In issue definition related to rights based policy, Canada has been stereotypically understood as taking a more positive, human rights centered approach whereas the United States has been expected to take a more negative, civil rights based tact. While this difference in approach is expected to be a key to a broad base of differences between the two nations and societies, the difference is arguably unusually relevant in the disability policy arena. After all, recent changes in the understanding of disability is transforming disability from an issue of personal culpability overseen by medical professionals and tempered by charitable efforts to an issue of shared social and personal construction for which society at large is responsible. As the incidence of disability continues to rise, broad changes in social, political, and economic infrastructures are the expected result of recent innovations in disability related policy. These changes will affect society well beyond the lives of individuals with disabilities. Over the past decade, Canada, the United States and several other countries have experienced a surge in the reported incidence of autism. The public management of needs related to the autism baby boom is an unfolding process. This project examines how the current definition of rights in the realm of autism policy fits into the ongoing history of the definition of human and civil rights in North America.

Guiding Research Question
Does the stereotypical difference between the Canadian and American approach to the construction of rights manifest in autism issue stakeholders’ experiences? If so, how?

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