

Back in 1995, I first encountered a group of Asperger's patients who were pushing the idea of autism as a culture. At the time, I recognized that they were technically incorrect, but my thought was, "Live and let live, whatever turns your crank." Unfortunately, in recent months, this group of misguided people has grown militant enough to be causing harm to our children, and this I cannot stand idly by and watch. A lawyer representing one of these people stood up in the Supreme Court of Canada and tried to get the Court to legally bar parents from seeking treatment for their own children. Let's look at the claims, and the facts.

First of all, it is very simple to show that autism is not and cannot be a culture. There are many recognized criteria that describe and define culture, one of which is the sharing of a language. Children with autism not only do not have a common language, but gathered in a room and left to their own devices, they do not communicate with each other at all. Only after treatment will the vast majority possibly have the ability to converse; only at that point can they join a culture of any kind. The second defining characteristic of a culture is generational transmission, and again autism falls short of the mark, as it is not transferred in any direct form from generation to generation.

So where do the autism-as-culture people get this concept? They rely on two other "culture" battles. First is the case of the deaf. It can be debated that those with hearing deficits share a culture since they do share a language - sign language - and it can also be argued that deafness has generational transmission, since some deafness is genetic and can be passed from parents to children. The second area where the autism-as-culture movement leans is upon the "culture of disability" movement, which avers that the entire group of disabled people are part of a single culture because of the way they are treated by society at large. We could argue that children with autism might be able to join this culture of disability, but only after treatment, because only then do they have the ability to communicate.

In this unfortunate battle that is brewing between parents of children with autism and the autism-as-culture mythmakers, the most unfortunate problem is that these so-called, self-proclaimed "autistics" are not

autistic at all. Some of them may suffer from Asperger's Syndrome, but even that is doubtful. It has been observed by some of the most respected diagnosticians in the autism world that the loudest proponents of this myth clearly evidence traits and abilities whose absence are the defining characteristics of autism. To put it simply, untreated children with autism are incapable of the very activism these so-called "autistics" demonstrate.

If people with Asperger's Syndrome, who already have the language necessary to join the culture of disability, wish to do so, that is their right. But to attempt to deny our children with autism the chance to be as articulate as they are is criminal. This group needs to stop masquerading as autistics, and to stop their attempts to deny our children their one hope to attain the ability for self-advocacy these people are lucky enough to have.