

Cousinhood – who cares?

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Preface

Three years ago I was sitting in the psychiatrist's office, trying to explain to him that I was a Cousin. There was no way that the term "Cousin" would mean anything to him, so I said: "I strongly identify with people on the autism spectrum". "Why do you want to identify with a disease?" – he responded. I gave up on trying to explain to him what it meant to me, to belong with the AC community; someone who calls autism "a disease" would not understand how liberating "coming home" was. Still, I knew that it was important to establish my relation to the spectrum with this doctor, as he was the one to prescribe me the antidepressant that I needed. There was a reason to suspect that the strange side-effects that I got from even small doses were related to the sensitivity of spectrum people to drugs, and I wanted this doctor to be more careful with doses, or at least to tolerate *my* carefulness.

I reached for my folder, searched for the articles that mentioned some problems autistic people had with antidepressants, and handed them to the doctor. He took the papers, but did not look at them. "How does this relation manifest in your case?", he asked. Now, if I had to give a presentation on my autistic traits and the effect they have on my life, I would come up with a well-structured survey, complete with examples. But this time, I was caught unprepared. The social worker had told me that the psychiatrist seemed to accept her impression that I had some autistic traits, and the purpose of this meeting was just to let me hear it directly from the psychiatrist, not to discuss whether it was true. I reached again for my folder, hoping to find something that I did not put there for this meeting, but might still be there. It was a list that I made when I had been treated by a former therapist, a list of the profound differences between me and him. I made this list in a desperate attempt to understand why all my efforts to communicate with him felt like running head-on into a brick wall. I hoped to use this list to explain myself to the psychiatrist, because my mind was blank. Soon enough, the psychiatrist ran out of patience, and said: "Why don't you just forget about papers, and *talk* to me?". That was the very thing that I could not do... When forced to explain myself to "outsiders", I immediately switched to "outside mode" of operation, following *their* agenda. Being on "outside mode", anything to do with the "inside" simply disappeared, and talking about it, if at all possible, had to be done in a scientific-lecture manner, as if I was talking about someone else. This meeting gave me again the overwhelming sense of *unreality*: was I really a Cousin? After all, I did a fairly good job at "passing for normal". On the other hand, I never felt a deep connection to others before I met AC people. Taking away this identity from me would leave me a no-one.

It was this intolerable sense of unreality which I wanted to resolve, when I had first turned to counseling, eighteen months before that. The concrete trigger was depression and deterioration of functioning, which had additional reasons, like overload and exhaustion. But the therapy was not going to be effective, if this chasm between "inside" and "outside" would be overlooked. When I described to my therapist my relationship with autistic people, she opened a book of quotes, and showed me something which was very much on target. During the days after this therapy session, I wrote to my therapist the following piece to describe how I felt and what I wanted to get out of therapy.

Unreality

“What is forbidden to be said, can not exist, should not exist, must not exist.”

(I quote from my memory, the saying that you showed me).

This is what unreality is about, isn't it?

I live in the confines of my head. Anything that is “me”, is not shared on the “outside”. It can't, it shouldn't. Looking from the outside, the “me” is unseen. Everything around me, is a “non-me”. There is nothing around me, that I can relate to, that can reflect on the reality of “me”. I have no way of verifying that this is all happening, that I am not dreaming or hallucinating, that this is really me. In my own frame of reference, it is all very clear. In the outside world, it has no manifestation. It isn't *real*.

But it should not be like that. I do not need anything, or anyone, to tell me who I am. For most of my life, I did not need it. Since my self-conscience formed in adolescence, I was acutely aware of how different I was from anything around me, how irrelevant the issues of people around me (in the broadest sense) were to me. That did not upset me, I accepted it as a fact of life (in fact, as a child I thought that *everyone* was different from anyone else like I was. It came as a revelation that other people did have a lot in common). Time and again I faced pressure to assimilate. I rejected that, and decided that it was the others' problem if they could not live with the differences. I valued my own selfhood, and nearly nothing seemed worth achieving if the price was to compromise on it. At the same time, I kept my differentness to myself. I did not fight back, I only walked away, as intact as possible. Fighting back would involve exposure, and interaction with them – which I did not want. Sometimes “walking away” meant, pretending to be what they were comfortable with, while in the “inside” being detached from them. I had no interest in expressing myself to people who would not appreciate that. I viewed myself as an extreme individualist (I still do). No one was going to tell me who I was.

