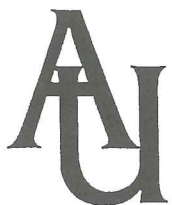


Produced by and for people with autism-spectrum conditions

united Asperger

Edition 55 July 2008





Asperger United is a newsletter run by and for people with autism-spectrum conditions. The newsletter aims to put people with the condition in touch with each other and to share information so that they can lead more independent lives.

Please note that *AU* receives over 200 letters each quarter so it is not possible to respond to every one, nor for every contribution to be printed. *AU* protects the identity of contributors by not printing full names unless the writer asks for his or her full name to be used.

Asperger United is free. To subscribe you, we need your postal address. We ask for a contribution of £6 per year from overseas readers and £10 from professionals and institutions to cover postage costs. Please make cheques payable to the NAS. Organisations requiring multiple copies: please get in touch.

Editor John Joyce

Additional support The National Autistic Society's Publications Department

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All we need is your name and address and we will add you to the mailing list — free of charge.

Thank you to George Cox who kindly produced the illustration included here and on page 6, and to Graeme Lawson for producing the *AU* logo.

Please note that the views expressed in Asperger United are not necessarily those of the editor, the National Autistic Society or those involved in the publication of the newsletter.

Contributions for the next issue should reach us by
22 August '08

Asperger United was founded in 1993 by Pamela Yates and Patricia Howlin, in association with the Maudsley Hospital, and Mark Bebbington and Judy Lynch of The National Autistic Society.

This was in response to a recognised dearth of services for people with Asperger syndrome and the potential for self help and networking as a means of support for this group.

The provisions for editor's and sub-editor's post was to develop a publication that was truly the voice of the people it was aimed at. This post also provided the possibility of work experience and responsibility and has benefited those who have held the position. These are Richard Exley, David Wright, Martin Coppola, Ian Reynolds and the current editor, John Joyce.

Pamela Yates provided support and advice to the editors until the publication was handed over to the National Autistic Society in 2000.

The name *Asperger United* was chosen by the group of original readers as the most 'appropriate name' for the publication. This was suggested by Anna Cohen.



Dear readers

Welcome to the July edition of your paper. I have recently been elected Secretary of the Croydon Curia of the Legion of Mary, a Roman Catholic lay missionary organisation. I served in this post until 2002 then withdrew to the general membership of this council. Legion HQ, called Concilium Legionis, is in Dublin where it was founded in 1921.

I reported last time about getting involved in computer dating. Many of the people contacting me may have been genuinely seeking friendship or more but unfortunately some were seeking financial assistance. I pointed out that I have come across a case where money was sent by money order and

not received and thought it was wrong to send money by any means. Because I will not be able to visit any of those concerned I am dropping out of this activity. It has also caused me financial problems.

Have any of you had unusual or interesting experiences which you think your fellow readers might like to read about? Please forward your stories.

May you all be blessed with good summer holidays even in the wet and wonderful Southern England.

Your editor

John Joyce

the relationships edition

If sufficient material is sent in, the theme for October will be **living** and the problems we have with it. Apologies to anyone confused by the theme announcement in the last issue — the living theme is nothing to do with Autscap. Writing and art on any subject is still welcome.

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Relationships

Hi. My name is **Tee**. I'm 33 years old and I live in my own flat, on my own, independently. I was diagnosed with High-Functioning Autism when I was 21 and schizo-affective disorder when I was 29.

When I read April's edition of *AU* it informed us they would cover the theme of relationships and I thought this would be an amazing opportunity to share my positive experiences of having an ASD mentor/life coach in my life who is an expert in autism and to also tell you how he has had a positive impact on my mental health. My mentor/life coach is called David. It all started back in 1994 when my advocate thought I had autism and introduced me to him. David knew straight away I had autism and he took me under his wing, seeing me free of charge ever since. He even got my HFA diagnosis organised.

Our relationship started by being about David helping me to understand my autism and answering questions about people and life that I couldn't understand without his help.

Before I met David I was deeply depressed, suicidal and in and out of psychiatric hospitals. When David came into my life it's because he helped me find myself by helping me to understand my autism. For example: he would explain to me why I couldn't do some things; not understand other things; and why I am the way I am; that this had a positive impact on my mental health as well as not feeling alone and isolated in the world which other autistic people without such support might experience.

