

Produced by and for people with autism-spectrum conditions

Asperger *united*

Edition **64** October 2010



AU



The National
Autistic Society



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:

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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 magazine.

Contributions for the next issue should reach us by
8 November '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 last black-and-white edition ever (probably). The January edition will definitely be in colour and include the changes we've been discussing over the last year and a half.

My apologies to those of you who are disappointed that this edition isn't in colour — it's proved impossible to get the new systems in place in time. Which means that this issue is also a rush job, so I'd like to say sorry now for all the book reviews and the lack of a coherent theme. However, it does give me a chance to print the letters in response to Paul's article from last issue, which are very varied.

I'd also like to apologise for only giving an email address for the Neurodiversity Network last issue — I'll print a postal address if it's supplied and I'll make more effort to avoid such mistakes in future.

Over the last year, as well as wrangling with computer suppliers, database engineers and software trainers, I've managed (when not working for the NAS) to write a book (well, half a book, along with a colleague), which should be out soon. It's called *Asperger syndrome for dummies*, part of the Dummies series. This is the last time I'm going to mention it, but I wanted to ask you a question, because someone has already told me they intend writing a review of it for *Asperger United*. The question is: should I consider the review for publication, or should I reject it because it's unfair for me to promote my own book in *AU*?

As ever, I look forward to your letters with interest,

the Editor

If sufficient material is sent in, the theme for January will be **sleep** (including **insomnia**) or **creativity**. Writing on any subject is still welcome, as are ideas for new themes, fillers (see page 9) and artwork.

the rushed edition

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Higher Asperger's syndrome

by **Bill**

Some years ago my granddaughter was diagnosed as having higher Asperger's syndrome. People with this condition are sometimes fondly referred to as Aspies. Other members of the family are candidates for the condition.

My granddaughter had problems and needed help with the condition. Life and the educational system are more complex today and conditions like AS have a more detrimental effect. More is being discovered about them and catered for, but it is in short supply.

What learning about the condition offered me was an explanation for many aspects of my life that had been affected by it, not all negative. This explanation led to a greater understanding. However, I still remain undecided as to whether to have remained ignorant would have been the better option.

Following are my thoughts on how I believe being an Aspy has affected my life.

Each of us is unique, both physically and mentally. The physical differences are based on our ancestral DNA and any physical damage encountered. Our mental differences are partly based on our learned behaviour, which is developed according to our experiences and conditioning.

The conditioning is according to what we believe as expressed, firstly by our parents and guardians, then our teachers and peers. This is influenced by governments, businesses and religions, much via the media. Learning by experience is more natural.

We constantly scan our environment for possible threats to our survival. How we perceive our environment is more complex. Perception is based on our senses and how we process and store the information.

A part of being human is that our senses are in the human range. Other creatures have their own ranges, so their world is unlikely to be perceived as we perceive ours.

We can be blind or be somewhere on the human range of sight. Similarly with our senses of hearing, smell, taste and touch, we might not have them or they will be somewhere on the human range.

As we scan our environment, we record what we sense and the emotions evoked as experiences. We then use those experiences (and any conditioning) to determine how we react to events. Thus we "learn" how to behave in our environment and thus we have the best opportunity to survive.

We also develop our belief systems, but we continually re-evaluate them according to new experiences and thus we change and evolve throughout our lives.

In every aspect of the human race there are extremes. A person can be extremely violent or extremely passive, but most will be near the middle. This majority is the "norm". If people are outside the norm then they are considered "abnormal". Society tries to cure the abnormal as a sickness or tries to train them to adapt.

Perhaps society could stop judging, accept that "the abnormal" are not actually abnormal, but different, and allow them as a part of society to remain as they are. Everyone has human rights, not only the majority.

Even if physical differences can be rectified, there must be freedom of choice. Some problem behaviour can be rectified. If behaviour is learned, it can be unlearned. Perhaps society can cater for all the differences, whilst offering the means to assist with change for those who wish to adapt.

It is easy to observe physical differences. When there is a mental difference that does not affect physical actions or behaviour, it is not always apparent. One of these conditions is AS. When information is received by the senses, the structure of the brain determines how it is processed and stored.

