



5. Neurodiversity—Um, Brains Are Biological Organs



While there are plenty of other pressures bending some toward denialism (scientific groupthink, the politics of grant-chasing, the unbalanced burden of proof, for example), I'll wrap up by addressing the ascension of the neurodiversity movement. I actually adore many things about neurodiversity and love how it promotes acceptance and empowerment, Hey, ten thumbs up for Sesame Street's new muppet with autism, Julia.

But let's draw the line at biology. Like hearts and lungs, brains are biological organs. When a child has a hole in his heart, we cherish the child but hardly celebrate "cardio-diversity." The scientific literature is now replete with findings of pathological neurobiological phenomena in autism, including impairments in neural connectivity, dendritic pruning, and synaptic functioning, among others. Increasing prevalence in serious brain pathology causing significant to profound disability (my two kids with autism, ages 18 and 11, are nonverbal and function at preschool levels, for one sobering example) represents a monumentally serious human crisis that should never be sugar-coated or mis-portrayed as mere flowering of supposed brain diversity.

But what, do I see rainbows on the horizon? Like the Bad Witch melting in Oz, it seems the Complacency Monster may be headed for certain demise. I regularly get emails from community leaders and researchers concerned about the lack of progress and forward-thinking about the adult autism crisis. Our heroes in the services sector, smothered by their growing caseloads, are begging to be heard and pleading for relief. Autism advocates around the country are developing new ideas for reform, sick of the kumbaya nonsense and ready to fight for our families. Each day that our crisis grows, the Complacency Monster seems more and more absurd. As an autism dad friend said, its position is "like standing on the train tracks and arguing about the speed, color and the driver of the train that is going to hit you."

Jill Escher is president of [Autism Society San Francisco Bay Area](#), an autism research philanthropist ([Escher Fund for Autism](#)), a provider of housing to adults with developmental disabilities, and the mother of two children with nonverbal autism. She can be reached at jill.escher@gmail.com.