Once David helped me to understand myself, it boosted my morale and raised my self-esteem.

I once asked David, "What do I ever do for you?" and he replied, "Every time I spent time with you I am learning about autism all the time." Now that I understand myself the relationship has moved on into a more fun relationship. We go on lots of outings, for example: he took me to the Cadbury's chocolate factory for my birthday once; and when it wasn't my birthday, to places like the Kelvedon Bunker, Warwick Castle and Thorpe Park, just to name a very few. He visits me to play dominoes at my flat, or sometimes we go and play bingo at the local club. David has also taken me on overseas day trips. We've been to Calais on a ferry, and Paris and Brussels on the Eurostar. We also go on overnight trips, for example: we've been to North Norfolk, Brighton and Dudley. Without David all of this would not be possible and I feel very lucky and privileged to know him and have him in my life. He has really improved my depression and well-being and I would say our relationship is special. I wouldn't want a better mentor/life coach and quite frankly I don't think there is one.

Our relationship isn't just about David learning about autism and me being taken out everywhere — there's other things too. He's always pleased to see me; he always greets me with a smile; he's always extra nice and kind to me; and he understands me and my autism on a level that no-one else can match. He also listens and helps me with my problems.

You said you wanted to cover relationships — well I think our relationship is a special one, and I hope you publish this in *AU* because I would really like to share my happiness and positive experiences of living with autism and mental illness and let the readers know that if any of them think that there's no-one that can understand them, there is and he's out there.

Autistic like a fox

by **Todd-Fox the Yiffer**, 15 years going on 30

First I should explain what yiff is: yiff is a sexuality which involves the use of fur suits to impersonate animals that the person is like.

Why am I a yiffer? Well I guess I just fit in this community due to my fascination with cartoons and animals especially the fox, which I use as my avatar. Though most call us weirdos, I don't care, for finally I might meet a special friend I've always wanted.

Why am I like a fox? My point of view when it comes to socialising is similar to the fox. The simple rule I like to follow is: you can only have one true friend and must try to tolerate theirs.

When foxes find a mate they will stay just within contact distance and will only hang about with that particular fox. With human nature this is impossible, so I stretch to tolerating that person's friends and only show true attachment to my one true friend.

Other things you should know, in a list:

- 1) I have a tendency to think I'm always right and will prove my point if it kills me.
- 2) I try and smile but it's impossible. I laugh only at what some would say is a rude and sarky sense of humour (like Jimmy Carr).
- 3) Due to a bad past in school, being the person everybody wants to stick the knife into, I find it difficult to cope with large crowds and will withdraw to hiding in my foxhole (hood), which often gets me looked upon as a troublesome teen, which deeply offends me.

I would like this presentation published if possible but it is nice just to speak my mind and have a voice, for if you're quiet you are often ignored and trodden on by Social Services, which is why I now lack schooling and work at home.

Sex, sexuality and the autism spectrum

by **Wendy Lawson**

Jessica Kingsley Publishers £13.95 / \$19.95

ISBN: 978 1 84310 284 6

review by **the Goth**

This is a thorough book, taking the reader from a general consideration of ASC and sex education, then through exploring one's thoughts and feelings about relationships, what you want from them, and what others might want from you. Next she looks at being in a partnership, being comfortable with your sexuality, making your relationship work (for both of you), and finishing with a couple of chapters about the importance of

communication and more of her own experiences in relationships.

As with so many books aimed at people on the spectrum, it is a book that some will love and some will hate but most of us struggling with the desire to be in a relationship, or who are in a relationship, will be able to learn something from this book.

Thank you for sending me my copy of issue 54. David's short letter in issue 53 seems to have struck a major chord amongst your readers and attracted an unusually large response.

The overall tone of issue 54 seems slightly different from many earlier issues — there seems to be a greater input from people who are managing to "get on with their lives".

I wonder how many people are out there in the community, struggling with life as so many of us readers have struggled, but who have never heard of "the autistic spectrum".

I am not sure whether the NAS's *think differently* campaign intends to try to reach people who may be suffering in isolation, but it would be interesting to try a series of high-profile press adverts, describing some of the difficulties which many of us face, and inviting individuals who recognise something of themselves in the descriptions to get in touch. Many of us have said that just knowing the name of the condition from which we suffer helps us to deal with it, even though we get no help from the public services.

