

***Love Anthony* by Lisa Genova**

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Reviewed by Sandra Mosk, M.Ed., BCET, FAET

Love, Anthony is a novel about autism. It is not a technical or scientific description of the disorder, but rather, a heart-warming, sensitive tale about a mother and her young boy who has autism. The author successfully enters the brain both of the mother and the boy in order to allow the reader to feel what it is like to have a child with autism and to experience how such a child views himself and the world. For professionals, including educational therapists, who work with this population, Lisa Genova's book will give you a deep and perhaps new understanding of the way persons with autism think, learn, and feel.

The story takes place on Nantucket off the coast of Massachusetts where Olivia Donatelli is living alone, trying to put the pieces of her life back together. She reflects on the events that occurred after her son, Anthony, turned three and was diagnosed with autism. She relates the emotional upheaval and isolation she endured as she observed other children Anthony's age talking and playing as most children do. We witness Anthony on the beach lining up little rocks as far as the eye can see, and later lining them up all around his house. If the line is broken, Anthony loses control and explodes. We come to understand the significance of threes in Anthony's view of the world. When his mother serves him two French toast sticks instead of the usual three, he is unable to eat his breakfast because two is not the same as three. Instead, he flaps his hands furiously and moans. We observe Olivia holding on "white-knuckle" to her loaded grocery cart as she is forced to wait in the check-out line with Anthony clutched to her side. She knows what will happen if she has to wait any longer. Then, when she gets in her car, she takes a shortcut home so that Anthony will have his lunch on time. However, she forgets that Anthony knows the route home by heart and cannot bear any divergence. His world shatters when something, anything, is different. He must abide by his rituals.

Before writing *Love Anthony*, Lisa Genova interviewed families, doctors, and professionals who were involved in one way or another with autism. She learned in her research that parents of such children feel "isolated, disconnected, and alone," and she found a way to show them how they can connect, accept, and cherish their special children and proudly integrate them into their lives. It is often through storytelling that we come to understand some of the more complex differences that exist in human beings. In reading *Love Anthony*, we, as educational therapists, can achieve a deeper connection with our students with autism and help them to achieve, succeed and fulfill their potential.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER: SANDRA MOSK has a private educational therapy practice where she provides informal assessment, program design, remediation, and case management. She is the Coordinator of Educational Therapy at Kayne/Eras Center in the Exceptional Children's Foundation.