



Aspiehelp / The Aspire Trust

Feb/March 2019 Newsletter

Edited by **Julie**

This issue: Article - Extreme male brain theory...

On 15th March our known world was turned upside down in Christchurch by the massacre of the Muslims. Like so many other people, we are devastated.

For some of us affected by the earthquakes, it was re-traumatising.

Many people flocked to Hagley Park and the Botanic Gardens “to show support” for the harmed and bereaved. For aspies and auties, going into situations like that may have been all too confronting and upsetting. You should not feel bad about not taking part. You must look after yourselves first and foremost and may even seek to have some counselling to deal with your feelings.

There are /have been very unpleasant things on Social Media. Please don't expose yourself to them, you don't need that nastiness in your heads!

There is no need to feel fearful about going out, But if you have ongoing anxiety, please contact us. We are more than happy for you (and family) to come in and see us at a lunchtime (12.30 to 1.30pm- free) during the week (please email or telephone first, in case we are out).

In Our Office

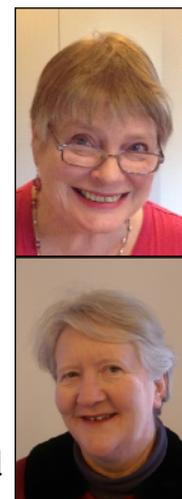
It has been a somewhat confusing couple of months!

Our Chairman, Peter Brittenden, has been very unwell and faces surgery by the end of the month. We look forward to seeing him restored to health for the rest of the year.

We began the year with a super volunteer Office person- Sara, who has intermittent health problems and is taking a rest at the moment. She has been really great and we hope to welcome her back at some stage.

We have been doing a lot of networking with agencies and also meeting several new clients. The turnover in staff among social service agencies has been quite astounding and leads to a lot of confusion in enlisting care for our clients!

We continue to hear appalling stories about the uninformed treatment of Aspies and auties, by people who are “professionals” and should know better. Please continue to tell us about discriminatory and arrogant behaviour and examples of “just plain wrong” attitudes . We are constantly fighting this kind of thing.



Our staff from top:
Leith and Julie

Sausage Sizzles!

Come down to Barrington Mall on these Saturdays for a yummy sausage!

Saturday 21 March

Saturday 6 April

Saturday 27 April



Social evenings

These are on hold for the foreseeable future.

Our Patron is Stephen Mark Shore, PhD.

The Aspire Trust, Inc is a registered Charitable Trust.
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Extreme male brain theory of autism confirmed in large new study – and no, it doesn't mean autistic people lack empathy or are more 'male'

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THE CONVERSATION

<https://theconversation.com/extreme-male-brain-theory-of-autism-confirmed-in-large-new-study-and-no-it-doesnt-mean-autistic-people-lack-empathy-or-are-more-male-106800>



Simon Baron-Cohen Professor of Developmental Psychopathology, University of Cambridge

Carrie Alison Director of Autism Screening Research, University of Cambridge

David M. Greenberg Psychologist, University of Cambridge

Varun Warriar Doctoral Scientist, University of Cambridge

Two long-standing psychological theories – the empathising-systemising theory of sex differences and the extreme male brain theory of autism – have been confirmed by our new study, the largest of its kind to date. The study, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, used data on almost 700,000 people in the UK to test the theories.

The first theory, known as the empathising-systemising theory of typical sex differences, posits that, on average, females will score higher on tests of empathy than males, and that, on average, males will score higher on tests of systemising than females.

Empathy is the drive to recognise another person's state of mind and to respond to another person's state of mind with an appropriate emotion. Systemising is the drive to analyse or build a system where a system is defined as anything that follows rules or patterns.

The second theory, known as the extreme male brain theory of autism, extends the empathising-systemising theory. It posits that autistic people will, on average, show a shift towards "masculinised" scores on measures of empathy and systemising. In other words, they will score below average on empathy tests, but score at least average, or even above average, on systemising tests.

The data on the almost 700,000 people in our study (including over 36,000 autistic people) came from an online survey carried out for the Channel 4 documentary, Are you autistic? Our analysis of this data robustly confirmed the predictions of these two theories.

D scores

A more subtle prediction from these theories concerned what we called "d scores". These are the difference between each person's score on the systemising and empathy tests. A high d score means a person's systemising is higher than their empathy. And a low d score means their empathy is higher than their systemising.

We found typical males had a shift towards a high d score while typical females had a shift towards a low d score. And autistic people, regardless of their sex, had a shift towards an even higher d score than typical males.

We also found that those working in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) had, on average, higher systemising and autistic traits scores than those in non-STEM occupations, who had higher empathy scores.

These results from the largest ever study of autism or of sex differences ever conducted, strongly support these two long-standing psychological theories. But results like these are easily prone to misinterpretation and we want to address them head on.

Beware of misinterpretations

The first misinterpretation is that the results mean that autistic people lack empathy, but this isn't the case. Empathy has two major parts: cognitive empathy (being able to recognise what someone else is thinking or feeling) and affective empathy (having an appropriate emotional response to what someone else is thinking or feeling).

The evidence suggests that it is only the first aspect of empathy – also known as “theory of mind” – that autistic people on average struggle with. As a result, autistic people are not uncaring or cruel but are simply confused by other people. They don't tend to hurt others, rather they avoid others.

They may miss the cues in someone's facial expression or vocal intonation about how that person is feeling. Or they may have trouble putting themselves in someone else's shoes, to imagine their thoughts. But when they are told that someone else is suffering, it upsets them and they are moved to want to help that person.

So autistic people do *not* lack empathy.

The second misinterpretation is that autistic people are hyper-male. Again, this is not the case. While our latest study shows that autistic people, on average, have a shift towards a masculinised profile of scores on empathy and systemising tests, they are not extreme males in terms of other typical sex differences. For example, they are not extremely aggressive, but tend to be gentle individuals.

So autistic people are not hyper-male in general.

Finding robust sex differences on average in over 600,000 people in the general population is important because it shows that factors linked to being male or female shape brain development. It doesn't mean that all males show one profile or all females show another, as individuals may be typical or atypical for their sex.

Similarly, there is large variation within autism, so this does not mean that all autistic people have difficulty with cognitive empathy. These findings are only valid at a group level, and interpreting it at an individual level is incorrect.

The causal factors influencing psychological sex differences are likely to include social experience and learning, but also include prenatal biology. For example, prenatal sex hormones like testosterone have been linked to empathy and systemising, and genetic factors have also been linked to scores on empathy.

And finding that autistic people show an extreme male profile on tests of empathy and systemising may also help explain why more males are diagnosed with autism – about two or three males for every one female. Autistic females have been overlooked historically and clinics are now more aware of this, but this new data suggests that the causes of autism may also include factors linked to sex differences.