Kevin

The angry people

I look forward to receiving my copy of *AU*. It is always immensely gratifying to hear how others cope. Then, my heart drops as almost everyone is so angry; angry about the way they have been treated; angry about the world in general; angry about life itself.

Anger in the short term can be a source of great strength, a highly motivational tool. But in the long term, anger is highly debilitating, a sore that denies us the joy of living and realising any potential for good that we might otherwise express. Anger is a lonely place to be, denying us the chance to enjoy other people. We fail to attract others and hence start and maintain friendships.

I'm afraid it will be a very long time before scientists and the world in general will start to take notice and respond to females with complex conditions. Instead females are put on the mental health register. Simon Baron-Cohen has been a leading voice in autism for some time and he's not going to give up that role easily! Even Tony Attwood said in 1997 "girls are suffering in silence" but still nothing has been done about it! I've just found out that females are also missing out on diagnoses of ADHD. There must be lots of other diagnoses that they are missing out on too. It's indicative of how females are seen as less important than males. This is clearly a human-rights issue.

You can print that in your magazine if you like. I await *AU* with anticipation.

I don't really care if science proves me wrong or right. Just as long as they get the **** on with it.

Dale

I also believe that this undervaluation of females in western society is one of the biggest conspiracies in history!

I was angry too. In fact it wasn't until I was diagnosed, after the age of 50, that I really came to know what anger was. Having been able to take early retirement, largely as a result of my diagnosis, I have the luxury of reflecting and releasing all the pent-up emotions that have blighted my life.

I have no right to criticise others and others of me likewise. We, on the autistic spectrum, have so many skills and talents and a richness of experiences that I find it disappointing that we are in danger of forever being characterised as: the angry people.

Thank you for listening,

Ray



How to reply to Pen Pals

- Please remember to let us know the name and number of the person whom your letter is for. (All pen pals are numbered.)
- To contact a pen pal, please send your letter to *Asperger United*, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG.
- We will pass your letter on to the person you wish to contact. However, we cannot guarantee the person will reply as that is entirely their decision.
- Please note that all pen-pal letters sent via *Asperger United* are opened before being passed on.
- Those under the age of sixteen must have parental permission before placing a pen-pal advertisement in *Asperger United*.
- If you prefer, you could try the NAS pen-pal website, which is at www.assists.org.uk/penpal.html Please note that ASSIST (which runs the website) is entirely separate from *Asperger United*.

****Important notice — please read****

Asperger United is happy to publish pen-pal advertisements but we must stress that we are not a pen-pal or introduction organisation. We do not match people up and we cannot monitor letters (other than the first letter, that is sent via us) so please be cautious when releasing personal details in your letters. The National Autistic Society / *Asperger United* cannot intervene or be held responsible for any ensuing correspondence between letter-writers.

Pen pal number 29

Hello, my name is Mark. I am 33 years old and work as a gardener in Kent. My hobbies include swimming, going out to places. I also like to do things with the church, as I am a Christian, so I attend the mid-week meetings.

I enjoy doing artwork and printing my pictures on the computer. I would like to make friends with other Aspies as I live alone and am quite lonely at times. For instance, I would like someone to go on holiday with me and to be a special friend. I would be prepared to meet when I know you better.

I have my own flat and car.

Pen pal number 30

Hi my name is John. I'm 20 years old and live just outside of Norwich. I have been a confirmed Aspie since I was 15 and also have dyspraxia and dyscalculia. My interests and hobbies include history, sci-fi (Star Wars and Babylon 5 in particular, with some knowledge of Star Trek and Dr Who), watching DVDs and swimming. I would like to hear from anyone around my age (16-25), male or female, to write to and socialise with.

Pen pal number 31

Would you please put me in future pen pals, so I can receive some letters, thank you.

Dawn

Pen pal number 32

Hi, I'm Emily (age 24). I'd like to meet other LGBT Aspies to be pen pals with. (I'm not looking for dates but would just like to meet some other people in a similar situation.)

Thanks.

NB. LGBT — lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, Ed.

Pen pal number 33

Hi, my name is Edward. I'm 18 years old, I have High-Functioning Autism and I am looking for friends around my own age or a bit younger (16, 17) mainly in Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire area.