The structure of the Aspy's brain requires that data must be compartmentalised to be stored. In order to achieve this, rules have to be established. These rules are determined by the individual and are simplistic. It is a straightforward binary choice, like true or false. Grey areas are not allowed. If an item of information cannot be categorised under an existing compartment, a new compartment will be established. Rules cannot be broken.

They do not always find the best way of doing things. They will, however, stick with their system because rules cannot be changed. To effect change, the rule has to be found defective. It will then be replaced with a new rule. This makes the person rigid, which can be interpreted as stubborn.

To be a rule, it must be true or false. It is very difficult to work without rules, so if a rule has exceptions, it cannot be a rule. New rules are required to apply to exceptions.

This approach affects the use of words. Each word can only have one meaning and a specific use. To say "I see" when one means "I understand" is unacceptable. To "see" implies vision. However, Aspies do recognise that there are differences and accept that other people use those differences. There is a tendency to believe that others are not correct.

This can also lead to verbosity and lengthy explanations. A person will think that he or she is not understood because the language is different, so will enter into a lengthy explanation to ensure that the message is received as intended. It is very difficult for them to determine whether or not another person is on the same wavelength.

Body language does not come under the "true" or "false" category. There are too many complexities and therefore body language is too subtle to be understood. This makes the Aspy seem distant and aloof.

The emotional part of communication is not always considered as relevant to them. This can make them appear as cold and uncaring or insensitive and unloving. They cannot always express their feelings as easily as other people. However, it is only a problem with expression. They are loving, caring and sensitive people.

The true or false rule is very important. If another person acts in a way whereby the true becomes false, that has an enormous effect. The Aspy will be confused and will fall into the false camp for reasons of security and protection. A barrier will develop. He or she will feel betrayed and can become unforgiving, until they are reassured or convinced. Sticking to honest facts without default is a basic requirement. Honesty can be dealt with in a black-and-white way.

Aspies do not make friends easily and find it difficult to socialise and join-in. They avoid crowds and groups, preferring one-to-one. Some are loners, preferring an isolated life by their rules. It is difficult for them to identify with other people. This is not how they want to be. They want to be accepted. They want to love and be loved, but it is easy for them to feel unloved and unwanted. It is difficult for others to understand them and accept their condition. They realise the effect their behaviour has on other people. They feel like failures, always upsetting others unintentionally.

As stated previously, each of us is unique and has developed our own behaviour patterns. Each of us has our own problems. Most people can understand and adapt or let go. An Aspy cannot easily do this; it is not in the rules. For them, like many others on the autistic spectrum, life is a constant struggle.



Dear AU

I am writing in response to Paul's request in your July edition. I too had parental problems as a child and often felt the sting of my father's leather belt, which was always neatly laid out in the middle drawer of his bureau. During my protracted adolescence and early adult life I had problems establishing relationships. Nevertheless at the age of 26, I did fall in love and marry.

The last words my father said to me before he died were, "Get me a glass of water, Colin." I complied and he drank.

Soon after, we stayed with my mother for the weekend with the intention of cheering her up. We had a little champagne then went to bed. I work up suddenly in the middle of the night, my throat dry. As I lay there my father spoke, crystal clear, "Go and get four glasses of water, Colin." I saw no apparition as I am not clairvoyant. Since that wonderful moment I have never been afraid of death.

After the birth of our daughter we got involved with the church and were "confirmed". That experience was uplifting, but like Paul, no spiritual bond or relationship with God developed.

Quite recently, Jehovah's Witnesses have come to our door and I would always have a chat with them. They gave me a booklet entitled, "What does the Bible really teach?" Concerning death, it has this to say: "When a person dies he ceases to exist; The dead do not see or hear or think."

I'll let Carl Gustav Jung, the famous psychologist, have the last word:

"Religious faith is loyalty to one's own personal experience."

Colin

As an Asperger and a vicar, I would like to make a reply to Paul's article in *AU* July 2010. He says that in spite of being converted many years ago he has never felt any closeness to God, and he wonders whether this is due to not having a relationship with his parents.

This could well be the case. More Catholic Christians (Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Orthodox) believe that when Jesus, dying on the cross, gave his Mother to St John, he was in fact giving her to all Christians, to have a ministry of motherhood in the Church. I would recommend Paul to think about her, and this could well help in his emotional and spiritual deficiencies.

