

Produced by and for people with Asperger syndrome

# Asperger *united*

Edition 30 April 2002

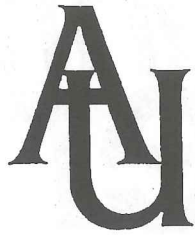


*Asperger United would like to thank Steve Gist for supplying the artwork for this edition.*



THE NATIONAL  
AUTISTIC SOCIETY





*Asperger United* is a self-help newsletter run by and for people with Asperger syndrome. 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.

*Asperger United* is free to people in the UK with a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome. We ask for a contribution of £6 per year from overseas readers and £10 from professionals and institutions to cover postage costs.

*Asperger United* is produced by an editorial group.

**Editor** John Joyce

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

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**Subscribing to *Asperger United***

Tel: 020 7903 3541  
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All we need is your name and address and we will add you to the mailing list – free of charge to people with a diagnosis!

Thank you to George Cox who kindly produced the illustrations included in the Pen Pal Network section.  
Thank you 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.*

### Contact Group

We are a social group for adults with Asperger syndrome who meet at 6.30pm on the second Wednesday of the month in The Mitre Pub, Upper Street, Islington. We have also formed a social committee and a political committee.

Last year was an interesting one for the group and some of us gave a talk to the NAS. I talked about my school days and employment issues. Our political committee is looking forward to meeting with MPs in 2002.

I am looking forward to coming to Contact in 2002 and helping to achieve something useful. The political committee meetings resumed in January 2002 and we are currently putting together a supplementary leaflet by people with AS for people with AS, we are discussing its contents and looking at funding possibilities. We are trying to explain in the leaflet that there is a range of different issues and needs amongst the AS community that we would like to promote awareness of.

If you would like to find out more about Contact, our pub nights, or our committees, then please contact Steve Allman, NAS Regional Officer - London, or Judy Lynch, Secretary to Regional Officers, on 020 7903 3557 - or via email on [sallman@nas.org.uk](mailto:sallman@nas.org.uk)

**DAVID SHAMASH**

*David*

*Thank you for the information. Unfortunately, because of a Wednesday evening commitment, I cannot attend but I hope you succeed in your aims.*

*John Joyce - Editor*

### A SUNNY DAY

The sun is very hot  
The sun is very relaxing  
The sun is full of glory  
I go swimming on the beach  
And we have drinks and we cool down and  
We skip around on the beach then we have  
An ice cream and go home.

**Jonathan Bailey aged 12**

*Thank you Jonathan  
John Joyce (Ed)*

Dear Readers

Hope all is well with you and I hope you all enjoyed Easter and are looking forward to the Summer.

Thank you all for your articles and poetry, as many as possible of which will appear in *AU* in due course. Some of the material will go into the first anthology.

On 6th February 02 in the Victoria Park Plaza Hotel, London, David Blunkett, Home Secretary, launched a Home Office Disability Support Network – members of which will be able to help one another achieve their goals. The majority of members have noticeable disabilities, like Mr Blunkett himself, but there must be others with less visible disabilities.

Autism seems to have gained a lot of press lately, particularly in relation to MMR. However, there is no evidence one way or the other and medical intelligence on this matter would be welcome.

I have completed a major portion of my Open University

language course and have embarked on a Spanish trip, hermanos y hermanas. Those of you still seeking educational or vocational advancement are invited to let us know. I am awaiting info on an application to participate in University Challenge on behalf of OU (Open, not Oxford, University). I also await knowledge of the result of a test, which could get me promoted to management. Any readers seeking such advancement?

Though we like to be positive, we must not forget those who have a less optimistic outlook. Therefore some letters received from these people will be included from time to time.

There will be an Asperger conference in the Autumn and the next edition will carry more information.

Best wishes

Your editor

John Joyce



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*Ian Payne is a 38 year old man with Asperger syndrome. Here he writes about his troubled school days.*

**M**y earliest memories involve being fascinated about how things worked. I was particularly interested in vehicles and plants. I could name almost every vehicle on the road and almost every plant in the garden. Yet people were always puzzling to me. They were unpredictable, they were always doing odd things and they seemed to be very different to me.