This safe solitude was shattered on the past few years. It happened almost suddenly, as I came across a newsgroup about autism. On the first day of reading, I came across an acronym – HFA (High Functioning Autism) – that changed my attitude towards the diagnosis of my son: He did not seem to fit the descriptions I knew about “classical autism”; What I learned about HFA children and adults described him very well, and I came to accept that he was autistic – albeit, high-functioning. So I continued to read that newsgroup regularly (I even pulled the archives and read some of them). Another revelation was, a few HFA adults who interacted with each other on this forum. I related very strongly to what they wrote: the attitude towards the general society and its conventions, the difficulties, what was important to them, “fun stuff” they liked. All made a lot of sense to me – unlike how I usually feel about experiences of people. Some of it resonated with my own selfhood, some did not. I did not have the same life experiences as theirs, but I found myself compelled to read their posts,

enjoying fun stuff, deeply involved with serious stuff. I did not have a computer at home at that time, so I printed out a few posts that were highly relevant to me, and took them home. I read them every night before falling asleep, and sometimes almost cried. I still have those old printouts somewhere. This forum is a public one, so I only “lurked” there. But when one of the adult HFAs told about his intention to leave the group (after repeatedly being attacked by parents), I dared to do something I had never done: I wrote him privately. I just could not let him disappear from my life. This first step developed later into a long-term connection, reaching more and more personal levels. I think that it is a real friendship - the first one in my life.

The acceptance of my son’s autism motivated me to learn about HFA. I searched the university library catalog for this term, and found one title that was still on order. As soon as it was on the shelf, I borrowed it. Yes, at last I found a book relevant to his condition. I looked up the index for the name of my friend. He had a whole article in the “personal accounts” section. I read it eagerly. It was moving to read about the cognitive and language aspects (he writes beautifully). But as I got to the social part, I was both engulfed, and confused or annoyed. His social attitude and experience resonated so much with who I was, and on the other hand, the way NT (neurotypical) people were described, was exactly what set me apart from the people around me. As someone “on the other side of the fence” (the status of an NT parent) I could not identify with the description of NT people.

When it was time to return that book to the library, I decided to purchase a copy. Another book that I ordered from abroad was Donna Williams’ *Somebody Somewhere* (the sequel of *Nobody Nowhere*). I knew about *Nobody Nowhere*, but for a few reasons decided to get *Somebody Somewhere* first. When the book finally came, I opened it on the first page, and started to read. I was shocked. She was using *my words*, my images! Things that I had told nobody before, how could she *know*? I guess that people have things in common, so when one reads a book, possibly there would be something in the characters that would touch upon one’s own selfhood. I had read books before that thrilled me or made me laugh or cry, but never touched my hidden self like that. Donna’s “outside” experience was greatly different than mine, as well as her innate physical and mental properties; But something in her “essence” was very much “me”.

Meanwhile, I continued to read the newsgroup. My friend had left it, and the other HFAs only “monitored” it occasionally – and for a good cause. As the only public forum about autism at that time, it was the first place that newly diagnosed HFAs (adults and adolescents) turned to for support. It was neat to watch this: Someone would appear, and either tell about recently being diagnosed, or just learning about autism and finding out how “things fall into place” when many of his or her difficulties and otherwise abnormal characteristics could be accounted for by autism. Then the person would get replies from other HFAs, comparing notes, offering support. In many cases, the person would express a feeling of finally finding his own kind, as if he or she was an alien who had been stranded on this planet, and now has found other aliens who were from the same planet. It would often happen later,

that the new person would find the forum too hostile to stay. But by then, a connection with another HFA would already be established, and the new person could leave the public forum and maintain this connection. Later that year, two private forums started by two adult HFAs. One of them was more parent-oriented, and the other, by ANI (a self-help organization by autistic people), focused on the needs of its autistic members (but allowed non autistic persons to join). I joined both forums (and later left the parent-oriented forum, and stayed on the ANI list). I saw there the same process occur many times - that new members were relieved to finally “come home”, where they are accepted and can express themselves in a safe place, where they would not be attacked for their autistic traits. A sense of a community emerged, and people would speak in terms of “us” (where “them” refers to the NT’s in the outside world).

