and he / she can't communicate them. By managing own feelings and staying calm and quiet, you won't add your emotions to the mix.

This behavior is reflected on the character Thomas while the girl he loved Kal was on vacation with her last boyfriend at Hawassa. At that time he was banging his head, shouting and he was scarring his father because he missed Kal the girl he loved.

Parents whose children are labeled 'high functioning' including those with an Asperger's diagnosis, they have a reason to be concerned that their kids who may be dealing with things like ADHD, anxiety and sensory issues in addition to their social and communication delays are not magically stop needing support after they reach a certain chronological age.

(www. 2019 child mind institute, Inc).

The family may not have the expertise to understand the child's condition fully. The family may also not have the time to be physically present to provide care around the clock. In order to remedy these obstacles, parents can hire a special needs caregiver

Apparently, Kal was as well played the role of special need caregiver; unfortunately she was yoked and seemed to carry the unbearable burden due to the solemn promise. She tried a lot to treat him but because of her personal life and push that came from her parents and her boyfriend

## Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

she decided to stop treating and spending time with Thomas. That was a horrible time for Thomas and his father.

Here the film reproduces how much the stereotypes and pressure come from circle of influence made her disappointed, how much not knowing about autism spectrum disorder are a full of challenge for caregiver. The attitude for person with autistic character were perceived as he don't know anything, that's why Kal was pretending as a wife and don't know. But on Thomas birthday, kal failed in swimming pool unknowingly and Thomas saw that, immediately he jumped in to the swimming pool to save her and he did. That was a turning point for kal to think about Thomas again and back to treat him. The pretending as a husband and wife has been restarted, but the continuation of this pretending has been end up on her weeding day. Thomas came with his father for weeding, what Thomas knows is he came to merry kal but his father brought him to know and see the reality the day is her wedding day and she is married another person. While he saw kal with her fiancé on the stage, he can't control himself he starts disturbing and shouting around. Kals brother and the other person took him in to brewery store room. He kicked himself there by brewery bottle and after a long bleeding he died there. That was a painful for kal, she start walking on the road alone and she talks "*what if my story was about hyena and monkey rather than Thomas and kal*" (the story she told to Thomas previously). It shows the pain and reflects how much she was regret.

The message from the character play doctor was very critical "*not knowing how to talk to an autistic person like Thomas cost life. We should know what we are doing, what we think they do not know is unconsciously what they know. We should give values to each person with autism spectrum disorder*".

# Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

## 5. Discussion

The two Amharic films, *Tisim*, and *Bandaf* high-lightly tried to show the common limitations of people with autism spectrum disorder. Major characters of the two films have been created in a way to show the covert and overt behaviors of individuals with autism spectrum disorder. Furthermore, they displayed difficulties in social interaction, communication, sensory sensitivity and sexuality particularly on *Bandaf* film.

Individuals with autism are frequently seen with unusual behavior because of its complications. The major characters, Surafel from *Tisim*, and Thomas from *Bandaf*, are designed to put on show the basic behavioral limitations. Two of the films in this research have successfully presented the physical difficulties which are almost-always explicitly seen from people with autism spectrum disorder. Though the characters are not able to show the mobility limitations during infancy and childhood period, watching these two films, one can understand the basic behavioral borders of autism spectrum disorder.

A person with autism spectrum disorder can display unique way of social interaction and communication. Because of autism spectrum disorder's effect on individuals' communication, either they restrict their social interaction or the society isolates them from social participation. The major characters, Surafel from *Tisim*, and Thomas from *Bandaf*, have circumscribed way of social interactions. They try to communicate with odd facial expression and physical gesture. Two of them have a few active vocabularies for verbal communication which is characterized by delays of uttering words, stuttering, speaking haltingly and so on. Consequently, they avoid repetitive play and they let few people interact with them Linsho for Surafel and Kal for Thomas.

## Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

For Bowley (2009) in her research asserts that you tube provides a safe environment for individuals with autism spectrum disorder. The finding of this research has put all the characters during their adulthood age on screen effectively. However, in Tisim and Bandaf films, the researcher observed only two types of therapy, exposure therapy for Suralel and art therapy for Thomas.

