

First-person perspectives and scientific inquiry of autism: towards an integrative approach

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What role should the expertise of the autistic communities play in shaping the category of autism compared to the role played by science? This question led to a debate about the quantitative importance of science compared to first-person perspectives for the understanding of autism. I see this debate as lying on a false dichotomy between science and activism, according to which only scientific inquiry would reveal the empirical nature of autism, while the discourse of autistic communities would construct a socio-cultural conception of autism. I argue that first-person perspectives should be considered a necessary step in the scientific investigation of autism. Drawing from Haslam's conceptual distinction between three types of validity in psychiatry (2013), I show that first-person perspectives of autism have been improving the content validity, the criterion-related validity, and the construct validity of its concept. All this shows that first-person perspectives have increased the scientificity of the concept of autism.