That confused me. I was first drawn to these people, because they seemed asocial, like I was. I could understand – as the article described – that a asocial person may still get interested in a particular person, and voluntarily connect with this particular person. But what I witnessed was much more than this: people who tended to suspect and to retreat from NT people in their immediate vicinity, were willing to accept and to share with strangers hundreds or thousands of miles away from them, because the latter were autistic – like them. Why did it mean so much for HFAs to meet “people of their kind”? Why was being part of a community – a group affiliation, which is usually a complex and stressful situation - so rewarding for them? Why did they need the group to tell them who they were? The extreme individualist in me could not understand that.

Part of the answer was, building or enhancing self-identity. People who joined, often told how the general society discouraged their self-expression; How isolated they had been. With others of their kind, they could compare notes, discuss their life experiences and their inner processing with others who understood their language and used their communication mode. They could tell themselves out loud, and receive external feedback, validating their own reality. In a “home” where being autistic was the “citizenship card” rather than a shameful disease, it was OK to take off the “uniform” that functioning in the general society imposes, and to just be. This is the kind of environment that enhances self-growth, and the emergence of the true self that had to be buried or denied before.

Maybe the importance of group acceptance is not unique to autistic people. I have seen something happen with classmates or members of other social groups when I was in high school. I felt that there was something that kept them together, but I could not understand what, and why was it so important and rewarding for them. Maybe they needed that cross-reference, that comparing notes with others, that validation of their own self reality. When you are isolated in the darkness of your own head, you do have your own reality, and it is certain and clear, so long you are in the dark. But when you have to go out there, “in the light”, you must leave this reality in the shade; And then it becomes unreal, you become unreal. But, suppose there is one place, which is safe enough for you to come out “in the light”, and still retain your own self, an let it breathe and express itself. Suppose you let others see it,

and acknowledge seeing it. Then it is no longer unreal, you did not dream it, you have external evidence for its existence. External validation is different from the usual pressure to assimilate: It does not tell you who you are or who you should be; It just confirms that the “who” that you let loose “out in the light” is visible, is real. It does not have to happen in all social environments; It is enough that you have this experience in certain parts of your life. Once you have experienced reality, it is there. You can carry it, and defend it, in less welcoming environments.

To some extent, I too experienced that. I felt parts of me resonate with expressions of people outside me – the books and articles and posts that I mentioned here. I was scared in the beginning, because the sense of sharing such inner things with someone else was new to me. But it also felt good, and encouraged the “inner me” to breathe and gain space. On the other hand, it was a one-way thing, I just read these things and felt strongly about them. The whole experience still remained in the darkness of my own mind. I could be dreaming this too - this resonance; I still needed external *feedback*. As the connection with my friend developed, I received a lot of such feedback from him. At first the experience of accepting “the real me” was shocking; It took me a while to adjust, but it felt good, and real. The process was very very long and gradual, and had many ups and downs (and probably needed a lot of patience from him), but I now feel safe, and real, within this connection. The situation is much different now than how it was five years ago – I can no longer discard “the inside” as something unreal. I can’t, however, carry it “in the light”. Connecting with my friend has become so safe and natural, that it all belongs now in “the dark”. It has no manifestation in my life here, only in cyberspace, and in my mind. (The distinction is very clear: My friend does not live in Israel, I only got to see him twice in the five years that we had this connection; And we communicate only in English, while most of my everyday communication is in Hebrew.) I might carry that inner part, that has already gained acceptance, in my thoughts when I go “out there”, but I am careful to keep it safe and hidden.

I have a hard time reading the discussion list. Although I tried several times to detach from it, I could not stay away for long. In the beginning, I used to join “fun” threads, and liked it; But later I stopped. Very often, I feel very strongly about things that I read, and am almost compelled to respond and to share. There is nothing in the list policies to prohibit this. I even tried to post a few times about matters other than “fun stuff”, but it was so stressful, that I stopped. There are many reasons why it is not working, more than the obvious one – that I am probably not autistic. A formal diagnosis is not required, I can just say that I am a Cousin – someone who has some autistic traits. I would not say that. I want to be accepted for who I am. False acceptance is a game I am already playing in my everyday life, I have no interest in adding another environment where I have to assimilate in order to be accepted. On the other hand, the list is the only place that I feel is relevant to me, where I am touched, where I would like to be accepted, where I would like to belong. It is not that I *need* external validation; I never lost my selfhood. But I am acutely aware of how good, how helpful it can be. Here

is a new experience: that being an outsider hurts. This never happened before, with social groups that I encountered and was supposed to feel I belong with, as I had not been too interested in them. I am very much interested in this discussion list, but I can't feel safe, or "at home", or that I have the *right* to be there. I am not even sure if I would be rejected if I said that I belonged; Maybe I can not identify that I "am home" even if I was in such a situation, because I never had enough of the experience of "being home" to be familiar with it.

