

Aspies' heroines

In the mid-1940s autism was first accurately described. In almost the same year a very unusual group of children was identified in Vienna. These children were later described as having Asperger's syndrome. Once again, many years passed and it began to be realised that Asperger's was on a continuum with autism, thus comprising autistic spectrum disorders.

In the last few decades the publication of books and articles about autism spectrum disorders

has burgeoned. Studies have been reported in many areas, ranging from self-report by a few of those so affected, to behavioural techniques, to brain imagery, to psychotherapy. But this book stands alone in presenting diary-inspired reports by six mothers (the 'et al.' authors) of very severe cases of Asperger's, plus notes by others.

What emerges is a picture of many years of struggle with various authorities, who frequently misled them about their children's problems. Most had the support of husbands and parents; nevertheless, friends melted away in face of the abhorrent behaviour of these innocent victims of nature. Unkind onlookers usually suggested that poor parenting was the real problem. Obtaining an accurate diagnosis, let alone a precious Statement of Educational Needs became a nightmare; so-called experts, psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers were often way off the mark and apparently blissfully ignorant.

Needless to say, the children usually had a tough time in state schools, particularly if not accompanied by special support; they were often excluded with nowhere else to go, and the problem of finding a suitable, affordable educational facility recommenced. Local authorities were too often obtuse, hostile or obstructive, while the mothers found themselves fighting battles on many fronts over lengthy periods, in some cases becoming almost suicidal.

Every child was, of course, unique; the only thing they had in common was that their behaviour was often appalling, especially in circumstances that they perceived as threatening. Such threatening circumstances involved, among other things, any change in their own routines, or that imposed by others. In addition, their difficulties in

communicating arose from incomprehension of others' feelings, or their body language, or their speech.

Very often parents detected something unusual in their children's behaviour during their earliest years. These suspicions would come to fruition in pre-school and especially later. Two mothers were forced to retreat into home tuition, when no progress was made in public facilities; others were ultimately (and ultimately is a short word for a long time) exposed to serial changes, exclusions and repeat performances of hopeless placements. However, one child, coming from a family that included another with Asperger's and a normal sibling, kept up more or less with his age peers and graduated to college for students with special needs; employment is hoped for in this case.

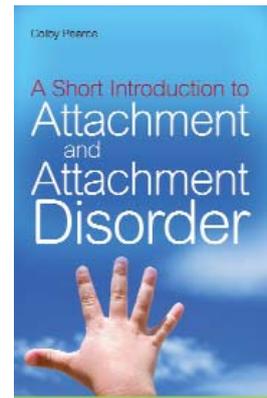
It will have been noted that this is a startling book in which very few professionals emerge unscathed. Of course, the majority of people with Asperger's are much less impaired than these extreme cases; what is more, it is unlikely that any society will be in a position to offer the individual support during waking hours that the most damaged individuals seem to require. The greatest advantage in the cases presented in the book came from private, rather than public, facilities, presumably a reflection of small groups and an optimal staff/student ratio.

This book is an easy read, compulsively so for these reviewers, and is highly commended. Severely affected individuals, and especially these heroic mothers, face imprisonment for life.

| Chipmunkpublishing; 2009; Pb £15.00

Reviewed by Ann and Alan Clarke

who are Emeritus Professors, formerly at the University of Hull



Useful and practical

A Short Introduction to Attachment and Attachment Disorder

Colby Pearce

As a new mum and a clinical psychologist working with a forensic population of young men, many of whom have experienced difficult attachment relationships, I found this book made interesting reading both on a personal and professional level. Colby Pearce presents a simple and accessible explanation of attachment and the associated difficulties that can emerge when a child's needs are inconsistently met or not met at all.

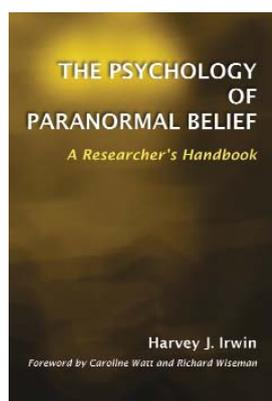
Those of us who find the labelling of difficulties, particularly in children, as 'disorders' somewhat unpalatable, should not be put off by the title. This book offers useful, practical advice, such as the importance of verbalising the child's thoughts and feelings and of responding to needs rather than just behaviours.

The author places a significant emphasis on the role of parents and carers of children who have experienced difficult attachment relationships, both in the recommendations that he makes and in the structure of the book. The contrasting brevity of the chapter about treating these children was my only slight disappointment about this otherwise highly recommended book.

| Jessica Kingsley Publishers; 2009; Pb £12.99

Reviewed by Amy Critoph

who is a Chartered Psychologist



What do you believe in?

