

Produced by and for people with autism-spectrum conditions

# Asperger *united*

Edition **61** January 2010





*Asperger United* is a magazine run by and for adults with autism-spectrum conditions (although some parents subscribe on behalf of their under-sixteens). The magazine 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: no extra fee, please get in touch.

**Editor** the Goth

**Additional support** The National Autistic Society's Publications Department

**Please send all correspondence and subscription requests to:**

*Asperger United*  
c/o The National Autistic Society  
393 City Road  
London EC1V 1NG  
Tel: 020 7903 3595  
Fax: 020 7833 9666  
Email: [asp.utd@nas.org.uk](mailto:asp.utd@nas.org.uk)

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  
15 February '10

*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, John Joyce and the current editor, the Goth (who does not wear black).

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.



**Welcome** to the first edition of 2010 and to the first edition from your new editor. Although the Goth is new to the post of editor, he, that is, I have been producing *AU* for over four years. I will sign myself "Editor" or "Ed." in the magazine when writing in my official capacity, "the Goth" when responding as a subscriber.

Surprisingly, just twelve responses have been received regarding the possible changes to *AU*, so I hope that the vast majority of people are happy to see some experimental changes in the magazine. Once you have had a chance to comment on the changes, you will get another chance to voice any objections before we decide whether to make them permanent.

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## Turning a relationsh\*t into a relationship

part one of two

by Paolo

This article analyses HOW and WHY relationships are so turbulent and eventually fail and WHAT can be done to turn them around. I argue that the problems and eventual ending of relationships start from entering them for the WRONG reasons and that these reasons centre around trying to GET something out of them for self-fulfillment. I then look at what can be done to turn relationships around when entering them with an authentic aim of GIVING something to the relationship. I show that by coming to a relationship with this “for-giving” aim, these can iron out “for-getting” issues of trust, power struggles, expectations, limits, and confusions as to who you really are and who you really want to BE in regards to a relationship.

\*\*\*\*\*

If we were to condense into one reason WHY relationships (and to an extent friendships also) have so many problems, I think it's because people don't (and have forgotten how to) love themselves and instead fear their selves as a person. This in my view causes the person to expect the other person to give them:

- Reactions
- Trust
- Attention
- Self-confidence
- Self-worth
- Excitement
- Drama

Other reasons in my view include one's culture rendering these above issues normal

and thus legitimizing/normalizing the actions (causing a self-fulfilling prophecy about the actions) and secondly the distortion of love through soaps and magazines (love today is portrayed very differently to how it was sixty years ago!). I therefore feel it's pretty much all a messy and pointless game of love-trade transactions between two people who are trying to know what it is the other is looking for in a relationship.

I think this therefore causes people to enter relationships for the WRONG reasons. HOW you may ask? Quite simply, I feel we go into a relationship with an eye toward what we can GET OUT of them. This includes to end loneliness, stop depression, bring ourselves love and to improve our sex life; ie. we move into a relationship to fill our needs and desires.

I feel this causes all sorts of problems in the relationship. This is WHAT I think happens as outlined below:

Instead of thinking about ourselves, we think about the other, causing the other in the relationship to become an obsession. This causes “love sickness”. This is when the other is told they are loved and think it's a manipulation, and so they ask you to prove it, even by changing your behaviour. When they do believe you love them, they worry about how long they can love you, so they change their behaviour to hold on to your love. Both people thus lose themselves — this is what causes the most trouble in relationships (they feel less in themselves). This is a perfect example of when love is a response to need fulfilment. Then the moment we stop getting

out of the relationship what we imagine we would, we want to get out of the relationship and thus the relationship eventually ends.

Looking at all of the above, I feel these are the things that can therefore be done to tackle all of the above issues:

If you like someone, instead of liking them to get something from having a relationship with them, GIVE/PUT something into their life that would make them feel good and eventually love their “self” again. The results are even better when you have learned to love your self first before doing this. Unless they are perfect, no one is not going to want to know you if you turn up in their life this way. If both gave something to each other then the relationship would be bliss, although the case is normally that one of the persons is disillusioned with their self. Now obviously, most people approach a relationship with one eye to get something for themselves with the other person doing the same. Although things will be good at first, the point is that we are talking about shredding the pointless stupid arguments that we have seen above that start from the pressures of meeting one another’s expectations of what they want from each other shortly after a relationship starts with this aim. That creates strain and eventually breaks the relationship as we have also just seen.

