

Phil Gluyas: Autism News and Views

The truth about Autism is here

Autism is not a medical disability

By Timelord Phil on September 11, 2019

There is a war on at present within the Autistic community. One side advocates Autism as a disability requiring medical treatment. The other side advocates Autism as a human difference. Both sides insist the other is wrong in all respects and are holding the community back and hurting Autistics everywhere.

The reality is that both sides have a point. There are disabling aspects of Autism. We wouldn't have low functioning Autistics if this wasn't true. The real explanation lies in the fact that there is a difference between an origin and a symptom. The origins of Autism are genetic. The disability aspect is the next step – the difference between the higher end of the Spectrum and the lower end. This is the one mistake that those advocating medical intervention are making – intermingling the two.

On July 17, 2019, Yuval Levental wrote a piece titled "The Neurodiversity Movement Should Acknowledge Autism as a Medical Disability". His position, from the position of a self proclaimed critic of Autism advocacy, is not tenable. He quotes a former Autism Speaks president over disabling aspects that are not a part of Autism itself, but rather co-morbid conditions with separate medical explanations that can and should be treated separately. Seizure disorders, such as epilepsy, have medications available and can also be subject to excess stress in the same way. Digestive complications have many different causes that are also medically amenable. Both link to Autism via one genetic factor – sensory sensitivity. This leads to sensory overload and pushes the young Autistic down the Spectrum. The way to reverse that overload is to treat the co-morbid condition. It has nothing to do with Autism at the core. That can not be touched.

The issue of wandering and being non verbal also have non Autism origins, but react against Autism in the same way as the medical co-morbid conditions. Wandering is caused by sensory overload in the home in general – parents doing the wrong thing and the child wanting to just get out of there. Autistics need space and depriving them of that space is a sensory overload. Being non verbal is a symptom of a sensory overload, and that overload could come from anywhere. We have six senses – the basic five, plus instinct. Instinct is the sense that is treated with ignorance. Autistics have instinct issues that have to be learned manually. It's not automatic, especially in the social sense. And when that non existent instinct is called upon, a sensory overload is possible if not likely. And again, that can come from anywhere.

The National Council on Severe Autism is a misguided group. It's leader, Jill Escher, holds to the view that Autism is DNA damage – a claim that has not been verified except through wholly unreliable anecdotal evidence. While most argue the idea of supports for Autistics at the lower end of the Spectrum

has value (and it does) this has to be done from an angle of knowledge. If the knowledge isn't there, or the "knowledge" isn't correct, mistakes are inevitable leading to a worsening of conditions for the Autistics concerned. That can't be allowed to happen. The challenge that Escher spoke of in the article written by Levental regarding challenges daily is correct. But going in the wrong direction will just make those challenges even worse than they already are. The answer to Escher's question "if my kids don't have autism, what do they have?" is "Your kids are Autistic and are suffering from a sensory overload. You need to find that sensory overload".

Levental claims that there is no evidence of the co-morbidity factor and it's all about Autism. He is equally coming from a knowledge-less base as Escher is – biased for his own personal reasons and experience, and drawing on the experience of those who are equally biased against Autism due to the same factor – the lack of knowledge. Autism is defined in the behaviours. A set of five of them – all of which need to be fulfilled to be diagnosed on the Autistic Spectrum. But there is a strong belief that each individual behaviour can be found in all human beings without exception. That is the genetic connection that should be researched and confirmed as the true origin of Autism. This is how having a genetic history is not always an accurate indicator.

Levental also spoke of high unemployment and social isolation among Autistics as being bad compared to other disabilities. It isn't great, but there is a reason for this. It's all about fear. The community fears Autism – a factor far more pronounced than other conditions. And people like Levental, Escher, Thomas Clements and the others aren't helping with this negative perception. We need to stop the fear. And that starts with true understanding of Autism. All Levental wants to do is criticise. He has no answers. And that is because he doesn't really understand. Neither do the others. True solutions to all parts of the Autistic Spectrum lie in understanding and acceptance. The rewards will follow. That is not fascist or eugenicist. They are the fear factors that the aforementioned people thrive on, not those who appeal for the rights of Autistics to be who they are – Autistic and proud. We are different, not less.

This article was originally written and submitted to the Scientific American for publication there at the end of July. For reasons unknown it has not been published – so I have published it here instead.

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