

On Time and Autism*

Elinor Ochs
University of California Los Angeles
Department of Anthropology (Distinguished Professor)
Center for Language, Interaction, and Culture (Director)

This presentation considers Heidegger's (1988) *clock time* (measurable, objective "nows" empty of psychological concern) and *experiential time* (saturated in world-situated, durative psychological relevance) in light of everyday talk about time by children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Our ethnographic observations of ASD children at school and home reveal a blurring of clock time and experiential time. When clock time becomes an object of concern, as is often the case for persons with autism, clock time is keenly experienced as both a source of and antidote to anxiety. Focusing on an eleven-year-old boy with Aspergers syndrome, the analysis indicates how time-reckoning is a formidable challenge, with moral consequences at school and other public settings. Challenges are particularly acute in anticipating the immediate future, including others' *expectations* about what should transpire in the immediate future. The discussion delineates strategies for managing these time-related anxieties, especially trying to manage the future by paying detailed attention to increments of clock time. The presentation concludes with a consideration of the fallout of endless, rigorous attempts to keep up with clock time expectations for the health and self-perception of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

Reference

Heidegger, M. 1988. *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Revised Edition, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

**This study was conducted with Olga Solomon (School of Occupational Sciences, University of Southern California)*