I would also suggest that he go to stay for a few days at the (Anglican) shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham in Norfolk, and join in the prayers and devotions, which I am sure that he would find inspirational.

There will be some, no doubt, who will consider my words as the worst kind of heresy. But others will agree with me that we all need to find what is personally helpful in our own pilgrimage to God, which will be slightly different for each one of us.

Revd John Wright

Dear AU,

did you know that there is now another magazine by and for people on the spectrum, called *Aspire*, in Leeds? It can be bought at Jobsteps (Coburgh House, 2 St Andrew's Court, Leeds) and is also available on line at www.aspiremag.org.uk

The online version is only 50p, £2 for the hard copy,

Jay



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*. Only replies from under-eighteens will be forwarded to under-sixteens.

****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 81

Hello. My name is Geoff, I'm 66, and I was diagnosed with "Asperger's traits" 23 months ago. . . . No, I'm not the same Geoff whose request was printed in AU 63 of July 2010, as (spot the difference!) I live in Devon.

At 66 years old, I indeed look much younger, and, with my Asperger's diagnosis I scored upon all necessary points bar the fact that I'm good at maths, along with my parents not being around any longer for to vouch for my behaviour in childhood. Here I also differ from the other Geoff as I am 100% gay. I have an immense love within me to give to a friend or friends, it part of my nature as a follower of Mahayana Buddhism (that of Tibet, China, and Japan), that and a wealth of interests — classic cars and buses, garden horticulture, local history, writing (novels and

fact and letters), and the paranormal, to kick off with. I enjoy getting to know people. I have occasionally enjoyed travel in the UK, in recent years regular travel to Bristol, but, as I am also physically disabled (with spondylosis and "multiple sclerosis traits" (yes! . . . The medical profession won't come clean upon this either!)), I have recently had to curtail this somewhat (my present limit, it seems, is a 40-mile round-trip upon buses, although a recent rail-trip was much longer). I don't recognise myself as being the same age as my peers, and so I'm looking to hear from anyone of age from early 30s to late 40s, this breaking pattern of a great solitude I feel, I being without welfare aid, and my life but restricted to the help and companionship of my three support workers, each having become a personal friend to me. Typically Aspie, I have few other friends and benefits income precludes much socialisation, leading to my having become very isolated.

Dear Paul

I saw your letter in *Asperger United* and could identify with some of your experiences. Like you, I became a “Christian” largely through fear of hell. I was just 10 at the time and very unhappy at home due to persistent bullying by my brother (who I am sure has Asperger’s) and my parents’ preference for my sister, the only one of us without Asperger’s. My parents were heavily involved in the church and the minister was fond of hell fire sermons. For the next eight years I tried to be a Christian but felt no connection with God. After a breakdown at 18 my feelings towards God were a mixture of fear and hatred.

It was at this point that I started university and was immediately befriended by some people from the Christian Union. As you say in your letter it is hard to make a connection with God and receive his love if you haven’t first made a connection with humans. The love and acceptance shown by the Christians certainly helped, but it was during two prayer meetings that the breakthrough came. During the first I heard people praising God and felt nauseated by it, but I told God honestly how I felt and asked him to help me. Within minutes a great lump of hatred had been lifted from me. At the second prayer meeting a few weeks later we all had an overwhelming sense of the presence of God in the room. It was a few weeks after the second prayer meeting that I quietly committed my life to God for the second time and this time it really did make a difference. Within days people started commenting on the change in me, one that was not due to my own efforts but to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Life hasn’t been all sweetness and light since then. There are still times when I get angry with God, especially after huge natural disasters like earthquakes and floods. I also have times when I doubt his existence, despite

the things he has done in my life. Yet the connection is still there and from time to time I can hear his inner voice talking to me, sometimes warning me not to do something, sometimes rebuking me for having critical thoughts and at other times encouraging me.

