



Understanding Changes in *DSM-5*

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

One controversial change in *DSM-5* was the new diagnostic label of autism spectrum disorder. Prior to *DSM-5*, these developmental disorders were listed as separate, including autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder (a milder form of autism), and pervasive developmental disorder (a more profound disorder). With the publication of *DSM-5*, these disorders were eliminated. Proponents of this change argued that having separate categories was not based on scientific and clinical evidence (Lord & Bishop, 2015). Further, it was suggested that diagnostic reliability was difficult given the number of factors such as language ability, social reactions, communication styles, and behaviors that needed to be considered in making a diagnosis. So, *DSM-5* now recognizes a new continuum called autism spectrum disorder.

Part of the controversy was that the new category reduced the number of ways to be diagnosed with autism (Barker & Galardi, 2015; Ferris, 2012). In fact, it has been estimated that there were over 2,000 different symptom combinations in *DSM-IV*, but only 11 are in *DSM-5*. The concern is that some individuals who were

previously diagnosed with one of the autism-related disorders would no longer meet the criteria for autism spectrum disorder. In fact, using the new criteria in *DSM-5* has led to fewer children being identified as having autism spectrum disorder than would other traditional rating scales (Mayes et al., 2014).

In addition, as described by Temple Grandin and others, many individuals who were described as having Asperger's disorder realized that they experienced the world and others differently. Many of these individuals valued the way they experienced life and work, even referring to themselves as "Aspies." There can even be some glamor or positive recognition for displaying the characteristics of Asperger's. In Temple Grandin's case, she was able to design structures that allowed farm animals not to experience fear. Some corporations, such as those involved in computer programming, also valued the ability of these individuals to focus with unusual intensity on particular aspects of their work. Thus, the loss of the term Asperger's was seen as a negative rather than a positive by many who experience the world differently from others and feel this is part of their identity.