

## storkdok's Journal



### Why I dislike "person first" language by Jim Sinclair

Sep 18, 2007 at 8:35 PM

By [storkdok](#) ✓

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## Why I dislike "person first" language

### Jim Sinclair

I am not a "person with autism." I am an **autistic person**. Why does this distinction matter to me?

1) Saying "person with autism" suggests that the autism can be separated from the person. But this is not the case. I can be separated from things that are not part of me, and I am still be the same person. I am usually a "person with a purple shirt," but I could also be a "person with a blue shirt" one day, and a "person with a yellow shirt" the next day, and I would still be the same person, because my clothing is not part of me. But autism **is** part of me. Autism is hard-wired into the ways my brain works. I am autistic because I **cannot** be separated from how my brain works.

2) Saying "person with autism" suggests that even if autism is part of the person, it isn't a very important part.

Characteristics that are recognized as central to a person's identity are appropriately stated as adjectives, and may even be used as nouns to describe people: We talk about "male" and "female" people, and even about "men" and "women" and "boys" and "girls," not about "people with maleness" and "people with femaleness." We describe people's cultural and religious identifications in terms such as "Russian" or

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"Catholic," not as "person with Russianity" or "person with Catholicism." We describe important aspects of people's social roles in terms such as "parent" or "worker," not as "person with offspring" or "person who has a job." We describe important aspects of people's personalities in terms such as "generous" or "outgoing," not as "person with generosity" or "person with extroversion." Yet autism goes deeper than culture and learned belief systems. It affects how we relate to others and how we find places in society. It even affects how we relate to our own bodies. If I did not have an autistic brain, the person that I am would not exist. I am autistic because autism is an **essential** feature of me as a person.

3) Saying "person with autism" suggests that autism is something bad--so bad that is isn't even consistent with being a person. Nobody objects to using adjectives to refer to characteristics of a person that are considered positive or neutral. We talk about left-handed people, not "people with left-handedness," and about athletic or musical people, not about "people with athleticism" or "people with musicality." We might call someone a "blue-eyed person" or a "person with blue eyes," and nobody objects to either descriptor. It is only when someone has decided that the characteristic being referred to is **negative** that suddenly people want to separate it from the person. I know that autism is not a terrible thing, and that it does not make me any less a person. If other people have trouble remembering that autism doesn't make me any less a person, then that's their problem, not mine. Let them find a way to remind themselves that I'm a person, without trying to define an essential feature of my personhood as something bad. I am autistic because I **accept and value** myself the way I am.

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Sep. 18, 2007 at 8:51 PM

Hmm. I've gone back and forth with the "person first" language; and I'm still undecided.

Good article.

[bazjgz](#) ♥



Sep. 18, 2007 at 8:54 PM

*I concur :o) I'm just gonna copy what Wilson said here!*

My son's book begins . . . *I am autistic*. He and many, many others in the autistic community, all that we have ever been blessed to know, have said they prefer to be called autistic.

"When you say *I have* . . . it generally precedes a negative. I have a cold. I have cancer. I have aids. I do not have autism, I am autistic. I am an individual. I do not have autism. I *am* autistic. Does my autism define me? No, I define my autism. It is a part of me, *I am autistic*."

I asked Wilson why and that is what he said . . .

[qwietpleez](#) ♥



Sep. 18, 2007 at 9:22 PM

I do not have autism, I am autistic. I am an individual. I do not have autism. I *am* autistic. Does my autism define me? No, I define my autism. It is a part of me, *I am autistic*."

*yep I still love it*

[genevieve3](#) ♥



Sep. 18, 2007 at 9:43 PM

I'm an aspie.. It's who I am.. I'm proud of that.. It makes me... well... me!

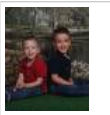
[tiny\\_mama](#) ♥



Sep. 19, 2007 at 1:47 AM

I really enjoyed reading that Karen! A kid with autism is just to impersonal. I want people to see all of my kid, and I feel like already people are only seeing parts of her.

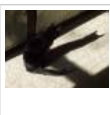
[tamsmom](#) ♥



Sep. 19, 2007 at 7:44 AM

I think parents want to say child with autism vs child is autistic because of the belief that autism can be "cured". I think the people with autism know better.

[Persi](#) ♥



Oct. 3, 2007 at 7:50 PM

Thank you for that! I never knew there was a controversy about this until I joined the AAPA Group! I worry now about stepping on toes about it.

I've referred to my son both ways, and people who are not personally connected to autism don't have a clue anyway. Either way, it means the same to them. And when my son is old enough to choose or care, he will tell people what to call him. I guess usually I call him My Sweet Aspie... because he is!

[ZaMaJoMom](#) ♥

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