

## **R. Richard Grinker, Ph.D.**

M.I.N.D. Institute Distinguished Lecturer Series – November 14, 2012

### ***Biographical Information***

Roy Richard Grinker is Professor of Anthropology, Human Sciences and International Affairs at the George Washington University. He is Editor-in-chief of *The Anthropological Quarterly*, and Director of the George Washington University Institute for Ethnographic Research. In addition to academic publications, he has published opinion pieces in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *New Scientist*, and *Nature*, among others. Grinker is a jury member for the Science in the Media Award given by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), and in 2010 received the American Anthropological Association's highest honor for communication of anthropology to the public, the Anthropology in the Media Award. Previous recipients include Jane Goodall and Stephen Jay Gould. He teaches courses on autism, psychological anthropology, anthropological theory, African cultures, and Korea. Grinker is the author of books and articles related to his research on economics and ethnicity in central Africa (two years of fieldwork with the Efe Pygmies of The Democratic Republic of Congo), South Korea, India, South Africa, and the U.S. His publications include *Unstrange Minds: Remapping the World of Autism* (2007; paperback 2008), and other books including *Houses in the Rainforest: Farmers and Foragers of Central Africa*; *Korea and Its Futures: Unification and the Unfinished War*; *In the Arms of Africa: The Life of Colin M. Turnbull*; and *Perspectives on Africa: A Reader on Culture, History, and Representation*. In 2008, he received a KEN Award from the National Alliance on Mental Illness for "outstanding contribution to a better understanding of mental illness." In 2011 he completed the first ever epidemiological study of autism in South Korea.

### ***Presentation Abstract (4:30 pm)***

#### ***Culture and Autism: Anthropological Perspectives on the U.S., Korea, and South Africa***

Although Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) appears to be universal, the contexts in which it occurs are distinctive. Yet little research has been conducted on ASD in diverse cultures within the U.S., or in countries outside of the U.S. or Europe, with little reliable information yet reported from developing countries. ASD experts are gradually learning more about how cultural differences may influence its prevalence, diagnosis, treatment, presentation, course, and family function. Drawing on research in the U.S., South Africa, and South Korea, Grinker, an anthropologist and parent of a child with autism, discusses the complex relationship between culture and diagnosis in the context of changes in autism awareness, prevalence, diagnostic practices, and community outreach. He reports specifically on a recently completed total population study of ASD in South Korea, and the effort to promote early identification and access to services for Koreans in the United States. At a theoretical level, he explores psychiatric diagnoses as social constructions. "Autism," like other psychiatric concepts, remains culturally and historically contingent, despite the efforts of institutions and practitioners to ground it in science as a stable category.