What hurts even more is, that I still have doubts about this gravitation towards autistic people. Did I "learn" the things that touch me so much, or was it there before all along? Contact with others certainly raised that to awareness. Sometimes it is so frustrating – things that I do or think or feel, remind me of things by HFAs that I read, as if I was saying lines from some play. Am I trying to take on a part in this play, to become someone I am not? On the other hand, isn't the very fact that I do find myself in expressions of others, that I feel that they were speaking for me, somehow an evidence that there *is* a grain of truth about communality with them?

Maybe if I say things out loud, they will feel more real. Maybe telling you about them, like I am doing now, is a first step in this direction. You are not a part of "the dark". Telling is already helping, between therapy sessions: I discuss things internally – all the time. I think about them whenever my mind is not too occupied with practical necessities. Maybe it has become an obsession, but it is by far easier to deal with than with that extreme sadness, that has been screaming inside me for most of my waking hours during the past few weeks. At least now the debate is explicit – in my mind. It will gain more substance, as I print this text on paper. And more so, when I give it to you to read; and as you read it; and possibly, when we discuss it.

But it is so risky. Exposure hurts – even when it results with correct understanding and true acceptance. It also has to be done with care. I kept relating to things I have in common with autistic people, but did not spell out *what* those things were. I can't. Forcing me to describe them directly will be painful. My determination to go through it anyway will return me back to "functioning mode", where I am not real. So, it is not enough to allow for things to be said aloud. It is also important to set free what naturally springs from the inside, but not to try to force the inside come out.

How can that be done? I don't know. This is your job :-)

Discovering my Cousinhood

I wrote this piece because things that I thought about when I was alone and wanted to discuss with the therapist, simply were not there during sessions. I brought the printout with me for the next session, but similar to its contents not being there, even the existence of the paper in my bag escaped my mind. I recalled the writing only at the end of the session, and handed it to the therapist, hoping to start the next session discussing it. In the beginning of the next session I asked if she read my writing. She said yes, and complimented my writing skills in English (which is not my first spoken language). She did not refer to the contents, although I explicitly wrote how important it was for me to discuss it with

her. She responded as if I brought her a piece of art. With time, I noticed other things which made the treatment ineffective. I decided to leave that therapist and look for someone else, someone who had some experience working with autistic people. Just expressing this preference to a stranger was a huge step for me, but I had to find out for sure that the therapist I was going to see really knew autistic people, not just parents or staff who worked with them. It took some time, but I finally found someone who said that he had worked with a couple of autistic youth.

The new therapist seemed promising at first. I brought a written summary of my problems and history of coping attempts, and he read it and related to its contents. Later I gave him the *Unreality* piece, and the next session he returned it to me with his written comments and questions. I was thrilled: there was a real prospect of communication!

But my hope did not last for long. The therapist did not follow through with written communication. After sessions, I would be often left confused and exhausted, unable to express my feelings, even my confusion and exhaustion. In a desperate attempt to stick with this therapist, I made a list of things that I needed in therapy:

- **Continuity:** each meeting has to follow the previous one. Everything that we talked about on previous meetings, is part of the present context.
- **Consistency:** clear and stable rules.
- **Accommodate my needs**, even if they are uncomfortable for you:
 - Written communication.
 - Sequencing (non-linear): I need to be able to change the subject, or to go back to things we discussed previously, **without** it being considered as a “new” subject.
 - Flow of conversation (allow breaks)
 - Minimize emotional “coloring”.

The cause underlying these needs, is that it takes me time to process things.

- **Believe** my statements about my inner reality, even if my body language or your previous experience say otherwise.
- **Predictability:** therapy plan
- **Separate** between mapping, assessment, value judgment, setting goals, and teaching coping strategies.

I finished typing the list, printed it out, and stared at the paper. These needs, which neither this therapist nor the previous one were familiar and comfortable with, were the same that one could find in every autism guide: consistency, predictability, a different communication style. I knew them from parenting my autistic son, and now I realized that they applied to me.

