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Section: Editorial

Op-Ed
Asperger's doesn't create miscreant

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In recent years, growing awareness of Asperger's Syndrome - an autism spectrum disorder - has brought both the blessing of a validated sense of identity and the curse of an unfair stigma of violence to the Asperger's community. The problem is that whenever someone who is accused of a violent crime also happens to be on the autism spectrum, the media, even if unintentionally, conflates his crime with his diagnosis.

The Autism Society of America has cited 22 criminal cases in America since 2002 where Asperger's was first used as a successful defense. This only adds to the increased association of the autism spectrum with violent behavior.

This myth is propagated out of a general lack of accurate information about what "autism spectrum" actually means, and how being autistic does and does not affect someone's behavior.

Having Asperger's does not give me an inherent predisposition toward violent behavior - neither does the fact that I write crime novels, spend a significant amount of my time researching criminals, terrorists, the legal system and law enforcement, and take a special interest in such topics.

Non-autistic law enforcement officers, crime authors, academics and researchers may all have the same hobbies and interests, and the vast majority of these people also do not engage in violent behavior.

One person, or even several individuals, should not be used to categorically judge and condemn a group as a whole.

Stereotypes only stigmatize and alienate autistics. We deserve to be seen as individuals. Judge if you must, but judge me for who I am, not for what someone else has done.

Lydia Brown is a junior at Lexington Christian Academy who belongs to the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network, the International Coalition for Autism and All Abilities, and the Asperger's Association of New England.

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