I go to a boarding school in Staffordshire and I stay some weekends, but my home is in Buckinghamshire.

I am very good at computing and spend quite a bit of time on the computer and I use MSN Messenger and e-mail too.

I like all kinds of different music, playing on the Xbox and I enjoy going shopping and visiting places.

I am finding it hard to have friends local to me as I go to boarding school, so if you would like to be my friend, please do let me know and give me your e-mail.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Pen pal number 34

I'm Ben, age 30 and would like to communicate with anyone interested in modern country music. In particular, Alan Jackson, George Strait, Garth Brooks, Miranda Lambert and many more. If you are a fellow country fan then please get in touch.

Pen pal number 35

Hi, my name is Jason, aged 19 and I live in Gloucestershire. I was diagnosed with Asperger's at age six.

I would like people to write to me to make lots of friends. My interests are watching Cheltenham Town FC and following football on TV. I also like playing computer games and going to the cinema.

I am very interested in watching documentaries and travelling to different places. I am doing General Foundation at college at the moment, but my goal for the future is to get a job.

Hope to hear from like-minded people soon.

Pen pal number 36

Hello, my name is Anna. I am 20 years old and I would like a female pen pal aged 30 years and above because I relate best with older women. I have just been referred to an ASD virtual team in order to get assessed for Asperger's syndrome. I have never had a proper long-term friendship.

I can be quite immature. I have explosive tantrums at home and consequently my parents get annoyed. However, I have intellectual interests that I feel set me apart from many people my own age who like to go clubbing, which I don't like because it is too loud and anxiety-provoking. I like quiet days and evenings listening to Radio Four and I am a great fan. I enjoy *Weekend Women's Hour*, *Check Up*, the *Food Programme*, the *World Tonight* and the *Today Programme*. I'm also interested in history, ballet and human biology. I often have serious obsessions and my current one is to do with autism/Asperger's and I am learning all about it. I am in my final year of university where I am imminently completing a history course. I am also receiving therapy for multiple phobias. I would love to hear from anyone.

Asperger meets girl: happy endings for Asperger boys

by Jonathan Griffiths

Jessica Kingsley Publishers £11.99 / \$16.95

ISBN: 978 1 84310 630 2

review by **the Goth**

Despite the title, both men and women will be able to learn some useful things from this book. It is a book which includes some humour, although it's written in a very difficult way: I'm not sure what's humour and what isn't. If it's just the things I found funny, then there are only three or four bits of humour in the book. I suspect there was more than that, which means that some of the rest of the book was humour but I don't know which bits — so I don't know which bits to take seriously, which is a problem. But there is very little on the market in the way of books on this subject, so it is a book worth reading.

The writer has his own view of what relationships are and why they are. I would argue with some of his beliefs about relationships but as a primer in how to win someone's heart I think it's more useful than any other book I've yet read. He appears to love mathematics so a lot of his way of talking

about relationships is by defining aspects of relationships as mathematical variables and manipulating those variables. If you're not mathematically minded, I think that could be quite a problem, even though he's tried to write it in a way that anyone could take. He's left too much of the weight of his description in the form of maths. I also wonder if this is actually useful, even for mathematicians.

The author sees rather straightforward, well-defined male and female roles, though some might find these stereotypes offensive. It has the advantage of being a short, very clearly written book, so apart from where the humour might confuse, it is packed with useful tips. He makes some very good points about why you can't be unambiguous, why things have to be left unsaid, and the effects that trying to be unambiguous have on people's decisions and how they feel — there are some very important lessons in this book.

All four books reviewed in this issue are on offer: please see the box on page 14.
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Decision-making in autism project

Researchers at the University of Cambridge are carrying out a survey to find out about the decision-making experiences of men and women on the autism spectrum. They are looking for men and women (aged 16 and over) who have a diagnosis of autism, High-Functioning Autism, Asperger syndrome or another ASC, as well as family members of adults with ASCs, to take part. The study

takes about thirty minutes to complete and all information will remain anonymous.

Complete the survey online at:
www.ldrg.org.uk/autismsurvey/ (enter the password "decision-making" at the prompt) or, to request a paper version, call Lydia Luke on **01223 746 100** or email **lrl29@medschl.cam.ac.uk**

My literary hero

by Ali

My favourite modern literary hero has to be Professor Severus Tobias Snape. Professor Snape is the Potions master in the Harry Potter books written by JK Rowling.