For a while this didn't really bother me: other people were merely part of the world, like other objects, but more unpredictable. I would watch the other children playing together and talking but their actions would just be completely incomprehensible to me. I would observe the other children in an attempt to understand them, but the rules they were playing by were always, apparently, changing. My clumsy attempts to interact with the other children were usually met with puzzlement or laughter. I was always bad at games and would never get picked for teams. When at school we were supposed to get into groups, no one ever wanted me to be in their group.

The more I studied other children and people and attempted to be like them, the more I failed. I had no trouble with academic subjects, in fact I was way ahead of most of the other children. I always seemed to get on far better with the teachers and adults than with my peers.

The teachers didn't really know how to deal with me. They couldn't work out why I seemed to be very bright academically but had problems relating to my peers. My handwriting was dreadful. They also failed to pick up that I was functioning differently to the other children. If I were interested in a subject I could pick it up very easily and I wouldn't need to study it. I could learn it

just by reading through it a couple of times. In the case of maths, I would solve problems in my head but I was unable to write them down on paper yet if a subject didn't interest me I was quite unable to learn it. I would solve problems by looking at them. After a while the answer would just pop in to my head fully formed. The teachers would usually want to see my workings out, so to please them I would work backwards from the answer. I don't think they ever realised. For years I assumed that everyone did this.

I was always very distracted by noise. I would also tend to lose track of instructions given to me. My mind would wander and I would become distracted by other things happening around the person giving me the instructions, such as noises or interesting objects near them. I found eye contact disturbing so I would avoid the person's gaze.

Sometimes, under stress or if there was too much going on around me, I would become disassociated. I would be doing something one minute, the next everything would fade away to nothing. After a while I would "come back" and continue where I left off. Not surprisingly this disturbed other people. I was sent for tests at the local hospital as it was assumed that I was having mild seizures, *petit mal*. All the tests were negative. The doctors suggested that I would grow out of them eventually. They still happen, but increasingly rarely. I think that they were a way of dealing with too much input and/or stress. My mind just has to take time out to process the information.

As I progressed through primary school my attempts to communicate with the other children were increasingly met with not just laughter and ridicule, but now hostility. I was picked on, teased and bullied unmercifully. I decided to give up trying to fit in with other people as nothing I tried worked. I spent my time at school alone, lost in my own thoughts, in my own world. I wanted no part of the crazy and confusing world outside. It was full of horrible, alien

people who were often mean to me for no apparent reason. I withdrew into fantasy. I created my own imaginary world.

The teachers failed to realise what was going on. They assumed that I was alone by choice. I did nothing to contradict this view. I increasingly saw myself as being different to other people. I began trying to work out why this was. I was unlike my parents and everyone else I had ever met.

So what was the answer? Of course I couldn't be human, yes, that was it: I was either a changeling or an alien. This finally made sense. This was why other people were a mystery to me. They weren't like me at all. I felt that there was a glass barrier between me and other people, separating us. At one point as conventional methods of communication failed me, I looked for alternative methods. This led to an interest in ESP. I tried to "beam" my thoughts to other people but naturally this didn't work either. Eventually I stopped trying to interact with other people completely, apart from people who were older than me. I seemed to be able to communicate better with them.

My emotions were different from other people, or so it seemed. I would have no direct access to them. If someone asked me how I felt about something I wouldn't know, although I could usually work it out given enough time. It was also noticed that I had few facial expressions. To this day I cannot smile on demand without looking in a mirror.

At secondary school my situation became far worse. The bullying became unbearable. It seemed the more I tried to fit in, the less success I had doing so. My lack of facial expression was increasingly noticed and I gained the nickname Lurch, after the butler in the Addams Family.

In a bid to become more popular I bought lots of packs of Top Trump cards, a popular craze at the time. I would wander around the playground asking people if they wanted a game.



Sometimes people played with me, but not often.