As well as having an aim to give, I think we also need to be equally specific and then take whatever shows up, when leading to a relationship. Don’t live your whole life out of your expectations of relationships with people otherwise there won’t be a balance. Step away from what something should specifically look like, but instead focus on what your ideas about the relationship are in the moment. Step away from everything in life being a certain way or fitting any prior pictures/moulds of a person. Differences create balance. Thus have some ideas/specifics about what you are looking for but at the same time leave

yourselves wide open and not caught up in expectations — thus try the unexpected since what you are looking for may be right under your nose — hence open your eyes. Leave room for perfection to be created and discard those rigid and specific requirements — thus letting go and living a life without expectation since love is a decision, not a reaction as love is unconditional, not conditional. It comes from us to put into someone, not to take from someone.

I also think when proceeding into a relationship, you need to ask yourself, what do I want here, not what does the other person want here (who do you want to be in this situation, for example do you want to be loving, caring etc?). To help someone, wake them up and remind them who they are (empower them), ie. re-mind their “selves”. People tend to see in themselves what we see in them — use this process in a relationship to allow them to “let go” of every false thought they’ve ever had about themselves. This can be done by reminding them of who they are by remembering who you are at the same time.

But I would be careful in making sure your help creates independence, not dependence (don’t dis-empower) to create a compulsion. Thus put/give something to the relationship as a means of noticing who you really are and not of extracting from it what you wish to receive. Thus make sure what you put into it is authentic and not something which denies/hides the real you in the relationship. Don’t try and give up/hide a part of yourself so that they don’t leave you or won’t love you. If the real you isn’t sufficient/attractive enough to keep that person, let them leave. Someone will come into your life and find the authentic you attractive enough. When they come into your life out of their response to your authenticity, they will stay and hence you won’t have to keep your act going in order to keep them in your life. Remember, when someone walks out, there’ll be fifty more behind ready to walk in.



## letters to the editor

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**Dear Editor,**

re adults with AS (late diagnosis). I love my diagnosis: suddenly everything makes sense! To *me*.

Everyone else, however, acts as if I've joined some strange cult: it's just an excuse, there's no such thing (as Asperger's), I need to pull myself together, what is it *now*?... I am wishing I had never "come out" with it.

**Hi to all,**

I'm female, and I was diagnosed with Asperger's a few months ago . . . at the age of 58. I first came across the condition in an article in the magazine *New Scientist* in April 2001. This article, by the Cambridge research team led by Simon Baron-Cohen, proposed a list of ten questions, and invited anyone who could answer "yes" to all ten to write in and perhaps take part in the research. I scored eight, and two possibles.

I did not take this further at the time because I feared that if I went to my GP and said something like "I've seen this article and I think I may have AS" he would have told me to stop wasting his time. However, last year I was made redundant, and while looking around for ways of updating my skills to get back into work, I went to visit Learndirect. Here I saw a leaflet about dyslexia, so I enquired about AS, and they suggested I try the Autistic Spectrum Quiz (ASQ) devised by Baron-Cohen. I scored 36, which strongly suggested AS.

So I printed out my results and took them to my GP, explaining how I had found out about the ASQ. He was willing to take it further, and referred me to a clinical psychologist, who confirmed the diagnosis.

Since then I have been exploring the condition and exploring myself! I keep having moments when I think "oh, so *that's* why that has been happening . . ." followed often by a

Even Asperger courses, conferences and support groups are for delegates, parents and carers but never, in my experience, for adults with Asperger's.

My GP, community health nurse and (private) clinical psychologist confirm the diagnosis but are not helping me with what next? Can any of your readers?

