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How Stories Shape Lives and Build Friendships: A Study of Parents With Children on the Autism Spectrum

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Poster Presentation P54

**HOW STORIES SHAPE LIVES AND BUILD FRIENDSHIPS: A STUDY OF PARENTS
WITH CHILDREN ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM**

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Over the course of the last month, I have interviewed, taken pictures of, and built relationships with parents of children on the Autism spectrum. My work here is, in one sense, a collection of stories and experiences about their lives. As an anthropologist, I am partially indebted to Clifford Geertz who stressed the importance of "thick," local understandings of culture. But in another sense, I believe that the particulars of culture are best understood and transmitted to others with reference to the general. In this way, my work has evolved into a multi-layered approach that builds on a theoretical framework for the understanding of "stories" and their significance across cultures. As recent studies in psychology suggest, the stories and narratives that come to shape an individual's memories are malleable and can be remade to meet one's needs for group identification. I will argue, with reference to my own collected observations, that there is an added dimension to the group I studied that differentiates them from this line of research. While the related stories involved in raising a child on the Autism spectrum are what bring these parents together, it is through honesty, not adaptation, that they express their values and maintain their friendships.