As I progressed through secondary school the bullying became worse. I would have my schoolwork destroyed and other pupils would attack me. I was big for my age and could, in theory, defend myself but the few times I did, it was me who got into trouble for fighting. I had no defence against the psychological bullying though. The constant refrain was "You are stupid and mad" and after a while I believed it. My self-esteem hit rock bottom.

In one lesson almost the entire class picked on me. To my horror the teacher joined in as well, ridiculing me in front of the other pupils. He would ask a question and then look around at all the

people with their hands up. Next he would say, "Ian, come up and show us the answer on the blackboard". When I could not do it, the whole class would howl with laughter at me. This would happen every lesson with him. I stopped going to his class after that. For some reason he didn't report me as missing.

I felt that I couldn't get help, as somehow it was my fault entirely. Some teachers did know what was happening but did nothing. I spent lots of time planning revenge on my tormentors.

In my last year at school I stopped going almost completely. Strangely, my absences were not reported to my parents. I would sign in at school and would then spend my day wandering around the local town on my own. The

exams I did pass I studied for by reading my notes through a couple of times just before the exam. I passed four "O" levels and a few CSEs.

As a mature student aged thirty I managed to obtain a place at a university and got a 2.1 Honours Degree in Psychology with Health.

At last, it was official, I wasn't stupid after all.

*Thank you Ian - good school story - the last laugh was yours!!*

*John Joyce*

## Research on memory in people with Asperger syndrome: volunteers wanted

I am carrying out research into the memory abilities of people with Asperger syndrome with a view to increasing the understanding of the memory system of these individuals. The research is being carried at the University of Sussex in the School of Cognitive and Computing Sciences (Psychology Group), and aims to complement a series of studies funded by a Wellcome Trust Grant in the name of Dr. Dermot Bowler at City University in collaboration with my supervisor at Sussex, Professor John Gardiner.

I am looking for individuals with an Asperger syndrome diagnosis, aged between 17 and 55, who would be willing to participate in this research. In the first instance, I am asking for potential volunteers who are willing to provide me with contact details (address, phone and fax/email if available). I would then send requests to them inviting them to participate in a particular study. The request, which the individuals are free to accept or decline, as they wish, would involve attending a session at the University of Sussex for approximately 3-4 hours. This time period would involve taking part in the Weschler Adult Intelligence Scale test on a day and time to be mutually agreed.

I will also provide potential participants with a brief description of what the session will entail, so that individuals can give more informed consent to their participation. I have obtained approval from the ethics committee at the University of Sussex for this research, which involves mem-

ory tests that are largely replications, or adaptations, of studies that have been previously carried out on different populations, including children. None of the tasks are overly taxing or distressing in nature and will not put the participants under any risk. Participants will be advised that they are free to leave at any time. At the end of each session I will provide participants with more information about the research to which they have contributed.

Participants will be reimbursed for travel expenses and offered an honorarium payment of approximately £7 per hour.

If you would be willing to help or would like further information, please write, phone, fax or email me with your name and contact details.

Brenda Smith  
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## letters to the editor

### Dear Asperger United

Many thanks for the latest issue of AU, which was up to its normal high standards.

I found Betty Marwick's article extremely interesting. She gave a clear image of many aspects of Asperger syndrome in different stages of her life. I also found her views on anti-depressants and their effects on the brain very enlightening, especially her views that MAOIs are the only class of antidepressants that work on her. I agree with her view that their success is probably because MAOIs act on dopamine.

Mit vielen Gruessen – best wishes from Germany

**Gerhard Beck**

*Danke, Gerhard - your comments are welcome*

*John - Editor*

### Dear Editor

My name is Martin and I am 24 years old. I have Asperger syndrome and I've always been the odd one out amongst other individuals.

I am really fed up with being the odd one out. I can remember when I went to Kielder with the boy scouts in 1992. They all laughed, made fun and bullied me. The year before that when I went to Kibblestone the same thing happened. I was also bullied at school. It just seems to me that everything that I've ever done and said in the past is meaningless.

I'll tell you something that I've noticed all the time that really does annoy me – I've seen other individuals who have got a disability themselves laughing and making fun of me.