So what is it about Severus Snape that I admire so much? He is, after all, not supposed to be a handsome or charming man (although Alan Rickman the actor who plays him in the movies is handsome). He is described as being thin, angular, with sallow skin, a hooked nose and greasy, black hair. However, I like it that he is different and I also happen to love prominent and hooked noses anyway. His black eyes would be like two glittering obsidians, very beautiful.

Severus is sullen, bad tempered, sarcastic and harsh. He is strict and frightens the children so he is not a warm and inviting character. What I admire about him is that he has always been on the good side and protected Harry from the beginning from the Dark Lord Voldemort and his followers.

Severus Snape is very skilful and intelligent, and as the books unfold you learn that Severus has a traumatic childhood of poverty and neglect: he is a loner and his parents are always rowing. The sad and thoughtful boy child roams the streets of the mill workers' houses where he lives dressed in a very large adults overcoat, trousers that are too short and a white smock; imagine a little Oliver-Twist-like boy with coal black hair, a white face and huge black eyes and there is little Severus.

He finds it difficult to make friends and finally he befriends a girl of his own age called Lily who grows up to become Harry Potter's mother. Severus becomes obsessive in his friendship with her; he is intense and passionate and like Heathcliffe with Cathy.

He reminds me of myself and many other people on the autistic spectrum because forming a friendship is so difficult and then when one finally meets a soulmate one can get clingy and possessive.

Severus notices that Lily is magical just like he is. They both end up at Hogwarts school with James Potter (Harry's dad), Remus Lupin (the good werewolf), Sirius Black and Peter Petigrew (who turns traitor). Severus and Lily are best friends.

Severus is bullied because he is strange and sullen, he is very deep, loves his books and studies better than socialising, and is also fascinated by dark things. He is very like a young person with Asperger's syndrome, the class geek, the misfit who cannot fit in, cares little for his appearance and is obsessed with certain interests.

James Potter and his friends get their kicks out of bullying Severus the "odd ball" and Lily and Severus fall out over his interest in dark magic. One day, after a particularly humiliating and spiteful dose of bullying, Severus is rescued by Lily; he is all angry and defensive however and takes his anger out on poor Lily, the one he loves so much. Of course later on he feels very guilty and tries to apologise but she will not forgive him.

In his late teens Severus joins the dark side, again — like many friendless and lonely young people he is impressionable and easily led and gets in with a bad crowd. At last he is accepted and finally feels he has a family. This happens to the kids that get involved in extreme religious cults, gangs, drugs and crime.

Later Severus learns that the evil Lord Voldemort plans to kill Lily and James (who she has now married) and their baby son,

Harry. Severus is deeply hurt that Lily has married James — he hates him still from the days of school-boy bullying. He still loves Lily and, filled with remorse and sorrow, he goes to his old headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, to beg for forgiveness for joining the dark side, and he pleads for assistance to save Lily and her little family. Sadly Lily and James die but baby Harry survives.

Severus Snape promises Dumbledore that he will watch over Harry and this he does for his beloved Lily, he becomes a double agent, teaching Potions at the school and spying, convincing the dark side that he is with them but all the time spying for the good side. Snape is often seen as being a bad guy but in

book seven it all unfolds as he is tragically killed by Voldemort's snake, Nagini. Harry is witness to the murder and as Severus Snape dies he gives Harry his memories and the truth is revealed: he looks into Harry's green eyes, just like Lily's eyes, cries out "Look at me" and then breathes no more.

It is a very tragic and Byronesque ending to a sad and lonely life but I admire this fictional character for his bravery and courage. I found him to be a real soulmate because he has so many Aspie characteristics. Maybe in the world of fantasy and magic there is no Asperger's syndrome but I think there is and my Severus Snape was an Aspie and a very brave man.

Dear AU,

I have noticed whilst reading that you do book reviews and occasionally film reviews. However, it is my understanding that there is a considerable amount of Aspies that enjoy computer games, so what I am proposing is that you do a computer-game review, and I am more than happy to do them for you. I have the finances to buy them and I will send you the reviews I've done each time I get AU, so they can be published in the next issue. I would really appreciate it if you would allocate me a column.

Sorry, Dan, but AU doesn't offer space to anyone on a regular basis, and as most games have an online component, it may be better to post your reviews to one of the online forums.