I am so sad that you have had to struggle for such a long time to make a connection with God. You have probably tried this already, but I think the best course is to tell him exactly how you feel. You could say: “I’m not sure if I believe in you, but if you are there, please show me and help me believe.” If you are angry with him about your background, your Asperger’s, or the way he seems to be ignoring your efforts to reach him, tell him that you are angry, even rage and storm at him if you want to. (I have done this many times and I haven’t been struck down with a thunderbolt yet.) I know that God wants to relate to you, but there is clearly some barrier and we need to pray that it will be removed. As you rightly say in your letter, belief in a God who is all-powerful and who is ready to help you is of immense benefit to those of us who are anxiety-prone and it has certainly helped me.

I have written about my life, including my spiritual experiences, in my book *Not Your Normal Family* under my pen name of Fiona Barrington, which is one of the books recommended by the NAS. I have used a pen name mainly to protect my brother, who shares my very unusual surname. If you are interested in reading it, you can obtain it from amazon.co.uk.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Barrington

Hi,

I am writing because I am delighted with what Paul wrote about himself on the back page of Edition 63 of *AU*.

There are several parallels Paul has mentioned that I have found with my own life.

Yes, I too needed help and had a fear of hell. I did not have any conviction of the presence of God, either, at the time I was prayed for by an evangelical Christian in 1990.

Yes, I too attended a lively church but didn't become a member. It was during Paul's time at his church that I had my time at mine, too.

My experience in those early days of my faith of God is very similar to Paul's. I could not give or receive love. I had to pray about this.

And the jackpot was hit later on in Paul's letter when he mentions that his parents never got on. My parents were always warring with each other and this made me, too, afraid of them. The penultimate paragraph of Paul's letter clinches it for me and my own life: yes, I didn't have a close connection with my father but was rather forcibly close to my mother. I really agree with Paul that the lack in my life also of a close relationship with a woman, together with my father not helping

me to grow into a man or someone tougher than I was during my mid-to-late teens, are pivotal factors in the deep distrust and fear of human beings that I too have suffered. This has also led to my difficulties in making what Paul describes as an intuitive connection with God.

Anxiety is central to autistic people's lives and that includes me. I have to fight it. People have always told me that I lack "backbone". But nobody talks about the thing that we Aspies really need: "frontbone". Yes, I know that this word doesn't exist but I use it to illustrate the fact that we, as Aspies, must learn to stick up for ourselves. Also, what I have found that I do hope will help Paul is that we must try to modify our distrust and fear of human beings, so that we can make this a "healthy mistrust" which isn't tending towards the paranoid or abnormal, but instead "scans" the person with whom we are dealing, and does not allow him/her to browbeat us, con us, etc.

Phew! I really hope that you will contact Paul with this message since I am amazed that I have read something that is so incredibly close to my own life experience. Paul, you are to be admired for your courage in revealing what you have.

Best wishes,

Tim

A thought

from Tracey

Deep in the soul, below pain, below all the distractions of life, is a silence vast and grand — an infinite ocean of calm, which nothing can disturb; nature's own exceeding peace, which surpasses logical understanding . . .

All Is Not As It Seems To Be!

I read with dismay *a letter of encouragement* which lumped Asperger's syndrome with "other mental health issues".

AS is *not* a mental health issue, although some people with Asperger's syndrome have mental health issues *as well*.

I have a very late diagnosis of AS and my cousin was diagnosed very early. Neither of us has mental illness. I do have mild OCD but control it with the thought "would other people do as I am doing in a similar position?"

All people with AS have an idea something is not quite right, but having had a diagnosis we just have to accept it. We do not have to lie down and accept being victims however.

Neither do we have to label people who (understandably) do not understand us as neurotypicals. This labelling of them is no better than the labelling of ourselves and is also potentially highly inaccurate.

The "neurotypical" might be bipolar, NPD, depressive, etc, etc. They could of course be typical — but of what are they typical? NT is just a label for the angry and lazy who want a quick fix. We ought to be looking at the people around us as *people*.

Because of the nature of AS, we all are more self-contained and lonerish than the "average" person (whatever that means). This does not prevent us from fighting our corner when we have been wronged. This is what I would advocate. Do not accept domination of others if what you want is reasonable. People will often tell you that you cannot do this or that — prove them wrong if you can.

Above all do not learn to become a victim no matter what the temptation of removing frustration and worry from your life. Don't let people take your soul from you, for they will do it if they can. Some do it because they

"know better than you", some because they want power over you. Never accept their authority for those reasons.