I'm fed up with being abused and made to look small by other people. It wasn't until I was 18 that I got a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome. I've never mixed well with other individuals. I'm very lonely most of the time.

**Martin**

*Remembering my scouting days, I did not think the movement encouraged such treatment of members.*

*Keep in touch with AU and you will make friends with people of similar background who share your interests - please write to one of our pen pals.*

*John Joyce - Editor*

### Dear Asperger United Friends,

I am writing to you today to ask you to join a campaign in a magazine called "Yours" for free bus passes.

Please can everyone who has Asperger syndrome and finds they are not entitled to a free bus pass write immediately to their MP.

The magazine "Yours" would be interested to hear if you receive a response or not from your MP, and what kind of response it is. If you do not get a response, write and tell "Yours" the name of your MP who wasn't interested enough to respond.

The address of the magazine is

"Yours Campaign"  
No Fuss Bus Pass  
Yours  
Bushfield House  
Orton Centre  
Peterborough  
PE2 5UW

If everyone writes to their MP and to "Yours" magazine immediately we really could make our campaign work.

Yours sincerely,

**Miss Anna Cohen**

*Thank you for the info, Anna. I think I will take this up myself.*

*John Joyce*

### Dear AU

What does anyone think about me starting up lists of statistics of records for anyone in the autistic spectrum? The statistics could include sports ranking lists and any other records such as how many words people could type in a minute etc.

What do other people think?

**Philip**

*The idea seems interesting but you should not use this information to encourage competition, because with our disability people develop different skills at different paces. If it helps people communicate with each other, it is a good idea.*

*John Joyce - Editor*





# How to reply to Pen Pals

- Please remember to let us know the full name (including surname) of the person who your letter is for.
- 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 onto the person you wish to contact. However, we cannot guarantee the person will reply as that is entirely their decision.

Hi, my name is Bill and I'm 36 years old.

I've not been diagnosed with Asperger syndrome but I have autistic tendencies.

I enjoy reading, walking, going to the cinema, videos, television and amateur dramatics.

Please write via *AU*.

My name is Cindy and I have recently been diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. I also suffer from Tourette's disorder.

I am employed as a filing clerk for the municipal government. I live in a town called Dundas. It is 45 minutes west of Toronto, Canada.

My hobbies include reading, bowling, travelling, swimming and stamp collecting.

Please write to me via *AU*.

My name is Leo. I suspect that I have Asperger syndrome but have not been diagnosed.

I live in London and study art restoration at university. I am interested in cinema, art, pool, snooker, science, reading, Buddhism, cycling and cricket.

I would like to meet up with other adults with Asperger syndrome with similar interests in London. I am discovering many new and exiting things in London – living for the future.

Please contact me via *AU*.

Michelle, who has Asperger syndrome and Joanna, who has high functioning autism, are starting a social/support group for HFA/AS adults in South Cumbria.

We aim to support each other, share experiences of local services and work for better ones, and have a good time with others with similar difficulties.

We will meet in Kendal, in a venue yet to be decided.

Please contact me via *AU*.

My name is Martin. I am 24 years of age.

I would like to get in touch with other adults of my own age group with Asperger syndrome in the Staffordshire area.

I attend a day centre in Burton-on-Trent but I get very lonely and would love to have someone to write to or meet up with.

Please write to me via *AU*.



### A VISIT TO THE OPTICIANS (THE FLY)

one day she gave me a myopic vision mission  
 she suggested I should go and see the town optician  
 so I arrived there on a fire engine  
 which I thought had been a bus  
 I got off and paid the driver  
 who didn't make a fuss.  
 I walked in through the window and sat down on a  
 chair  
 and with the aid of a reading glass I could easily  
 see  
 a dirty great big blue-bottle  
 sitting right there next to me.  
 well, immediately I knew I had a problem found  
 human eyes are simple  
 but a fly's eyes are compound  
 I only need one pair, to try them on for size  
 but that little buzzing bastard  
 has a thousand pairs of eyes.  
 the optician he can see to me in a twenty-minute  
 sitting  
 but for my little friend it's a two to three day fitting.  
 so I thought long  
 and I thought hard  
 then I knew just what to do  
 I squashed the little buzzer  
 and moved one place up the queue.