For the techies out there: AU has a copy of the Games factory 2 (PC CD-ROM) to give away to whoever sends in (to the usual address) an A6 postcard with the largest number written on it (e-mail attachments and home-made cards accepted). As it is very unlikely that the correct answer will be submitted, the prize will go to the most interesting answer, Ed.

Assassins' creed

Rating 15

for Xbox 360, PS3

£45

review by **Dan**

Plot: the game is set in 2100. You are in an assassin's memory, reliving his experiences in the time 1100, and you are in Jerusalem primarily, but also in other cities. You are given targets to kill and you can usually do it in any style you want — you just have to worry about the guards . . .

Comments: I really like this game. The graphics are fantastic; if any of you have seen the advert for it, the graphics really are that good. The story part of it is annoying when you can only observe your character's conversations and you cannot do anything but wait until they are over, but the gameplay definitely makes up for it. A must-have as long as you like fighting games.

Affects of mild autism/ADHD problems on my family

Since being diagnosed with mild autism and ADHD problems in 2001 these things have been said about me:

1. Strange.
2. Funny.
3. Peculiar.
4. She's too nice to be autistic.
5. Who's that lunatic spinning round and round?
6. Do you think she's crazy?
7. Here comes the crazy girl!
8. Being laughed at because of the way I speak.
9. Being laughed at waiting for my taxi to take me to my special school because I go to that school and I wear a different uniform from them.
10. That I was called ignorant because I didn't move out of a man's way quick enough. When he was given a card explaining why, he threw it on the ground, so who was ignorant?
11. Someone saying that my humming and singing annoyed them.

Things I have said and done:

1. Telling strangers they are fat!
2. I said "Hello boy!" to a workman who came to our house.
3. Going up to someone and saying "What is your name?" right in their face.
4. Meeting an adult we all knew well at the bus stop and then seeing them in town again and saying "Oh no, not you again!"
5. Jumping onto a stranger's lap.
6. Cuddling strangers.
7. Putting my leg across the lap of a boy at the theatre.
8. Telling a lady in the hairdressers that "Your hair will turn blue!" while she was having it permed or coloured.
9. When I started the junior school, the deputy head teacher said she was useless at playing the piano in an

assembly. A minute later I shouted out, "Miss Leggett useless!" I was repeating what she said and I do not understand why I should not have shouted this out because she said she was useless.

10. When I was at the junior school I was asked with my class to think of words finishing in "ard", I shouted out "bastard!" It is a word ending in "ard" and I do not understand why I should not say that word and I do not know what it means.

These are things people who really know me have said and done for me:

1. Rhiannon's really nice, why is everyone horrible to her?
2. A girl in my class in the junior school wanted to know why I would not be going to secondary school with them because "she is clever" and "she thinks of things we'd never think of."
3. The youth club leader said we should celebrate autism because this makes who Rhiannon is. She is good at arts and crafts and that we should encourage this talent. You also know nothing about autism until you live with someone or deal with that person all the time.
4. A girl I had never met before made me a card saying how much she liked my singing at a craft day I went to.
5. When I left the junior school my class made me a card of sweets in the shape of a house with photographs of each of them and they also made me home-made cards.

I am now 11 years old and anyone who really knows me knows what a nice person I am. I live with an invisible disability called autism/ADHD. It is ignorance and lack of understanding that makes people behave the way they do to me.

Why read poetry?

Lots of us on the spectrum like to think that words have specific meanings that can be looked up in dictionaries and that anyone who doesn't use words this way is wrong. Some may find this view reassuring, but it is not the truth. By definition, dictionaries are compiled from a body of documents called a corpus, which literally means "body". The dictionographer decides what goes into the corpus to make it representative of all the writing and recording in the language. (Dictionaries are said to be "descriptivist" because they do not judge the language. In contrast, lexicons are "prescriptivist" and are free to include the opinions of the lexicographer.) Then they go through every word in the corpus and list what it is used to mean, including when it is misused. They usually comment on uses that they feel are uncommon in any way, including new misuses, but once a misuse is common it is in the dictionary just like any other word. This is all just an autistic way of saying: language is fluid.