It is different if you have psychiatric issues, but if/once these are addressed I believe that you should then take back control. It is, after all, your life and your future.

I have always fought authority when I believed them wrong. I have not got on in the world as well as if I had given in to them, but I have not lived on my knees. This has given me confidence and self-respect.

From what I have seen and read, I believe that people like us have been confused because we are trying to meet our needs which are pretty unusual in general, *and* meet the expectations of those (NT or not), who have a vastly different outlook. This cannot be done.

Furthermore, although we people find communication a tad difficult, it is not much better for anyone else. All we are is sprinters with a backpack. If communication were that good amongst non-AS, why is the divorce rate so high? Why are so many people trying to find a partner on the internet? Wars happen when people run out of communication. Is the world without wars? People as a whole find it hard to communicate *effectively*.

AS gives problems, particularly to those who have missed education, but our hyper-focus and obsession can be used to make us experts. The war of the AS people in Britain has just started with our legal recognition. Our situation is 100 times better than it was 40 years ago for my cousin.

Let's go forward using our native talents of persistence and focus to get us what we want. We are not just fighting for ourselves, we are fighting for those who will come after.

Peter

Three books from Sarah Hendrickx

All three books are £13.99 / \$19.95

from Jessica Kingsley Publishers

and reviewed by **the Goth**

Asperger syndrome and alcohol

drinking to cope?

by **Matthew Tinsley and Sarah Hendrickx**

ISBN: 978 1 84310 609 8

A concise, direct, soul-bearingly honest book part-written by a recovering alcoholic who only discovered that he had Asperger's syndrome once his recovery had begun.

The most shocking part of the book was the strong anecdotal evidence for a significant proportion of alcoholics being on the autism spectrum while at the same time no scientific research had been conducted to investigate this.

I found this a deeply moving book, partly because of the harrowing depiction of someone suffering in the tertiary stage of alcohol abuse but, I think, mostly because of the unconditional love shown to him by his family and friends no matter how badly behaved nor how inconsiderate he was.

Asperger syndrome and employment

what people with Asperger syndrome really really want

by **Sarah Hendrickx**

ISBN: 978 1 84310 677 7

Another of Hendrickx' excellently researched and compiled books, this one is full of first-hand experiences of people in the world of

work. Not just people on the spectrum telling you what worked for them and what didn't work for them: their colleagues, bosses and mentors also tell their experiences of working with someone on the spectrum. This is useful because then you can see what the situation looked like from someone else's view.

The adolescent and adult neuro-diversity handbook

Asperger syndrome, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia and related conditions

by **Sarah Hendrickx**

ISBN: 978 1 84310 980 8

A book that does exactly what it says, covering the whole spectrum of neuro-diverse conditions: ADHD, ASD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, Tourette's syndrome, and OCD. And importantly also covering dysgraphia and anxiety disorders, which are often overlooked.

The one slight blot in a thoroughly researched book is that there's no coverage of tic disorders other than Tourette's, but everything that's covered has, as ever with books by Hendrickx, been treated sensitively, openly, and with vignettes from people who have the conditions. It's good to see the neuro-diverse spectrum addressed by a single book, as professionals in the area often don't seem to understand the range of problems people have, nor that the same problems crop up for people with very different conditions. The final two chapters offer tips for anyone either in education or work (including seeking work), which (as well as being useful) show just how ordinary and simple the advice is. Organisations which balk at providing adjustments for diverse people would learn how "special adaptations" are actually just best practice, if only we could get them to read the book!

NAS Christmas cards and Christmas card competition

This year's NAS Christmas cards are now on sale. As always, we've got a selection of cards to choose from, including those designed by our competition winners. The *Candy Cane* card is designed by J Williams, an 18-year-old with Asperger syndrome and the winner of our adults' competition. The *Bobbin' Robin* card is designed by 7-year-old Jay, who attends a specialist autism unit within a mainstream school and is the winner of our children's competition. There is a special card for *Thomas and Friends* fans, and we're also offering a bargain bumper pack — 15 of last year's designs. For more information please see the catalogue enclosed with this issue, or visit: www.autism.org.uk/christmascards

And if you would like to submit artwork for the competition for adults on the autism spectrum to design a Christmas card for the NAS Christmas 2011 range, here are the details:

- 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
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
The resolution of your design must be 300dpi (dots per inch) or more. If you email your design, please include your name, age, address and the title of your design in the email.
- You must be 18 or over to enter the competition.