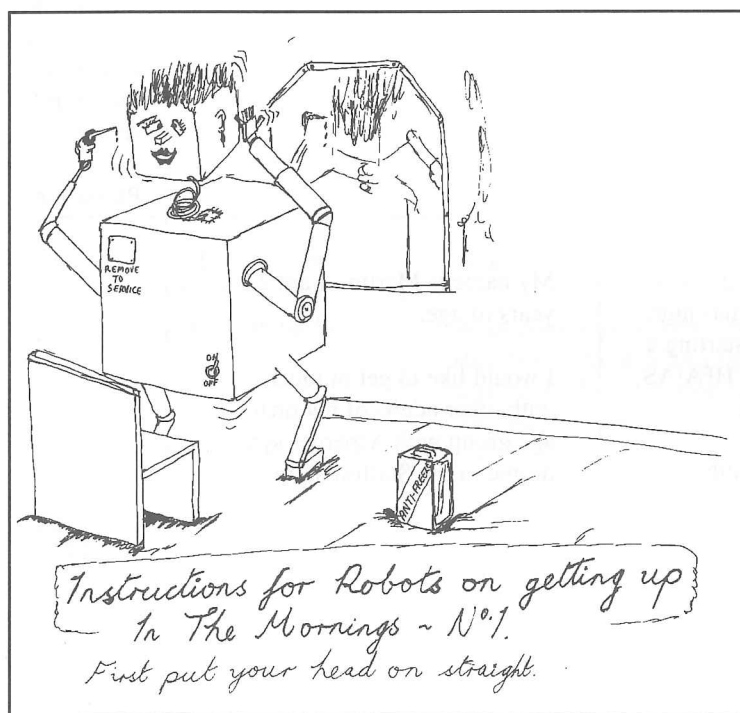
### HOW WAS YOUR WEEKEND?

dear mother: the weather was sunny  
 the outlook seems fine,  
 but I wish you could see  
 what they've done to my mind

*(Dedicated to the consultant at the  
 Royal Free Hospital who misdiagnosed  
 me).*

### SASHA THE GNASHER

Sasha the gnasher  
 thought William would bash her  
 cos try as he would,  
 he just couldn't catch her  
 never mind attach her.  
 his schemes and his plans got rasher  
 and rasher-  
 one even involved a potato masher,  
 which is no way to catch a gnasher  
 named Sasha.



poetry and artwork by Steve Gist



**Dear Editor and AU readers**

My name is Kevin. I am 27-years old and live in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire. I have an identical twin brother who has autism. I also have an older brother and a younger sister.

I remember that throughout my childhood I felt that I was different. I went through mainstream school being bullied and also being picked on because I had a twin brother who had a disability. After leaving school at the age of 16 with 6 GCSEs I went to work for an electrical firm, where I stayed for four years. My dream in life was to own my own shop and in January 1994 that dream came true. On the 22nd of September 1994 I was involved in an incident that took away my dream and my confidence - I was held up at knife point and robbed of £400. After that I started to suffer with post traumatic stress disorder and depression and ended up having to sell my business at a loss.

I started work with another electrical company but found it difficult communicating with the staff and general public. I could never seem to hold down a job and was going from one company to another.

In 1998 my depression began to get worse - I thought I was going mad. I started to do my own research into autism, Asperger syndrome and genetics. I came to my own conclusion that I had Asperger syndrome but getting an official diagnosis was extremely difficult. I saw four different doctors and three psychiatrists in the Staffordshire area and all of them said that I didn't have Asperger syndrome. Eventually I got in touch with the National Autistic Society who gave me the details of Cambridge Lifespan Asperger Syndrome (C.L.A.S.S.).

In May last year my mum and I went to Cambridge to see Dr Simon Baron-Cohen and, after a long day of assessments and tests, I was finally diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. When we left Cambridge to get the train back to Stoke I broke down and cried. It was such a huge relief to finally have a diagnosis after 27 years.

