

How our understanding of the behavioral characteristics of autism has evolved

You can draw a straight line from the initial descriptions of many conditions – claustrophobia, for example, or vertigo – to their diagnostic criteria. Not so with autism. Its history has taken a less direct path with several detours, according to Jeffrey Baker, professor of pediatrics.

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Here is how the “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders” (DSM), the diagnostic manual used in the United States, has reflected our evolving understanding of autism.

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[T]he DSM-5 [introduced the term ‘autism spectrum disorder.’](#) This diagnosis is characterized by two groups of features: “persistent impairment in reciprocal social communication and social interaction” and “restricted, [repetitive patterns of behavior](#),” both present in early childhood. Each group includes specific behaviors, a certain number of which clinicians have to identify. The manual eliminated Asperger syndrome, PDD-NOS and classic autism.

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Many were concerned that after their diagnosis disappeared from the book, [they would lose services](#) or insurance coverage. Those who identified themselves as having Asperger syndrome said the diagnosis gave them a sense of belonging and an explanation for their challenges; they feared that removing the diagnosis was synonymous to losing their identity.

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Experts continue to view autism as a continuous spectrum of conditions. There are no planned revisions to the DSM for now, but the language in a draft of the ICD-11 — which is expected to debut in May 2018 — [mirrors the DSM-5’s criteria](#).

Read full, original post: [The evolution of ‘autism’ as a diagnosis, explained](#)