The closing date is 15 February 2011 and the National Autistic Society is not able to return entries.

Dear Readers

Anybody from South-East England who can face travel to the Sutton/Croydon area is invited to consider forming a social skills discussion group. Likely meeting place will either be Croydon or Sutton. The format would be part description of experiences, part advice and assistance.

We would meet at a time suitable for all members, allowing for getting time off work or studies.

There would be opportunities for socialising.

Please contact me via *Asperger United*.

John Joyce

Comments on Barrey's article, *Diagnosis*

I wish to share my experiences on AS diagnosis and its effect on oneself and one's partner.

Barrey has found that diagnosis has worsened his relationship with his non-Aspie partner, as she has used or misused the evidence to categorise him as being affected by AS. I have found the exact opposite. Before diagnosis, I and my wife were very confused by my behaviour, which she didn't regard as normal. Diagnosis came as a relief to both of us, with me thinking I could find out how to get on better with her, and she more able to understand me, after reading more of the literature. We had some very useful counselling after the diagnosis, both individually and together, which has helped us to communicate, sort out problems and get on far better.

We both think that Aspie partners need as much help as the Aspies themselves, and we have co-formed locally a group of some four Aspies with their non-Aspie partners (all women as it happens), with the whole group and the subgroup of non-Aspies meeting fairly regularly (together with the occasional unpartnered Aspie). The women-only group have a ball talking about the behaviour of their Aspie partners, letting off steam, though not maliciously. Our ages are similar to Barrey's, with some younger ones. I would recommend Barrey's partner to find or form such a group.

My diagnosis has certainly helped me, and I get on with people far better than I used to; I can understand them reasonably well now. So don't feel that AS can't be cured; it can certainly be alleviated.

Peter Krebs, email
peterkrebs@talktalk.net

Use my name if you wish, or send this to Barrey and ask him to get in touch with me.

New social group for adults with Asperger syndrome in Rhondda Cynon Taff

Do you have Asperger syndrome or suspect that you might have?

Do you have problems socialising with people?

Would you like to meet others with similar life experiences?

Would you like to be part of a social group, to do things with people who understand you?

If you are 18 years of age or over why not come along to our first meeting to find out more about the group and what it can offer you.

Where:

Room 3
YMCA Buildings
Taff Street
Pontypridd
CF37 4TS

When:

Thursday, 9 September at 7.00pm.

Carers, family members and friends welcome.

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Help with social skills and social understanding

double review by **Carmel**

The art of talking to anyone

by **Rosalie Maggio**

ISBN: 978 0 07145 229 8 £9.99 / \$18.95

published by McGraw Hill Higher Education

and

That's not what I meant!

by **Deborah Tannen**

ISBN: 978 1 85381 512 6 £9.99 / \$11.95

published by Virago Press

I would like to introduce *AU* readers to two books that have helped me with social skills and social understanding. Although I have read many books on this topic, few were of use. Many are aimed at people who already have good social skills, and are way too advanced for me! Some teach methods of persuasion or influence that strike me as unethical. Others adopt a psychological approach, citing difficulties with self-esteem as the core “problem.” This makes me angry because it is misleading: it is far more likely that poor social skills — and the attendant lack of friendship and loneliness — would cause low self-esteem, rather than the other way around! The two books I discuss here, though not written for AS people specifically, are practical guides which explain the social world in language sufficiently clear that, for years, I have referred to them over and over again and found them useful in dealing with situations and for clarity in understanding other people’s behaviour.

Rosalie Maggio’s book focuses on small-talk. She outlines the unspoken rules of a variety of situations including work, socializing

at a party or conference and chatting to friends or relatives. There are concrete suggestions for what to talk about and a chapter on listening skills; as well as guidelines for introductions, joining in a group conversation, dealing with someone who is too longwinded, boring or who makes you feel uncomfortable and other awkward conversational predicaments!

For some AS people, there might almost be too many suggestions. There is a lot to learn and one needs to take it at one’s own pace. Rather than discuss posture or eye contact in detail, Maggio proffers a chapter on “attitude.” While the advice here is good, some appears a little harsh or unrealistic. For instance, it is unlikely somebody who has great difficulty making conversation would be able to act as if they are completely relaxed and confident!