One of my main concerns in writing this letter is to complain about the lack of support and services in my local area. We have no specialist doctors who can diagnose Asperger syndrome, no on-going support or help after a diagnosis, no specialist units for people with AS and there's an incredible lack of awareness amongst GPs and in mainstream schools.

I would like to remind everyone that 2002 is Autism Awareness year.

I would like to thank the following people - my mum and dad for all their help and support, Dr Simon Baron-Cohen and Jeanine Robinson because without people like these I would not be here today.

If you would like to contact me please do so via AU.

**Kevin Healey**

**SKY DIVING**

Above the trees above the ground  
above the city it flies.  
The silver bird which carries the men  
who have dispensed with suits and ties.

They come from all walks of life to try  
the ultimate thrill.  
They have all chipped in a subscription  
to cope with the bill.  
When it has reached eighty-five feet  
each man rises to his feet.  
Each man walks towards the door,  
Each man then tries out Newton's law

Each man is exposed to the air.  
They are buffeted by currents without a care.

One, two, three. four. What are we all waiting  
for?  
Seven, eight, nine, ten. I wondered what hap-  
pened to Ben?

They fall through the air  
Like puppets or feathers.  
They suit their helmets  
and suits like Hell's angels',  
Suit up in leathers.

They pull their ripcords.  
often holding hands, their parachutes come  
out and stretch  
out like fans.  
The ground comes up and  
their boots defy the earth.  
They land the right way  
Not catching the impact often coming down.

They pack their parachutes  
Then walk towards the town.

**William Furlong**

*Thank you William.*

*Another fine example of AS poetry*

*John (Ed)*

## *Autistic male-stroms and how they are formed*

While on The National Autistic Society's work preparation programme, I was watching a video about a maths undergraduate student who lives (sadly) a very mechanistic life. While watching, I actually heard that there was an argument that Asperger said this disability was the commensuration of the male personality, which I thought about on the way home. Then something clicked: if this is true then radical feminists would have a field day on this.

Since radical feminists argue that women are oppressed because society is geared exclusively to the benefit of men, women are deemed "other" and "inferior". If any liberation has to be gained, men should have no place. Hence, they would argue that Asperger's hyper-males should be the least of all to contribute, for the unholy trinity of impairments: communication, interaction and imagination (in terms of empathy) leave them at a disadvantage in a society where these characteristics which western society genders "feminine" are increasingly important in the post-industrial workplace. Especially as the nature of production since the 1960's has shifted from mechanisation to automation.

The theory of how this personality type became redundant could go something like this: when the male role was the hunter-gatherer, he needed "radio silence" in order to get covertly close to his quarry. Hence the communication skills and language abilities that women have could bring attention to the group's quarry and that it would have run off. When women invented agriculture (as some anthropologists suggest), the male hunter-gatherer's role was co-opted. Hence Asperger's theory of the "hyper-male" was validated in so far that, as modes of production shifted, males with what is now labelled Asperger syndrome became redundant. This in effect gives radical feminists a pretext for their argument, which is partly anecdotal evidence in that (by way of example) males seem to communicate by way of grunts, yet still get the message.

If two men are sitting watching a football match and there are cans of lager on the coffee table, just two or three grunts and a can of lager is being drunk. Then only two hours later, they are.

On the other hand, speaking from experience, my mother spends half an hour on the phone some evenings. Hence from this anecdotal evidence, radical feminists can argue that in the AS male's lack of communication skills, they become irrelevant to society.

The best cultural evidence of both how far this argument has permeated the public consciousness and the way disability is depicted in the media would be an episode of "The Simpsons" where Lisa worries that she is becoming more stupid as a result of not being able to solve a puzzle that seems straightforward. All the male members of the

Simpson clan act like total idiots, playing a game of head butting with saucepans on their heads as helmets. Given the left wing libertarian viewpoint of the creator, Matt Groening (and myself), it is hardly surprising that this scene is juxtaposed with the females of the clan being doctors and successful professionals.