I write poetry. I don't write very good poetry, but I enjoy the challenge of trying to use language at its most fluid. This is the fundamental heart of poetry, the core of the Earth. Poetry is not obscure or personal any more than any other writing is obscure or personal, it just chooses to ask the reader to think about what was written in order to get the reader to delve deeper into meaning. Often, a poem can say something that it is impossible to say in prose — similarly, a novel can say something about the human condition that it is impossible to say in a factual book; by definition, a novel should be more than just a story, although people tend to use the word loosely. A poem can say in a single sentence what would take an entire book to try to say in prose. Look at this poem (from *the Poetry of Robert Frost*, edited by Edward Connery Lathem, published by Jonathan Cape. Reprinted by permission of the Random House Group Ltd):

Fire and Ice

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

What are fire and ice? I see that they are emotions in the breakup of the relationship which is described in the verse, but that is not the only thing that they are. The poem has at least three meanings. I find it fascinating that meanings can be so intricately interwoven, but it is not just poets who do this: people constantly use words, tone and body language to express different meanings. To say that people should mean what they say is to miss out on much of the meaning. It can be hard work understanding what these meanings are, but it is also where much of the joy of language lies. I know that sometimes I need clear meaning because I am too stressed to cope with thinking about meaning; I suspect others are the same. What needs to change is the stress we are put under, nothing else.

We on the spectrum often have great difficulty learning how to spot non-surface readings. We also struggle to appreciate poetry; I feel this is a shame and a missed opportunity, as the skills associated with finding deeper meanings are useful in helping us to understand the layered meanings of conversation (and indeed most other forms of communication). We have a strong tendency to follow only the literal meaning of the words used, ignoring tone of voice, facial expression and body language — where, of course, the actual meaning of the conversation is usually expressed.

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*Love, sex and long-term relationships:
what people with Asperger syndrome really, really want*

by Sarah Hendrickx

Jessica Kingsley Publishers £13.99 / \$19.95, ISBN: 978 1 84310 605 0

Well-written, rare subject on sex for people with Asperger syndrome. Sarah has a partner who has AS so she is speaking from lots of experience. A very good couple of pages on finding a partner and sensory perception and solitude. Masturbation: is must-read couple of pages; very daring Talking about this deserves an award.

So, you've managed to progress from the online communities through the herd comfort of other Aspies in the train- (or plane-) spotter groups . . . and now you want to learn how to find, charm and keep that real, live, special "someone". Well, here's the book that can help you to do it!

Most Aspies have very limited knowledge regarding how best to establish or conduct sexual relationships. This book makes use of extensive research conducted by Sarah and enables people with AS to discuss their desires, needs and preferences in their own words. Attitudes to gender, sexual identity and infidelity are included, together with positive advice on developing relationships and exploring options and choices for sexual pleasure.

Sensory difficulties in relationships are also discussed, and I found this particularly useful as it explained some of the "hang-ups" I have personally experienced in relationships. Eureka — especially with

Stories are from real people with AS. I feel more people with AS were needed to take part. Also there are people like myself who do not have the Internet, fax or e-mail, who would have liked to have taken part. I have written by post to Sarah; no reply.

Review by **Mark**

certain perfumes! (Apologies for this poor excuse for a joke) Sexual relationships for Aspies are often discussed in the pages of *AU*, and I was interested to read in this book that men with AS have their first sexual experience much later than the NT average whilst women with AS generally have it in their early teens — quite probably because they have been manipulated by others. Also noted is the fact that a significant number of Aspies never have sex.

Women with AS are generally perceived as being more "tomboyish", whilst men with the condition are seen as being less "macho" than their NT peers — and are often more attractive to NT women as a result. Finally, the book ends with a list of "handy hints for good sexual relationships" which will be handy for both people with AS and their NT partners. In conclusion, if you have AS and you're in a relationship (or want to be) then this is the book for you.

Review by **Neil**

All four books reviewed in this issue (on pages 5, 9, 14 and 15) are available from Central Books Ltd, the book distributor for the NAS, tel: **0845 458 9911**, or on line at **www.autism.org.uk/pubs** and from all good bookshops.

Special offer to readers of *Asperger United*: normally postage and packing costs £3.95 on book orders but readers of *AU* can get copies post-free until 31 August 2008. Just send your order with a cheque made payable to the NAS — address on page 2.