### 5.1 Attachment and sexuality

As Bowlby's (1969) said attachment is an emotional bond with another person. Bowlby believed that the earliest bonds formed by children with their caregivers have a tremendous impact that continues throughout life. He suggested that attachment also serves to keep the infant close to the mother, thus improving the child's chances of survival. He viewed attachment as a product of evolutionary processes. Bowlby and others proposed that children are born with an innate drive to form attachments with caregivers.

Throughout history, children who maintained proximity to an attachment figure were more likely to receive comfort, protection and therefore more likely to survive to adulthood. Through the process of natural selection, a motivational system designed to regulate attachment emerged.

So what determines successful attachment? Bowlby and others demonstrated that nurturance and responsiveness were the primary determinants of attachment.

The positive development of this attachment will grow up in to human sexuality. Human sexuality is often misperceived as referring only to specific sexual behaviors (NCASH, 1995). Rather, sexuality encompasses a broad variety of physical, emotional, and social interactions,

## Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

suggesting that a simple and precise definition cannot be written (Bruess & Greenberg, 1994).

Thus, many experts and organizations prefer to use general terms to describe human sexuality.

The National

Commission on Adolescent Sexual Health (NCASH), for example, states: Sexuality is a natural and healthy part of life. Sexuality encompasses the sexual knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors of individuals. It deals with anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry of the sexual response system, as well as with roles, identity, and personality. Sexuality encompasses thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and relationships.

Sexual behavior propose that human mating is governed by an inborn sexual behavioral system and those individual differences in sexual motives, cognitions, emotions, and behaviors reflect variations in the functioning of this system. Even though our culture is not open for such kind of issue in Ethiopian context, when it comes to autism spectrum disorder, it's more series. But the issue of sexuality is noticed in Bandaf film. In any case, as the physical growth is continued it will bring hormonal changes. Hence, the hormones advance the emotional developments into higher level. Sexuality is part of it. People with autism spectrum disorders are too enthusiastic to establish a relationship and they intuitively create strong intimacy or affection with their caregiver. Nevertheless, this natural feeling has been denied or/and overlooked by the society's attitude, through their complicated communication and language shortfalls.

The films Tisim and Bandaf have provided evidence to show the parameters of sexuality of people with autism spectrum disorder. The plots of the two films are constructed on the basement of relationship and intimacy. The intimacy starts with trust and it gradually grows into love and sexual attraction. Even though individuals with autism spectrum disorder are not able to express it verbally, it is shown in different ways. The researcher have seen these on the film Bandaf, the

## Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

character name Thomas touches his caregivers hand to kiss, and also hand some other parts can be taken as the manifestation of well-built desire of sexuality or affection. Because they are found in imperfect social interaction, likewise, they at least attempt to compensate 'the loss feeling' with someone who is physically and emotionally close to them.

### 5.2 Social interaction of person with Autism spectrum disorder

Autism spectrum disorder is characterized by deficits in two core domains: deficits in social communication and social interaction; restricted repetitive patterns of behavior, interests and activities. Their social skills deficits are characterized by poor eye contact, lack of joint attention, pedantic or odd speech patterns, difficulty both initiating and maintaining conversations, lack of social problem-solving ability, lack of empathy, and difficulties interpreting body language Frith et al. (1991).

According to Unchalee et al. had identified the three problematic social skills among students with autism spectrum disorder: the self-control behavior, the communications skills and working in a team Unchalee(1992).

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 Conclusion

This research has been focused on evaluating the character representation of person with ASD on two selected Amharic films *Tism* and *Bandaf* that are produced in Ethiopia. The state of film, like other forms of art, is comprehensive and complex. According to different literatures, since the early days of film production, film psychology scholars have been studying the nature, the characteristics and consequences of film on society. However the art of film is introduced to Ethiopia in the early years of the art's introduction to the world, both its production and study have been limited and unnoticed. But in recent years, the production of feature films has been flourishing and growing.