When we started to discuss the chasm between “inside” and “outside”, an overwhelming fear took over me: I was afraid that the therapist would try to talk me out of my connection with ACs. I liked his suggestion to help me bridge the gap between the two worlds, but I could not convey to him the profound difference between them, and why I had no social connections in “real-life” (as opposed to

cyberspace). Worse yet, he tried all sorts of psycho-dynamic explanations, at the same time insisting that he was not using psychoanalysis on me. My frustrating, exhausting advocacy efforts for my son were understood as self-enhancing and as an example for my ability to interact with people, rather than a source of overload. I made the following table to help me explain to him the difference between necessary interactions, which I called "duty", and interactions which I *chose* to have (apparently, only with AC people), which I called "recreation":

<u>duty</u>	<u>recreation</u>
personal, voluntary choice	personal, voluntary choice
work, possibly fight	rest
exhausting	refreshing
business	leisure
achieving goals	for its own sake
satisfaction from coping and achievement	pleasure from being natural
in spite of possible confrontation	thanks to harmony
interaction might involve compromising self	interaction enhances self
enhancement of self through struggling, self-determination and preserving self identity	enhancement of self through mutual understanding, acceptance and validation
In Rome, behave like a Roman	At home, be yourself
means for achieving goals are determined by alien environment	media for connecting are direct, and basically transparent

Drawing this table helped me to realize that I not only gravitated towards ACs, but that I *could not belong* with the NT world. The secure situation of therapy gave me the optimal conditions for successful communication: Unlike in "real life", I could be completely open with the therapist, because I honestly trusted him to be on my side and I had nothing to risk by opening up to him. I *know* that I was very serious about therapy, and made huge efforts to get through to him. If we still could not understand each other, then there was probably some essential difference between us. I finally was convinced that I was not NT.

So, what was I? Surely, I was too "mild" to qualify for an autism-spectrum label; A label would imply a disability, and I could not believe that I was disabled. Being a non-NT meant that I had enough autistic traits, probably not as much as an A (autistic), but as a C (Cousin).

This conviction made a huge difference to me; I almost felt re-born. I was finally "at home" among "my people", and was free to share my life with them, good and bad. That did not make things easier in everyday life, but at least I had a haven to retreat to. Moreover, I had an identity that finally made sense to me.

Getting evaluated

After the traumatic meeting with the psychiatrist I realized that it was not enough for me to know that I was a Cousin. The antidepressant which I was taking was not working, and I needed to see a doctor who was familiar with the effects of drugs on autistic people. There was no way that I would start looking for one without a formal evaluation. It took me a long time to find a professional who could evaluate adults with autistic traits. When I finally found someone, I wrote to him the following text:

Evaluation – what for?

I need a good reason to start this process. There are a few reasons why I shouldn't. First of all, the cost. Not only money, but time and effort. Secondly, the risk. I already ran into professionals who thought that they were qualified to treat autistics, and I gradually realized that their familiarity with the area was only superficial. Adjusting to a new person is very hard for me, and makes me vulnerable. I need the correct therapy to undo the bad effects of past experience that I had with therapists; I can't afford to be hurt again.

Another reason why not is, that I probably would not qualify for a label, because my difficulties are not severe enough. If at all, a direction, or an "axis" would be identified, but I will be on its normal side (though probably closer to the "clinical" threshold than most people).

Usually, the main purpose for seeking a diagnosis is eligibility for services. However in my very mild case, it is obviously not the purpose. BTW, even people with an official autism label find it hard to receive services, if they are high-functioning. In fact, I always wondered about independent adults who tried to get a diagnosis. What's the point, if there is no intention to take the "certificate" obtained at the end of the process to one of the state service providers and ask for help? If there is no need for special services, or if appropriate services do not exist, a label would be no good. I still think that if I didn't need any help, I would not have a reason to seek for evaluation.

Another common reason to seek for an evaluation is, to find an explanation for the difficulties. Maybe if my problem was diagnosed ten or twenty years ago, and I was treated by a therapist who knew how to use this knowledge to help me, I would have been in a better condition now. But that did not happen, and I did the hard trail of "self diagnosis" without the help of professionals. Those who helped me most were people on the autism spectrum. Part of that was indirect – I read their posts and writings and realized how much I belonged with them; Part of the help was direct – people told me "you are one of us" ... It's true that I am not really autistic (or Asperger's), but we have a name for the milder form of the social and communication traits of the autistic spectrum: Cousin. To me, this is my "label".

