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Asperger's Diary

Life through the lens of Asperger's Syndrome.

by Lynne Soraya

Thinking About The Unthinkable

What makes us human? And why does it matter?

Published on June 7, 2012 by Lynne Soraya in Asperger's Diary

Recently, the news broke that the [UN is calling for an investigation of a Massachusetts special needs school for torture](#), after a law suit led to the release of [disturbing video](#) of a young man being shocked with electricity 31 times over a period of 7 hours. If we assume that [behavior is communication](#), and that "problem behaviors" are often attempts to communicate [stress](#) and pain, then what does it mean when we "treat" such behaviors in this way? Does that make sense? More to the point, is it humane? Or is there a better way?

Effectively including those with disabilities into the community requires that we prevent the mistakes of the past. How do we do that? We need to presume competence. Presume sentence. Presume humanity.

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Lynne Soraya is the nom de plume for a writer with Asperger's Syndrome.
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Why? Given the implications, the alternative is unthinkable.

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A few years ago, I was at a conference on language and evolution when an audience member questioned a prominent child language researcher's thesis by raising a counterexample: One aspect of the development of children with Williams syndrome didn't quite fit the researcher's theory. The prominent child language researcher quickly retorted, "Oh, I've seen children with Williams syndrome. They don't count. They're not even human. They must belong to some other species entirely."

With the wave of a hand, an entire group of people erased from the human race. Without a contesting word, members of the human species were sacrificed — but a theory was saved.

- [Rachel Cohen-Rottenberg: The Empathy Issue Is a Human Rights Issue](#)

Empathy. For most people, the word is synonymous with humanity. The American Psychological Association calls empathy "the trait that makes us human. According to author D.H. Pink, empathy is "a universal language that connects us beyond country or culture. Empathy makes us human. Empathy brings joy.... Empathy is an essential part of living a life of meaning."

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
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