In both films *Tism* and *Bandaf*, the characters are portrayed from the perspective of autism spectrum disorder. The represented characters have its' own names and traits. Both selected films portrayed autistic characters on the opposite side of the stereotypes that are formalized by the general society. In order to attempt and address the research question, a media content analysis was implemented to evaluate the autistic characters representation. While each intermediate had its own unique story plot, it is obvious that each plot would be trusted heavily upon common autism spectrum disorder myths and stereotypes that are identified and discussed by the Autism Research Institute.

Regardless of the differences the content of myths and stereotypes were presented. Each of these media content analysis were checked and used through literature reviewers and personal

## Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

experiences to make sure whether the characters of person with autism spectrum disorder are portrayed appropriately or not while it's still being entertaining.

Confidently the researcher believed that, the findings of this study will help to address the issue and characters of person with autism spectrum disorder to ignore under representation of individuals with autism spectrum disorder images at the front of audience through different media. Because film have its own brush and canvas in everyone's mind to paint in the worlds of paradise or agony. The artistic value has made them powerful to create unforgettable life lessons. These lessons are emotionally grasped by all the five senses when they are thought through film. All over the world, art has touched different burning issues.

Throughout the entire research process, the study has discovered that the two films have highlighted to show the common limitations of person with autism spectrum disorder. Furthermore, they display difficulties in social interaction and communication. Person with social communication and interaction difficulties have problems understanding what other people mean. Communication is not just the words we use; but how we use our body language, facial expression and tone of voice to communicate with someone else. In social interaction it's very significant. The other point is sensory sensitivity to sexuality is one the critical point that needs to be considered.

This research has identified that by watching these films, one can understand the basic physical and emotional reflections of person with autism spectrum disorder. The researcher has found out that the two films have put the communication barriers of persons with autism spectrum disorder on screen effectively.

## Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

The film Tism and Bandaf have provided evidence to show the parameters of sexuality of person with autism spectrum disorder. In this regard, the characterization particularly Bandaf was so effective to display the challenges of the care givers. Hence, the audience can infer the kind of care and treatment should be given to persons with autism spectrum disorder.

Further the researcher has investigated the limitation on both films; both of them have tried to show the major characters of person with autism spectrum disorder but failed to show the mobility and communication limitations during infancy. Above and beyond, no intervention has been seen, so the audience has learnt nothing about the cumulative impact of autism spectrum disorder during infancy as well as childhood period which is very important to be seen.

Finally this study has discovered that the Tism movie's producer has got well-enough consults from professionals to touch the untouchable issues of autism spectrum disorder. However, the movie Bandafe would have come with better presentation of autism spectrum disorder if its producers had got professional advice.

# Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

## 6.2 Recommendation

### 6.2.1 What has to be done to fill the observed gaps?

There should have to be critical discussion with professionals before production is delivered, the government particularly Addis Ababa office of culture and tourism also should afford special need experts while evaluating such kinds of films, government and non-governmental organizations also they have to support such kind of filmmakers to display on public media.

Regarding autism spectrum disorder, the audience needs to learn more the kinds of care and treatment with their boundaries. Since its spectrum and very broad issue, but it's possible to teach through media like film and television.

In general, the overall aim of the two films seems to illustrate the major problems regarding autism spectrum disorder. When special attention has been given to the untouchable subject, they have also touched other impairments like physical, social, communication, language ...etc. It was possible if they use flashback technique of narration, it would have been better if the audience had seen challenges and any intervention during infancy and childhood. Finally the researcher would like to say it is a very good beginning and effective tool to teach the society. Hopefully, taking these two films as a benchmark, other filmmakers will initiate to produce research oriented films on such burning issues.

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# Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

## **ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY**

### **COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND BEHAVIORAL STUDIES**

#### **DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL NEED EDUCATION**

Dear Participant:

I am a graduate student at Addis Ababa University. For my final thesis, I am collecting data. This questionnaire is designed mainly for the purpose of gathering information in order to obtain the required data. The information gathered through this questioner will be used as a major source for the thesis titled: *“Character Analysis on Representation of person with autism spectrum disorder in two selected Ethiopian Amharic films.”* It’s prepared for the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of “Master of Art” in Addis Ababa University. Since the information you provide had a prime importance contributing to the quality and success of this study, you are kindly requested to forward your genuine response and I can assure you that the information you provided will be confidential, please answer all questions honestly and truly as possible. Participation is strictly voluntary and you may refuse to participate at any time.