Even Dr Simpson says: "The Simpson Gene is on the 'Y' chromosome, hence it only affects males." (We can see the effects of the Simpson Gene in action as the males play a head butting game). Although there is no relationship between AS and intellectual ability, the analogy for this in relation to gender is established in the minds of the public. After all, aren't boys the most common media image of this disability?

This leads to the question: what of other feminisms? Before we answer this, we'd better argue the downside of this theory. Again, speaking from anecdotal evidence stemming from my personal experience, I knew a girl with Asperger syndrome who had a number of obsessions. At one point she was obsessed with buses, as if there was nothing else to be interested in. But in my opinion, they seem ephemeral in that mine have waxed and waned.

Since I consider Asperger syndrome a medical manifestation of a cultural disability insofar that someone with AS cannot entirely interact with the culture that created them and also that the culture is in some way disabled, it is important to consider the material nature of the condition. Hence Marxist feminism would see a cause and effect relationship between AS as a commensuration of the male personality and economics. Since basic Marxism would argue that since there is no god, soul or supernatural, everything has a key relationship to economics. Using Joseph Locke's idea of a *Tabula Rasa*, they would argue that a personality is shaped by experiences but look at it within the context of the economic system.

For instance, it can be argued that with the controversy surrounding the MMR vaccine, there is a vector of cause and effect between what they would see as the divide and rule strategy of capitalism as manifested by government policy and autism itself. Hence the experiences of the MMR jab are the product of the corporate machine being in control of government health policy in order to further profits and autism is integral to the divide and rule strategy of capitalism and its effects. The unholy trinity of impairments would in this context be viewed as the reifications that result from being alienated by the means of production, especially in a post-industrial society as I'll say later.

However, when applied to gender, the issue of women being affected by this disability comes into question. A Marxist feminist would say the same, only that a woman with AS would have her disability as the means of women's oppression under capitalism. Hence in being "hyper masculine" in so far as the condition affects males more than females (both in number and general severity), it almost takes on the quality of subverting gender types



prescribed by society on one hand by never marrying or having children. Paradoxically, though, it enforces them by excluding the female from the culture that shaped her "disability" and the subsequent alienation that society creates by saying that she has autism. It is as if, in excluding her, society effectively projects the fact that it is autistic in an almost Freudian manner and in the sense it refuses to be totally inclusive of those it creates.

On the other hand, we can say that a late Marxist or even post-Marxist interpretation would be that the economic base and ideological superstructure are indistinguishable from each other. As this applies to AS, we can say that society has greater problems if the means of production and expression are one, because the "new economy" relies on the commodification of emotional expression, for instance. We can see this in the proliferation of chat lines and internet chat rooms,

where we pay for the privilege of expressing the emotions we supposedly take for granted. While anecdotal evidence exists that people with AS are good with information technology, it is only because it is emotionless and sterile that they gain any advantage in society. Like the AS undergraduate, I see it as the thing itself. Nothing can change this, except society and its attitudes.

**By Chris Henniker**

*Interesting psychological insights - is this the opening salvo of a psychology thesis on autism or just an article for AU!!*

*John (Ed)*

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## **My life story**

**I** am now 20 years old but I was only diagnosed with Asperger syndrome in December 1999.

I was happy at junior school and had plenty of friends. School was a bit boring but bearable. I was a Beaver, then a Cub, went to Sunday school and the youth club. I went swimming and was goalkeeper for the school team.

Life changed for the worse when I went to secondary school. It was a nightmare! I felt intimidated and knew I had to look after myself. I didn't want to talk about school at home and didn't do my homework.

In Year 9 I changed to a much smaller private school which was better and I could relax more. I went on work experience with the local paper but disaster - I was sent back to school early! I didn't enjoy Year 11 and so I sometimes walked out. On an art trip to London it was so boring that I spent the day riding round on the underground, which I preferred. I tried to get out of a geography trip to the Cheddar Gorge but did it and ended up loving the potholing!