**Sam**

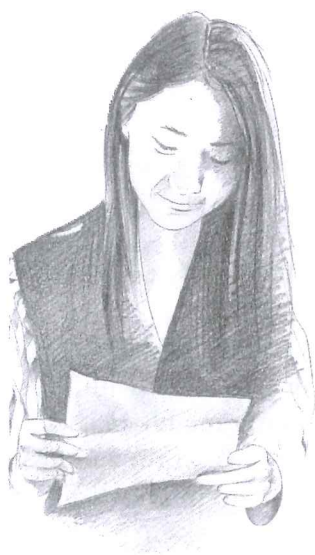
feeling of "if only I'd known I could have been saved a lot of grief".

The letter from Igor in issue 57, mentioning that his psychiatrist called him "evil", struck a particular chord. My family has never been happy with me. My mother in particular seemed to resent me from a very early age, even telling me at one point that she wished she had never had me. I was completely bewildered because I had no idea what I was doing wrong. Family members called me heartless, evil, uncaring, even mad. Teachers and doctors thought I was neglecting my children because I did not *APPEAR* upset when they were ill.

If only someone had sat down with me and talked to me about this — but they didn't. Instead, they started trying to scare me, to frighten me, in attempts to shock some sort of reaction out of me. When I realised what they were doing — but not why — it made me very angry, and I resolved to ignore all such attempts. My feelings are not a Roman circus!

So please, to all you neurotypicals out there: don't, please, try to "shock" us into a response. It doesn't work and only makes matters worse, closing us in on ourselves even more. If you think someone is acting oddly, don't take it personally, don't condemn them, don't punish them. TALK to them. If you feel you can't do that yourself, get a doctor or a priest or a good friend to do it — but DO IT.

**Julie**



# 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 by the editor, not the person who sends in the advert.)
- 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](http://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 66

**Hi, my name is Geoff**, 66 years old, diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome. I live in Lincolnshire, I enjoy trying to make friends, and a lot of my closest friends/family have sadly passed away, so I get quite lonely. I live alone with my dog, a cocker spaniel. I like home life and general DIY tasks, going out occasionally to socialise, I am also a smoker, and would welcome letters from anyone and perhaps to meet up occasionally.

Thank you kindly

**Geoff**

## Pen pal number 67

**I'm looking for a pen pal**, still meet up someday. My main interests are paranormal, keeping fit, and working with animals, socialise and doing business.

Yours faithfully

**JRC Ferguson**

PS. I want to be there and support anyone who suffers from AS or autistic disorder.

### **Lars and the real girl**

directed by **Craig Gillespie**, screenplay by **Nancy Oliver**

DVD review by **Elkie**

The story takes place in a small town in the north of Sweden. Lars lives in the converted outhouse of his parental property, while his older brother with his pregnant wife occupies the main building. Lars works in an office and attends the local church, but otherwise he lives a rather secluded life. He does not like to follow invitations or respond to the attempts of match-making from people in the community. However, their constant pressure to find a partner leads one day to Lars ordering a life-size doll on the Internet and convincing himself that she is real. Thanks to the advice of the local GP, the whole community goes along with Lars' delusion and the doll in her wheelchair helps Lars to get more involved with people.

Right through the film, Lars very convincingly displays typical features of

Asperger syndrome, like his highly organised life with unmovable routines, his hypersensitivity to touch, noise and visual stimuli, his interaction (or lack of it) with colleagues, church and family members and his general interpretation of the world and his life in it. In many ways I found in Lars a mirror of myself.

What makes the film even more valuable is the change of attitude Lars and his girl bring about in their community, initiated by the GP. The typical small-town narrowmindedness is transformed step by step, culminating in everybody's sincere participation at the girl's funeral, once she had fulfilled her mission.

I thoroughly recommend this film to anyone looking for a positive approach to Asperger syndrome and inclusion.

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### **Sex and hugs**

by **Daniel**

I'm not looking for fame  
But to remember your name  
I can do dates  
But not names  
I can do hugs  
But not sex  
I like you  
I can't sit  
For when I sit I feel that greed will consume me  
I fear I will want all of you at once  
This is too much for me  
So let's call it a date  
By the way, what's your name?

## A painful gift

the journey of a soul with autism

by Christopher Goodchild

with illustrations by Julie Lonneman

ISBN: 978 0 232 52758 2

£12.95

published by Darton, Longman and Todd

review by Mary

Chris Goodchild was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome when he was in his forties. For him, as for many others diagnosed in adult life, the diagnosis led to him being able to understand the distress he had experienced throughout his life. In this beautifully illustrated book he tells his story.

