

MY OPEN LETTER TO JENNY McCARTHY

RUSS DAVIS

From: Russ Davis, student/writer; Puyallup, Washington
To: Jenny McCarthy, model/comedienne/actress/author/activist;
Weehawken, New Jersey
Subject: Why I Oppose You and Your Activism

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

Before all else, let me tell you exactly who I am. My name is Russ Davis, and I am an autistic. On the spectrum. Whatever you want to call it. In June 2000, I was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome; I'm now made to understand that's not a thing anymore. No matter. I still tell people that I have Asperger's, but my concern is not over what label my fellow autistics choose to use. My concern is that autistics keep in mind that we should not be enemies with each other---we should be enemies with people who want to destroy who we are.

Last night, I had the strangest dream. I dreamt that I finally had a chance to meet you in person and tell you everything I've always wanted to tell you. Because, for all the statements you've given on autism, I don't think you've ever been willing to sit down with an actual autistic person to see how we really feel (except for your son, but the public doesn't get to hear his side of the story). Well, last night, your dream self granted me that opportunity.

Let me tell you right now what I told her last night.

I am a human being with dreams. I want to be a published author. I want to travel to many different countries and meet people from all kinds of cultures. I want to be independent. And yes, I might as well admit, someday I'd like to meet a nice woman who I can spend forever with. Just like everyone else, I want to have a good life. I don't think being on the autistic spectrum should be incompatible with that idea.

Do you feel the same way, Ms. McCarthy? Because your own statements make me feel like I should just “give up” as long as I have autism, and that I should refrain from trying to have a good life until I conform like a good little boy and “join the grown-ups’ table” (since, after all, nobody with autism truly grows up, do we?¹).

You seem to have this air of never understanding why people oppose you and your anti-vaccine, cure-autism-now crusades. You’ve even tried to tell people that you’re misunderstood and taken out of context; in May 2014, you wrote in the Chicago Sun-Times that you are actually “pro-vaccine”---an assertion utterly at odds with your record.

I can’t speak for everyone, only myself. Here’s why I oppose you and your activism. For ease, I’ll do it in something of a list format.

I oppose you and your activism because one of its cornerstones is that autism should be seen as a public health crisis, which needs to be eradicated---in a fashion similar to smallpox, influenza, cholera, or Ebola. There is a wide gulf between what I have---Asperger’s Syndrome---and cholera, such as the fact that Asperger’s Syndrome doesn’t debilitate you.

I oppose you and your activism because you deem autism to be so worthy of eradication that you’ll even give it higher priority than actual public health threats. Here, I am thinking of a 2010 column you wrote for The Huffington Post in which you said that 20,000 children in San Diego with autism were a bigger concern than 12 children in the same city with measles. I get that those are wildly different numbers, but what threat are those 20,000 autistic kids posing to San Diegans?

I oppose you and your activism because, even after it has been thoroughly debunked, you’ve peddled the idea that the vaccines we give our children can also “give” them autism. In using your celebrity status to peddle this nonsense, you’ve helped perpetuate the idea that having autism is something that should be avoided, and you’ve also played a role in convincing parents to avoid vaccines.

I oppose you and your activism because, when he was finally punished for breathing life into a nonexistent link between autism and vaccines (and taking kickbacks in the process), you stood by Dr. Andrew Wakefield, the British doctor whose autism-equals-vaccination-injury celebrity predates your own.

¹This is sarcasm, by the way.

I oppose you and your activism because you have admitted to using your son as a lab rat of sorts in your attempts to find a cure for autism---such as when you publicly stated that you administered chelation therapy to him, a process rejected by the scientific community due to its serious and sometimes fatal risks.

That leads me to further state that I oppose you and your activism because your campaigns against autism and vaccines was founded on the back of your son, an individual who deserves support and understanding, not pseudoscience, and not the “opportunity” to be used as a prop for said science by his own mother.

These are the most basic reasons why your activism needs to be refuted and battled. But they merely touch on the central point as to why your activism is dangerous. I don't throw around that term lightly, but it is an appropriate word for the work you've done. It is not enough for me to do what some have done and simply dismiss you as a clueless crank looking for attention. No, Ms. McCarthy, you and your activism and ideas must be battled in the public square. The central reason for why I believe this is simple: You are trying to turn autism into a negative, something that must be dismantled and destroyed. In the midst of this campaign, you are promoting the idea that we autistics should assimilate into a homogenous society, rather than recognizing our differences and building on our strengths.

At the end of the day, the cure-autism faction is an arrogant, ableist movement which stands on a dangerous philosophy: That autistic people have little worth to society, that we are primarily (if not complete) burdens---and since killing autistic people is immoral, society should instead kill the ingredient that makes us who we are. I regard this movement as arrogant because the people in charge of it---that is, people like you, Ms. McCarthy---think that they know what's better for autistics than we do. You think we're better off being less like ourselves and more like you.

Autism has traditionally been treated as a disease; it should be treated like a lens, much like the lens on a pair of binoculars. My neighbor, my supervisor, my optometrist, and my garbage collector, among others, all see the world in different ways. This is what Asperger's Syndrome is: An unconventional pair of binoculars. Those 20,000 autistic children in San Diego you're apparently so concerned about? They live with a difference. They live with an alternate manner of viewing the world around them.

Unlike many men, I have never found Playboy Playmates attractive. In your specific case, I think you are more than unattractive, but this has nothing to do with your outward appearance. Rather, this is a judgment of, in the words of Dr. King, the content of your character. I don't care how many times your face has been on the cover of Playboy, but I do care what you are the face of. Like it or not, you have become the face of an evil movement---one which is rooted in fear, ignorance, and prejudice.

Like I stated, Ms. McCarthy, I had a dream last night that I had a chance to tell you these things. It was a golden opportunity, and I felt like I owed it to the autistics of the world to let the world's most visible cure-autism activist hear another side of the story. I was sad to wake up and realize it was only a dream.

Yet, at the same time, it could only be a dream. After all, for as much as you talk about autism, I can't find any evidence that you've sat down and conversed with someone on the spectrum who objects to your mischaracterization of our lives. More to the point, mountains of scientific evidence can't convince you that you're incorrect on vaccines. How could one autistic person---especially one as insignificant as myself---shine a light on how incorrect you are about our status in life?

I would be willing to give you the benefit of the doubt and tell you that you could redeem yourself. But that would require you to open your mind to the possibility that autistic individuals bring something to the table, that we're valuable members of society and not just hopeless damsels in distress waiting for you to come to the rescue. If you're willing to open your mind to this possibility, I will be the first to hear you out. However, your record indicates to me that you are too far gone.

Jenny McCarthy, by your own appointment and with the help of countless parents and quacks, you have become the president of a movement which peddles discredited junk "science" and does so in an effort to dehumanize people with autism. Your movement is intent on destroying autistic individuals and replacing us with people we were not meant to be, all in an effort to cleanse the world of what is a neurological difference. It is a movement that frightens me, but I will be damned a thousand times before I let it silence me.

My name is Russ. I am a writer, a student, a friend. I am a human being with a place in this world. And I have autism. Rather than

cowering in fear before your power and intimidation, I will stand and fight, playing my anthem for all the world to hear.

Regards,
Russ Davis
Writer, learner, and autistic