Sincerely!

# Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

## Annex A: Interview questions

### Part1. Socio Demographic Characteristics of interviewee

1. Name (coded) \_\_\_\_\_

2. Sex \_\_\_\_\_

3. Age \_\_\_\_\_

4. Educational Level \_\_\_\_\_

5. Profession \_\_\_\_\_

6. Place of residence \_\_\_\_\_

# Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

## Part 2. Interview for participants

For Script Writers	
	1. What does autism mean for you?
	2. How do you connect your professional views with autism in order to incorporate autism?
	3. What is your focusing point in terms of describing the character of autism in your script?
	4. What kind of challenges do you face when you write this script?
	5. Do you get any opportunity to discuss about autism with special need experts before you start writing the script?
	6. Do you think you reflect all the characters of person with autism in you script as approved in science?
	7. What's your final comment about your film?  8. What do you think needs to be improved in the films?

Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

Part 2. Interview for participants

For Directors	
	1. What does autism mean for you?
	2. How do you connect your professional views with autism in order to incorporate autism?
	3. What is your focusing point in terms of describing the character of autism in this film?
	4. What kind of challenges do you face when you direct the character of person with autism in this film?
	5. Do you get any opportunity to discuss about autism with special need experts?
	6. Do you think the film you direct reflect all the characters of person with autism as approved in science?
	7. How was the feedback from the performers?
8. Do you have any comment about the film you direct?	

## Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

### Part 2. Interview for participants

For Actors	
	1. What does autism mean for you?
	2. How do you connect your professional views with autism in order to incorporate autism?
	3. What is your focusing point when you perform the character in terms of describing autism?
	4. What kind of challenges do you face when you perform the character?
	5. How was the feedback from your audience?
	6. Do you get any opportunity to discuss about autism with special need experts before?
	7. Do you think you perform all the characters of person with autism as approved in science?
8. What's your final comment about the film you perform?	

# Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

## Part 2. Interview for participants

For producers	
	1. What does autism mean for you?
	2. How do you connect your professional views with autism in order to incorporate autism?
	3. Do you get any opportunity to discuss about autism with special need experts?
	4. Do you think your film portrayed all the characters of autism as approved in science?
	5. What kind of challenges do you face when you produce this film?
	6. How was the feedback from your audience?
	7. What's your final comment about your film?

# Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

Adapted 8/17/15 from *Autism Communication Tool* created by Maureen Turner, Psy.D. Page 1 of

## Autism Observation Checklist

Character name \_\_\_\_\_

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delay in speaking first words</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delay in combining words</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delay in current language ability (quantity or quality)</li> </ul>
Difficulty holding conversation	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not make small talk (just to be friendly)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rarely/never initiates conversation</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty sustaining conversation</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty discussing topics chosen by another person</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Says inappropriate things</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doesn't understand sarcasm/humor</li> </ul>
Unusual or repetitive language	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repeats what others say often (e.g., movies, people, etc.)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses incorrect pronouns (e.g., she instead of I)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaks in an overly formal way</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unusual volume, rate, or pitch</li> </ul>
Play that is not	

## Character Analysis on Representation of Person with ASD

developmentally appropriate	•	Doesn't imitate (e.g., vacuuming, phone, etc.)
	•	No/limited pretend play (e.g., doll, action figure, etc.)
	•	No imaginary play (e.g., pretending an object is another, etc.)
	•	Restricted, repetitive, stereotyped behaviors / movements
	•	Interests those are narrow in focus, intense, or unusual
	•	Nonfunctional play with toys (e.g., lining up toys)
	•	Repeatedly watching individual scenes in movies
	•	So focused on one thing to the exclusion of others
Unreasonable insistence on sameness/routines	•	Rituals/routines that need to be done in a particular way/order
	•	Difficulty with minor change in routine
	•	Upset if objects are rearranged
	•	Difficulty with transitions
Repetitive motor mannerisms	•	Hand flapping or wringing
	•	Toe walking
	•	Head banging
Preoccupation with parts of objects	•	Playing with parts of toys (e.g., doors, wheels, strings)

THANK YOU SO MUCH