Alone together: making an Asperger marriage work

by Katrin Bentley

Jessica Kingsley Publishers £12.99 / \$19.95, ISBN: 978 1 84310 537 4

review by Alison and Jay

We are a couple, and Jay has High-Functioning Autism. *Alison's part of this review is in italics.*

The book looks at every part of the author's relationship, from meeting for the first time to the present. It takes the reader through a number of key events in their relationship, and tries to make sense of them and suggest ways of dealing with some of the problems.

This is a very open account of the difficulties experienced in a relationship and the perseverance that can be needed to make it work. Given the variety, and severity, of the problems described, I sense that it may have been as cathartic to write as it is helpful to read. The sense of hurt and confusion that has been present during the marriage comes through clearly, but at the same time, the author has managed to look objectively at her experiences and describe useful approaches to addressing problems that arise. I particularly valued the examination of how we can, often inadvertently, seek to sap the energy of others in our desperate need to renew our own, and the ideas for how to avoid doing this.

I found the author's description of AS rather inaccurate. I think it's fairer to say she was describing her husband. For example, she says that AS people respond best to compliments. This is certainly not true of me: I find compliments difficult to deal with; they are a real energy sapper. This happens: my head fills with thoughts; I struggle to find an appropriate response. Memories of times when the compliment would be completely inappropriate come into mind, someone says "you look very smart", I think of a time when

I was definitely not looking smart. Throughout the book, however, it is generally a very good description of what goes on in my head, and seems to be written from a usefully understanding point of view. I have no idea of what she means by a white-board, which is something she refers to several times — the white-boards we had at school don't seem to be what she means. At various points she talks about conversation both in groups and as a couple: her description of her husband's feeling in a group seems very similar to my understanding of all conversations, which is why I don't think she is describing something particular to couples. I struggle to find a space in the day, in the interaction, where I can start speaking about something, if I want to speak about something. That may be because I don't feel comfortable enough to say what I'm thinking and feeling, or because I can't properly express it there's something else, not necessarily more important, but which is filling my head more. I think Alison is the same, it's not an autistic thing.

I often wonder about the fact that neurotypical behaviour resembles Asperger behaviour when the neurotypical person is stressed. It makes me wonder how much of the indicative behaviour of Asperger's is just stress, not typical of Asperger's per se.

For me, one of the main messages I took from the book was that, despite all our good intentions, we don't best meet others' needs by swamping or ignoring our own. Rather the emphasis should be on endeavouring to understand more about what each of us requires in order to cope — with day-to-day life, with the wider world, and most importantly, with each other.

Request for volunteers

Richard Mills (NAS) and Professor Declan Murphy (Institute of Psychiatry, London) are looking for male volunteers with ASC between 11 and 35 years of age to participate in a research project. Many thanks to everyone who has contacted us so far about joining the project — we've had a huge response. So far, over thirty-five people have participated in this and a related project. However, we're hoping to include still more people in the project! This project is studying areas that cause difficulties for some people with ASC, such as decision making, impulsivity, motivation and planning. We hope that this work will help us to better understand and develop ways of helping people with these problems.

We are paying participants for their help, and travel expenses.

The study involves playing three computer games during a fMRI brain scan, and some questionnaires. The brain scan is a painless procedure with no known side-effects. If you would like to register for the project, please email either:

richard.mills@nas.org.uk

or

clodagh.murphy@iop.kcl.ac.uk.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call Dr Clodagh Murphy (Institute of Psychiatry, **020 7848 0938**). Many thanks for your help.

Do you have Asperger syndrome or High-Functioning Autism?

The UK MRC AIMS network is the first autism research network in the UK, made up of the Institute of Psychiatry and the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford and is supported by the National Autistic Society. The AIMS (Autism Imaging Multicentre Study) Project is investigating brain structure, to try and answer important questions asked by individuals with autism spectrum disorders, such as:

"Is my brain different from other people's brains?"

"Is that related to some of the things I do?"

Taking part in this project involves

completing some questionnaires at home, then visiting one of our research sites, where you will complete some games and tasks, have a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) brain scan, and a DNA sample will also be collected.

To take part you must be male, aged 18 to 45 years, and right-handed.

You will be paid £60 for your participation and any travel expenses will be reimbursed.

If you would like to hear more about this project, or to take part, please contact:

The Aims Team on **01865 226 383** or email **project.aims@iop.kcl.ac.uk**



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