OPINION

Minority report

BY **APOORVA MANDAVILLI**

10 JUNE 2008

239b4785-9995-d894-1197-39a12d7ddaf4.jpg

Autism is sometime called the result of an ‘extreme male brain?.

And the classic traits associated with the disorder ? social awkwardness and obsessive interests, for example ? are associated with men, and are better tolerated in men than in women.

Add to this the statistics ? that autism affects four times as many boys as girls ? and it?s no surprise that girls and women with autism feel all but invisible.

Although it?s clear there is a **gender divide**, not much is known about the scientific basis for the difference. Leo Kanner, **who first recognized autism as a distinct disorder**, thought it only affected boys. He later realized his mistake, but even today, girls with autism are often diagnosed later than boys.

Even after their diagnosis, these girls face formidable challenges.

Because women are expected to have qualities such as empathy and the ability to socialize easily, for example, women with autism or Asperger syndrome struggle more to fit in at work or in school, according to **an article last week** in the British newspaper, *The Guardian*.

As one woman with the disorder says, “If I had been a boy… I'd have gone into science, I'm sure - I might have gone on to be a nuclear physicist. I'd have met some girl who would have become my supportive wife and she would have made up for my social shortcomings, in the eyes of the world, and I'd have been the rather odd but brilliant professor who couldn't really handle social occasions.”