Chris had a very difficult passage through childhood and adolescence, experiencing cruelty, rejection and abuse from people he would have expected to be able to trust. In adulthood, not knowing why he was finding social situations overwhelming, he developed skill as an Alexander technique teacher. In his work he was able to relate to people in the very formalised encounter of teacher and client.

His spiritual life was enriched by meeting and studying with a spiritual director, who showed him how much the Catholic contemplative tradition could help him.

Chris's love for his young son and his realisation that he found it hard to bear the love his son gave him brought him to the point where he realised he had to find out what was preventing him being able to accept it. The diagnosis of Asperger syndrome was a revelation, and he became aware that this condition is truly a gift.

The illustrations in the book are woodcuts of the Stations of the Cross by Julie Lonneman.

One by one these preface each chapter, with a brief personal prayer relating to the events of his life Chris describes next.

I found the book very moving, a very good introduction to how autism can affect a person. It gave me a lot to think about the nature of suffering, what we share with one another as fellow beings, how accepting love is one of the hardest things.

The books reviewed on pages 9 and 15, are available from Central Books, the book distributor for the NAS, tel: **0845 458 9911**, on line at [www.autism.org.uk/pubs](http://www.autism.org.uk/pubs) and can be ordered from all good bookshops. **Special offer:** readers can get copies of these two books post-free until 28 February 2010.

Just send your order with a cheque made payable to:

The NAS  
393 City Road  
London  
EC1V 1NG

## Connect

the adult Asperger's syndrome user group in the Wirral

(supported by Wirral Mind)

advert by Charles

Do you feel marginalised, alone and alienated from society?

If you are an adult diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, then a new support group is available for you.

We aim to give practical help, support and advice.

You will be able to meet others, make new

friends and improve your social skills in a safe friendly environment and be encouraged to live life to the full.

For more information please contact Gill Kenwright at Wirral Mind

Tel: **0151 512 2200** and  
**ask for extension 109**

Email: **support@wirralmind.org.uk**

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## Design a Christmas card for the NAS!

Once again, the National Autistic Society is running a competition for adults on the autism spectrum to design a Christmas card for its Christmas 2010 range.

Your design should have a Christmas theme and the size should be at least 210mm by 210mm (but it doesn't have to be square). Avoid using shiny colours and objects such as gold, silver and coloured foils in collage work as these are difficult to reproduce. Do not fold your design.

Please write your name, age, address and the title of your design on the reverse of your design. You can send your design by post to:

Christmas Card Design Competition  
Publications Department  
The National Autistic Society  
393 City Road  
London  
EC1V 1NG

Or you can submit your design in digital format by email to:

**publications@nas.org.uk**

If you submit your design digitally, the resolution of your design must be at least 300dpi (dots per inch). If you email your design, please include your name, age, address and the title of your design in the email.

You must be aged 16 or over to enter the competition. The closing date is

**15 February 2010**

The National Autistic Society is not able to return entries.

The NAS is also running a competition for under-sixteens to design a Christmas card. For more information about this competition go to **autism.org.uk/christmascardcompetition**

## The body language phrasebook

500 ways to read the signs

by Nick Marshallsay

ISBN: 978 0 68104 552 1

£12.99

Collins & Brown publishers

review by **Alain**

Hi all, I wanted to bring to your attention this book I discovered. It's called *the Body language phrasebook: 500 ways to read the signs*, and I think it could be very useful in the study of how people with autism and Asperger's syndrome read, or can learn to read, body language.

It was written by a former salesman in Australia who now specialises in helping people improve their communication skills (tone of voice, gestures and eye contact). It was written as a guide to body language as used in business and social contact and because some of the signs in it are very, very basic it was criticised by some reviewers for being overly simple. I disagree.

The research into autism that I have taken part in has consisted mainly in the study of reading facial expressions, not taking into account other factors such as how people stand or sit, or how they use their hands when talking, all of these things are crucial factors in communication. As the book reminds us, only 7% of people's opinions of us are formed by the words and 55% comes from our body language.