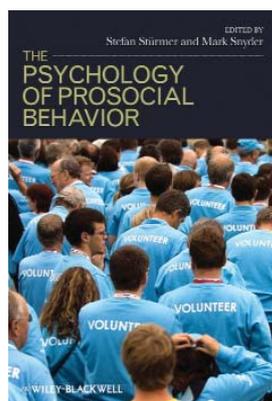
The Psychology of Paranormal Belief: A Researcher's Handbook
Harvey J. Irwin

Wait. Don't just think about ESP and telekinesis, roll your eyes and move on. Whatever your own belief, paranormal belief in some form is evident throughout the world, ranging from deep-seated religious beliefs, through to crossing your fingers just in case. What this book successfully achieves is acknowledging the importance of paranormal belief, whilst remaining unbiased in its presentation of them.

Irwin's aim is to explore the origins and psychological functions of paranormal beliefs. His international reputation in the psychology of paranormal beliefs and parapsychological experiences ensure that this work is both accessible and informative.

The book is in eight sections. The introduction tackles defining paranormal belief, outlining how limiting traditional definitions of 'what is scientifically impossible' can be. Further, it discusses types of paranormal belief, and even some of their origins. The work then goes on to discuss socio-cultural influences on paranormal belief, the psychometrics of paranormal beliefs and the cognitive deficits hypothesis, amongst others. Clear, thorough and informative.

| University of Hertfordshire Press; 2009; Pb £16.99
Reviewed by Kelly Bristow
who is an A-level psychology lecturer at The Henley College, Oxfordshire



Helping to bridge the literature gap

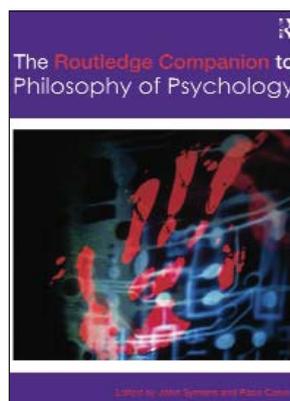
The Psychology of Prosocial Behavior: Group Processes, Intergroup Relations, and Helping
Stefan Stürmer and Mark Snyder (Eds.)

Prosocial behaviour has been a central issue in social psychology for decades. However, the social identity perspective (the idea that people's thoughts and behaviour are affected by their identification with social groups) has been sorely missing from the literature. This book is a detailed and fascinating attempt to correct this oversight. Rather than simply conceptualising prosocial behaviour (or lack of it) as an interesting side-effect of group processes, this volume places it centre-stage.

The chapters present a rich array of research and theoretical discussion, ranging from evolutionary perspectives on helping to the role of group memberships in bystander intervention. The practical implications of the research are also considered, including a discussion of how such findings could be used to increase volunteering and to encourage those in need to accept help.

This book is essential reading for anybody who is interested in prosocial behaviour, or in applying social identity processes to relevant real-world situations.

| Wiley-Blackwell; 2010; Pb £29.99
Reviewed by Juliet Wakefield
who is a PhD student at the University of Dundee



For the philosophically minded

The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Psychology
John Symons and Paco Calvo

This collection of essays aims to look at the present state of play in philosophical thinking in psychology. It follows on from Block's 'classic' anthology *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology* (1980/1). Developments in the literature reflect an increasing collaborative and multidisciplinary approach in research, and the need to maintain sensitivity to a broader intellectual context. As an interested novice, I was intrigued by the book and excited by the praise attracted by respected luminaries. Contributors are scholars from the world's best universities, with extensive experience within the field.

The essay-style format allows dipping in to the book and exploring themes individually. The five areas are the historical background of the philosophy of psychology,

psychological explanation, the biological basis of psychology, perceptual experience, and personhood. The topics covered are rich and wide ranging, the style of the contributors synthesise well to create a thorough and engaging text. I found essays on Freud and the Unconsciousness; Sleep; and Personal Identity interesting. I felt the essays were well balanced and directed the reader to question topics for themselves.

The book presumes a certain prior knowledge of philosophical concepts. I was intrigued by many of the topics but found I had to do further reading to come to terms with certain themes. The volume is expensive, so I would recommend it to those with more than a passing interest in the area, potentially organisations, those involved in research in the areas covered, or lecturers within in the field.

| Routledge; 2009; Hb £95.00
Reviewed by Hannah Nelson
who is an assistant psychologist at Greater Manchester West, Intermediate Care

just in

Sample titles just in:

Mental Capital and Wellbeing Cary Cooper et al
A Mind of Its Own: A Cultural History of the Penis David Friedman
A Hole in the Head: More Tales in the History of Neuroscience Charles G. Gross
Moving Out, Moving On: Young People's Pathways in and Through Homelessness Shelley Mallett et al
The Intuitive Mind Eugene Sadler-Smith

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