Some people have criticized this book as “too American” for a British readership. Here in the UK, people seldom introduce themselves by a full name; and some of the conversational strategies may appear stilted. Yet none of it is impolite, and I think a person would have to be very picky to object! It is of more concern that Maggio’s assumed social environment is middle class: “work” refers to business or profession; and nothing is written about differences in social behaviour towards the upper and lower ends.

Deborah Tannen’s work has a different emphasis. She is a linguist writing about the reasons why misunderstandings occur in communication and why people may disagree over what constitutes “good manners.” Having often wondered why people don’t always say what they mean, or why one person will criticize me for making a remark that went down well with someone else, I read it avidly!

To paraphrase, the source of these difficulties lies in the fact that people use

different conversational styles: some are more straightforward or “literal;” others involve making suggestions, implications or “dropping hints” and inferring meaning. The reasons Tannen cites for these differences lie in culture, both in the global sense of nationality, ethnicity and religion, and the local, like upbringing and social circle. Indeed, neighbours in the same street may have different communication styles. That she does not discuss nor appear to be aware of neuro-diversity is unfortunate because some communication factors may be, I believe, more hard-wired than she supposes, and a study on the way neurological differences interface with cultural ones would be yet more illuminating!

Meanwhile, the section covering some common causes of misunderstandings has helped me come to grips with past difficulties. I was startled to find several of my own areas of misunderstanding are exactly the ones that give many people a headache! The book gives limited advice on how to overcome the problem, other than suggest people be more flexible about communication. However, this is an area where knowledge and understanding in itself can help, and those “common causes” are worth committing to memory in order to avoid!

People cleverer than me have said that while much is investigated scientifically, there is too little research into the human condition. I believe the reason only limited help is available with social skills is that relatively little is understood scientifically about human interaction. These two books, however excellent, cover only a fragment of their topic matter. If and whenever some truly objective research is carried out into humanity and its modes of communication, people with AS might have a better chance to learn about ourselves and to understand why our own way is different from the supposed norm.

Earthlings

by A Lint

Earthlings

**The skull protrudes,
The mouth is the face
And it's bone,
With shiny side eyes.**

**The tiny pumping heart
In its little ribby cage
As it claw-finger grips
A side-waddle motion
On a branch,
Reaching sky,
Piercing hollow
With travelling cry**

**By the body grown
And silky-feather warmed
Its eggs have been cracking here
For sixty million years.**

**Having many wise “nearness fears”
So we must violate the right
Of those with wings to flight,
To satisfy our terrible urge to know
What-makes-another-creature-so**

Inspired by crows and the idea that we don't have to diagnose or dissect a person to understand them.

Life on the edge and beyond

by **Jan Greenman**

ISBN: 978 1 84905 106 4

£15.99 / \$19.95

Jessica Kingsley Publishers

review by **Neil**

Aspies are egocentric and tend to only have empathy with other Aspies — so this book makes for quite difficult (and emotional) reading, as it gives a perspective on what it is like for other family members to have someone with AS growing up.

Jan's son, Luke, has a diagnosis of ADHD and AS as well as significant health problems in his first couple of years. Jan — who had been a high-flying merchant banker — had expected to return to work after having Luke, but it was not to be.

This is a deeply moving and thought-provoking account of the effect that we have on our loved ones — parents, siblings and

wider relatives. We don't mean to cause the pain, hurt and difficulties that we do — but, somehow, it happens and we feel even worse as a result.

Seeing behaviours and acts that many of us will have done from the neutral perspective of someone else can help with our own behaviours and actions, and in particular being aware of those around us and the effect we have upon them.

I bought four copies of this book — one for myself, one for my own mother and two for the other parents of people with AS I know — hopefully they will see that their experiences are not unique and they are not alone.

Dear AU,

I very much enjoyed the picture by A Baker of the green, petrol-driven Land Rover, currently unlicensed, and first registered with the DVLA on Tuesday, 13th December 1955.

Amazing what you can learn from a carefully rendered pencil drawing.

Please pass my best wishes to the artist.

Charles



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