The book itself is an all-colour picture book. It runs to 288 pages with an introduction and subject index and in between, on colour-coded chapters, chapters on different

aspects of body language ranging from basic general signs, signs of dominance or submission or sexual signals. The way each sign is explained is through using a photograph for each sign (a person standing, gesturing, making a facial expression or any combination of the three), along with a caption explaining its meaning, possible origins, and how a sign might have different meanings in other countries and cultures (apart from the English-speaking worlds of the UK, USA and Australia). Some of these signs are just basic facial expressions, but most are accompanied by standing or hand signals that might alter or amplify their meaning.

The author takes care to point out that body language is complex and subtle, and that the clues he lays out should only be considered in the context of a given situation and the presence of other body language signals. The way the book is broken down and how the signals are explained makes it very easy to digest, either reading the book from end to end or dipping into it from time to time like you would a dictionary.

The book is available on Amazon (UK site) [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk), where it is available at a discount. If you're a researcher, person on the autistic spectrum or anyone involved with the AS world in any way, I would definitely recommend this book as worth looking up.

### The North Somerset strategy group for adults with ASD

**My name is Ben** and I represent adults with autism on the Strategy Group. The group was set up to help develop an adult autism strategy for North Somerset and includes representatives from the council, the NAS, the primary care trust (NHS), representatives of care providers, people like me with autism and their carers.

I am 28 and I was diagnosed with Asperger's when I was 18. I live in Weston-super-Mare with my two dogs and I do voluntary work. Until recently I received minimal support from social services. Before moving into my new address I received help from my local GP, my home care services, private counselling arranged through my GP

and support from Carr-Gomm and Advance Housing. I've had also minimal support from the local police force when I became a constant victim of hate crime at my previous address.

I hope in my new role to be able to tell the group what issues are important to people like me in North Somerset and let the council know what services we need to make life easier in this area. I've had trouble in the past getting help when I needed it and I'd like to stop that happening to other people in the future.

If you live in North Somerset and want your voice heard, email me at **ASDsupport2009@aol.com**

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### The Autistic Rights Movement UK

advert by **Russell**

ARM UK is the first UK national organisation run and controlled entirely by autistic people.

It is a not-for-profit, unincorporated voluntary association. It is a membership organisation. It is not a charity.

It is a campaigning organisation which aims to:

- advance the interests of autistic people and ensure the enforcement of their civil and human rights
- raise awareness of autism and educate the general public and government bodies
- involve autistic people in the commissioning, design, delivery and evaluation of all services used by autistic people.

It will establish regional and local Autistic Rights organisations and bring them together into a national network.

It promotes:

- the involvement and engagement of autistic people in statutory-sector strategic planning at all levels and in all areas
- positive autistic identities and to oppose negative stereotypes
- the social model of disability
- the recognition that there is a "hierarchy of disabilities" and consequent "hierarchy of equalities" and to promote the abolition of such inequity
- social inclusion and independent living
- the concept of "neurodiversity".

Telephone: **0191 259 6384**

Text: 07810 170 846

Website: **www.autisticrightsmovementuk.org**

E-mail: **info.armuk@goolemail.com**

Dear Editor,

I was so appalled to read the accounts of Aspies crushed in the name of God, in edition 60, I felt that it is my *duty* to offer them the “psychic lifebelt” known as Contributionism, the brainchild of old-Redhillian Alan Moelwyn-Wright. He may be a real person with a distressing stigma whose privacy is protected by fictionalisation of his personal details. So I am appending an explanation of the genesis of Contributionism in the hope that you will allow me to submit accounts of it,

yours faithfully,

David

### Contributionism: a psychic lifebelt?

I was diagnosed with AS at age 62. As early as age 9, in 1950, I saw a yawning disparity between my parents’ religion and the world I was growing into. My parents practised Thomas-the-Tank-Engine Christianity — that is, Christian dogma at a reading age of 7. My short story *Saint James the less* has the boy of 10 meet the man I was to become in 1984.

In 1953, I was dared to commit pranks with a sexual element and I was expelled. This inflicted inextirpable irrational guilt which was greatly worsened by chronic unemployment. My father made me out to be flawed from head to toe. My very name stank of abject ignominy. I was sent to Red Hill Remedial School which moulded my character.