Therefore, the important outcome of a label – a framework to understand the profound difference between me and the people I am surrounded by – already exists, and I no longer need a professional to explain to me the nature of my difficulties. It's a shame that it took so long and involved so much pain, but it already happened.

OK, then what for?

The most important part for me is the "mapping" process. I assume that the evaluation includes a set of standard tests. The analysis of test results may help me to understand my abilities and limitations. I know how I feel, and I am familiar with my reactions in various situations, but I lack the perspective of what is expected from normal people. In fact, my natural tendency is *not* to be so interested in the normal conventions, but society expects me to behave normally, maybe also to feel what normal people feel, in fact to *be* normal... an rigorous, fact-oriented analysis of the test results, together with an explanation of where my difficulties are, can help me cope.

An "official" confirmation of the nature of difficulties (even if not manifested in a formal label) from a professional will help me to locate my "self-diagnosis", which sometimes still seems unreal, in my everyday reality. An evaluation, done by a professional using an objective method, in the form of a paper that I would be able to hold in my hands and read when I need to, will help me fight the unrelenting feeling, that it is all in my head. After so many years of hearing that from the people who are close to me and from professionals whom I turned to for help, I probably need such a "charm".

The most important reason is, that I still need help. Even though I gave up talk therapy, I still need mental help, and I am treated by a psychiatrist (for depression). In contrast to what my psychiatrist says, a person on the autistic spectrum can not be treated by a professional without a background in this area. In addition to unusual response to drugs, the communication with people having autistic traits is different, and the professional may not identify mental states correctly because of the differences in communication or in body language. As a client I can say, that the feeling of someone who seeks for help, and can not explain to the helper what is going on for him, is very hard and even adds to the depression. Maybe even the diagnosis of depression (and the medication accordingly) is incorrect, and only someone who is familiar with the difficulties of spectrum people can locate the primary problem (if depression is a secondary complication). An evaluation which identifies my problem as related to autism may not persuade my psychiatrist to change his attitude, but at least I will be able to go back to the HMO and ask for a referral to another psychiatrist with the suitable background. A request which is not backed up by a professional will be ignored.

A detailed analysis will also help me to communicate with professionals. I have learned from my experience, that I express myself in terms which are not understood by professionals. A detailed evaluation may "translate" my inner world into terms which are understandable to professionals. Then

I might be able to explain what is difficult for me and what can help me. It does not ensure responsiveness of professionals, but I guess that nothing can be achieved *without* it.

Some of the expectations of the evaluation were fulfilled: I learned a few things about how I look like from the outside, and about things that are natural for NTs which I don't do. The overall conclusion came as a big surprise: a formal Asperger Syndrome label. Apparently, the total score was high enough to place me on the "clinical" side of the continuum.

Epilogue

It took me five years to realize that I was a Cousin since I had first discovered the world of autism, and then more than two years till I received an "official label". To me, the significant step was discovering my Cousinhood. It took so long, and was involved with so much mental effort, because I honestly agreed with the stance of the AC community, right from the moment I discovered its existence, that Cousinhood wasn't anything "mild" at all. A few Cousins had some other officially-diagnosed disability, with some communality with autistic people; Some Cousins had recognizable autistic traits but not an autism spectrum label, and weren't otherwise impaired. But they all were clearly not NT, and were, to some degree, cut out from normal social relationships. I had to be absolutely sure that the reason for my difficulties and for lack of normal social life was autism-related, and not one of the reasons common among NTs. Figuring out things in details and the need for the "absolute truth" are common among AC's.

Discovering my Cousinhood was all I needed in order to participate in the AC community; It had no effect on "practical" matters. If I was to tell anyone in "real life" about my autistic traits, I needed the "Kosher stamp" of a professional, otherwise I would be met with disbelief. As long as I did not try to get state-services designed by law for autistic or otherwise disabled people, it should not matter whether the evaluation resulted in an autism spectrum label or in some "sub-clinical" condition, as it detailed my problems and needs in words understood and respected by professionals. Some day, everyone will be accepted for who they are, so labels won't be needed.