In 1998 I passed 10 GCSEs but didn't want to stay on at school any longer. I tried West Herts College but didn't fit in so I only went for one day. Instead I stayed at home and enjoyed it for a while, as I could listen to my music, play on the playstation or computer, watch videos or read. But eventually I got bored and depressed, especially when my younger brother went to college and started working at weekends.

I was really glad when I got my diagnosis as I hoped I would be understood and helped, instead of being told off or laughed at. First of all I tried a computer training course but this was a disaster and so I left at lunchtime.

In May 2000 I went to the Stop-Gap Project at Watford Football Club, run by Patricia and Peter from the Careers Service. I thought this was going to be a disaster as well but everyone talked to me and I really enjoyed it. Most importantly, we were treated like adults and helped each other.

We planned a three-day trip to Snowdonia for pot-holing, rock climbing and abseiling. At the last minute I began to panic and got upset but I'm glad I went because it was brilliant! I enjoyed all my challenges and got the Bronze and Silver Youth Achievement Awards.

In September 2000 I went back to West Herts College for the 'Introduction to College' course. This time I really enjoyed it. I liked Norah, our tutor, her assistant Carrie and the rest of my mates in the class. We did IT, maths, cooking, art and lots of other things and I received my certificate in June 2001.

I enrolled again at the college last September but didn't like the IT class, so I dropped out. I have thought about other courses but I'm still waiting to start. However, not being at college is getting boring again...

**Daniel  
Hertfordshire**

*Sorry to hear of your problems Daniel. Unfortunately many people with AS have similar difficulties.*

*Perhaps you can sign for Watford and make your mark on society that way!*

*John Joyce  
Editor*

## My work experience

I am a 15 and a half year old boy with a mild form of Asperger syndrome. It is difficult for other people to understand my condition and I often face teasing at school. Many of the other pupils pick on me just because I am different. Except for one other pupil, I am the only person with autism in the whole school.

This January I went on one week's work experience at my father's workplace, the DfES or Department for Education and Skills, to give it its full title. The DfES helps in the running of schools and training of adults and also works with other government departments.

I did a great variety of things:

- helped my father in his job with purchasing
- helped people with their computer problems
- helped run the staff nursery
- printing up labels
- filing – of course!

The work was enjoyable and I am thinking of working at the DfES when I am older.

One of the most interesting things about the DfES was that there were several other people with disabilities working there, some of them in wheelchairs. If someone with a very serious disability can work in the DfES, this means that someone like me should be able to work there as well with some assistance.

Anyone can work for anyone, anywhere, if they try hard enough and if they have support and understanding. I hope that anyone worrying about work who has been reading my letter will feel inspired to go that little bit further.

Ian

### Stockton on Tees

*Seek employment with DfES when you are ready, perhaps, if qualified, in a more senior position than your father!*

*As a civil servant, I can recommend such employment for people with AS*

John Joyce  
Editor

## New book news

### *What is Asperger syndrome and how will it affect me?*

We are very pleased to announce that this popular booklet, originally published in 1999, has been updated and reprinted.

This excellent booklet explains Asperger syndrome in the simple jargon-free language that children with Asperger syndrome can understand and relate to. It also offers helpful contacts and strategies for making life easier to cope with. It is aimed at 8-13 year olds who have Asperger syndrome but its clear approach means that it is ideal reading for anyone who wants to know more about Asperger syndrome – parents, grandparents, teachers...

This booklet is written by Martine Ives of the Autism Helpline. Martine's experience of dealing with hundreds of queries from people with Asperger syndrome and their families make her an ideal author. It means that she really understands the needs of people with Asperger syndrome and can also communicate in a way that people with

Asperger syndrome can relate to.

This book is published by The National Autistic Society and costs just £1.50.

### Special offer to readers of Asperger United!

Normally we charge £3 postage and packing on book orders but readers of *Asperger United* can get their copies without this additional charge until 31st May 2002. Just send your order, together with a cheque made payable to the NAS. Send it to *Asperger United* at the NAS – address on page 2.

We had a very good response to our first "New book news" column in the New Year issue of *Asperger United* and so we plan to run it as a regular feature.

Please let us know about any other books that you think readers of *Asperger United* should know about.



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