Following a narrow escape from a railway accident I had a major row with my father who insisted that God had contrived me to miss the doomed 7:43 from Hastings that was preordained to crash at Hither Green to warn the world that *He is in charge*. I was so sickened by his claptrap that I should repent and attend Church regularly and go to bed at 9 PM sharp! So I created a plausible myth about Alan, aka. the Socrates of Charford.

Alan *may be* the pseudonym of a real old Redhillian. He dares to invent a better code of behaviour than Christian morality after *he too* misses that 7:43 train in 1967. *He too* was taught to question the wisdom of our elders, so his brainchild, Contributionism, amounts to a moral *Highway Code* as logical as arithmetic.

Contributionism incorporates de Chardin’s idea that humans are cells in God’s brain, so it is possibly definable as a religion. In also incorporating the Pelagian heresy, that we *do not* need to pray to God, and the concept of reincarnation in parallel universes, it is arrant heresy to Christians and has landed me in trouble for expounding its tenets.

When I took up climbing lofty mountains, I underwent a metamorphosis which I describe in many of my literary works. I also underwent convulsive paradigms shifts at Red Hill. When I was maimed I had to redefine myself and a decisive moment was the ascent of Cader Idris with false leg. I call this change of life-perspective “growing dragon’s wings”. All of us can view society as from aloft, so we see through the myths, lies and half-truths forced on us by the people in power.

I would earnestly wish to liberate Neil and all the others, who were squashed in the name of God, by taking them on excursions to the wild beauty in Fife, and teaching them my hobbies. As a young man living in London, every Sunday I went on hikes along then-just-closed railways where I would melt into the landscape and unravel my mind.

Following an assault in my home, I am so traumatised that I want to move to a quiet cathedral city environment, perhaps Dorchester, there to set up exactly the supportive community which Alan operates. If I was to set up a supportive community at Prince Charles’s eco-town of Poundbury near Dorchester many Aspies could reach me from London and nearby. Then at last I could play Plato to Alan’s Socrates and provide a psychic lifebelt to all.

## Social comparisons, social support and mental health in adults with Asperger's syndrome

research findings from **Rachael Blood**

following the advert in *AU*

Trainee Clinical Psychologist, Oxford Doctoral Course in Clinical Psychology

This study aimed to examine whether social factors, such as social comparisons and social support, affected the mental health of adults with Asperger's syndrome (that is, whether there was a relationship between social comparisons, social support and mental health). (Social comparison is the ability to compare your opinion and achievements with others, and social support refers to support received from your social network, for example, family, work/college, health professional, and so on).

The study also aimed to examine whether age affected the mental health of adults with Asperger's syndrome (that is, whether there was a relationship between age and mental health). Current age (for example, is there a time in life when a person might be more vulnerable to mental

health difficulties) and the age of diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome were examined.

The study involved completing an Internet-based questionnaire. In total, 135 adults with Asperger's syndrome took part in the study.

In terms of the main outcomes, there were no relationships between age and mental health. Therefore, an individual's life-stage (for example, early adulthood) did not make them more vulnerable to mental health difficulties. Also, those who had been diagnosed during childhood did not differ in their levels of mental health when compared with those diagnosed in adulthood.

There were relationships between the social factors

and mental health. Those who had poorer social support had more symptoms of mental health difficulties. Also, those who made social comparisons that indicated that they felt different to others had higher levels of mental health difficulties.

In conclusion, this study indicates that services will need to address social support issues in order to improve mental health. The study also demonstrates that those with Asperger's syndrome and mental health difficulties may benefit from therapeutic work which will explore their social comparisons.

Finally, I would like to express my sincerest thanks to all of those who have taken part, who included at least 55 subscribers to *Asperger United*. Your help is very much appreciated.

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If sufficient material is sent in, the theme for April will be **living** and the problems we have with it. Writing on any subject is still welcome, so get writing! (Cover art is also welcome.)

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## **Theory of mind and the triad of perspectives on autism and Asperger's syndrome**

by **Olga Bogdashina**

ISBN: 978 1 84310 361 5

£19.99 / \$ 36.95

Jessica Kingsley publishers

review by **Neil**

Theory of mind is the ability to imagine and make judgments about what others feel and think; its absence in autistic individuals has been termed "mindblindness" by Professor Simon Baron-Cohen. Uniquely, this book addresses the problem that there are multiple different perspectives as far as AS and other ASDs are concerned, by first defining autism then examining the perspectives of people with ASDs, their parents and professionals under the headings of classifications, diagnosis, causes, development theories and treatment. By comparing and contrasting the various perspectives, this book enables each group to understand and predict each other's responses and behaviours.

Most amusingly, Olga Bogdashina describes the attitudes of psychologists and psychiatrists using terminology usually applied to people with ASDs: the aloof group (who try to blame autism on parents, saying that the behaviour of ASD children is due to a

lack of discipline and poor parenting); the passive group (who see their job as simply that, and having attended a single seminar or lecture on autism regard themselves as "experts" saying things like: "he cannot be autistic because he is too interested in people" or "shows emotions (for instance, cries when upset, smiles a lot or wants to please people, or gives eye contact or talks well)"); the active but odd group (who think they know it all and dismiss anyone who disagrees); and, finally, the professional group (who know that they will never have all the answers but are passionate about ASD). Unfortunately, I think we all know too many of the former and too few of the latter categories!

An excellent and well-written book (particularly considering that Olga Bogdashina is Ukrainian!) which should be on the shelves of every mental health professional who has an interest in ASD.

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Editorial continued from page 3

This quarter the new IT equipment and subscription database have had a few teething problems which have taken up a lot of my time, so replies to post and e-mail are now very behind. If you're expecting a response, my apologies; please be patient.

Lastly, no one responded to Michelle's letter regarding her fears about death in her family, so I would like to reassure her, and everyone with similar fears, that coincidences do happen, and that different causes of death usually coincide purely by chance.

**The Editor**

## Assistance Dogs for adults

by **Richard**

I am fifty-three years old, and was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome in 2004. For the past two-and-a-half years I have had a support dog, Tosca. She was handpicked for me by a small charity that used to train or retrain rescue dogs to be assistance dogs.

I work in an office, and Tosca accompanies me all day, giving me various forms of support. She provides an alternative structure to my day. I have to take her out for a walk at lunchtime. She moves around occasionally, making me aware of her, and interrupting me when I have been working in front of the computer too long. She reminds me to finish work and go home on time. I work for a very big organisation, and Tosca alerts my colleagues to the fact that I have Asperger syndrome and that they should talk to me appropriately. When I am in a difficult situation at work, she is sensitive to my feelings and provides reassuring physical contact until I feel more comfortable. Then she will settle down again. If the situation is unbearable for me, she will become very restless and cry, providing a signal so that I can make an exit.

When I want to leave a social situation, Tosca will give me a cue and a reason to leave. On the other hand, people often come and talk to me when I am out with her, and this gives me an opportunity to have a

conversation with new people. When Tosca is wearing her assistance dog jacket, a lot of people want to ask about her and stroke her. Sometimes their questions can be intrusive, but I have learned to deal with them. Funny things happen. One lady tried to give me money as I was standing outside the supermarket. She thought I was collecting for a charity.

Training Tosca helps me too, because her training has to continue all the time so that she doesn't forget, and I have to spend a lot of time thinking about her. Also I have had to learn to deal with her unpredictability, and find positive solutions to difficulties I have with her behaviour.

At the moment, as far as I know, no dogs are being trained to assist adults on the autistic spectrum. However, if there were enough anecdotal evidence of the benefits of dogs it could possibly lead to a research project. So, if you have or have had a dog, and you feel that the dog has had an impact, positive or negative, on your quality of life, I would be very interested to read your story, and perhaps correspond with you about it in order to explore these ideas.

**Richard**

**atpoise@fastmail.fm**



Asperger United, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road,  
London EC1V 1NG.  
Telephone: 020 7903 3542. Fax: 020 7833 9666.  
Email: [asp.utd@nas.org.uk](mailto:asp.utd@nas.org.uk)  
Website: [www.autism.org.uk/aspergerunited](http://www.autism.org.uk/aspergerunited)

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