



Aspergers - An Intentional Life

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Consideration of a perspective that Aspergers is not the mental defect imagined by many, but a variation in neurology that offers distinct advantages as well as challenges.

The implication of a thesis that a neurological variant that results in greater sensory and processing demands results in the development of a proportionally greater degree of manual or intentional control in the administration of ones thoughts in contrast to most whose less intensive neurology allows for the development of a more reflexive and integrated administrative thought process.

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The day that NBC was going to broadcast the last episode of Seinfeld, they went overboard for cross-promotion. In one promotional segment they had Jerry interviewed by the Today Show regular Katie Couric. In the sort of breezy way she had, she asked Jerry, “Where do you get your ideas”. You could see that Jerry was caught off guard and asked, “Is that what you want to talk about, where ideas come from”? He followed up with a good riposte, “Where do any ideas come from, like where does the idea come from for a new haircut”? Without batting an eye, Katie responded, “From a magazine”.

To me this exchange captured a little of the difference between what is called neuro-typical (normal people) and Aspergers people. Essentially Aspergers people bring a lot more mental processing to the table than others who sort of fly on “automatic pilot”.

When I was seventeen and I was first stationed in Germany, some fellow soldiers thought it would be amusing to take me out to a local bar. A girl came over and sat down next to me and asked me if I wanted to buy her a bottle of Champaign for \$65. My reaction was rather typical of Aspergers, trying to make sense of things.

I only made \$70 a month. My response was, “I do not understand why I would do that”. I later figured out that a bar girl was someone the bar owner hired who would sustain the illusion of romantic interest as long as purchases of over-priced alcohol continued. If I had an understanding of the process earlier, I would have been able to say something more diplomatic such as, “Thank you for your kind offer, but I do not have much money and I have to be watching my spending”.

Having been an Aspergers child and having raised Aspergers children, I have given some thought to the challenges presented by Aspergers both for the neuro-typical people they interact with and for Aspies themselves as they attempt to deal with the neuro-typical world. I understand that several years ago those who earn a living presenting themselves as experts in this field decided to change the name of Aspergers to Autism Spectrum Disorder. However, I feel that keeping Aspergers as a distinct condition is more helpful.

It is my contention that Aspergers is not a dysfunction, disability, disorder, or other defect. I see Aspergers as just a variation in neurology. A variation that produces significant differences in how the world is perceived and how thoughts are processed.

It may be that greater sensory and processing speed and or configuration result in an abundance of information to be processed. These differences appear more pronounced in childhood as the means to process information is still being developed.

Not every Aspie is a genius, has every characteristic, or has every characteristic to an extreme degree. It is this variability that makes Aspergers different from neuro-typical people as well as produce variability from each other.

I see the neurology of Aspergers presenting an Aspie with an abundance of information that has to be processed intentionally in order to minimize anxiety. This is in contrast to neuro-typical people who have a more reflexive way of integrating information from the world around them into their inner mental world.

It is my hope that this book will be of some help to those who are less able to use an automatic pilot and tend more to use manual control to intentionally direct the course of their life. If anyone needs some help in this regard, I can be reached at info@ems-publishing.com

Tim

Chapter 1 - Overview

This book is a compilation of my thoughts, reflections and observations about Aspergers. I began to consider I had Aspergers when I was in my 60s. In the 1990s there was a TV show where a character was supposed to have Aspergers and he scooted around the office holding his hands on his thighs as he ran down hallways. It was fairly easy to dismiss such a farcical presentation as having little humor and no relevance. However, over time I began to encounter more realistic although fragmentary descriptions such that I began to consider the possibility.

Getting Information from systems with vested interests;

When one first begins research, one encounters a great volume of "expert" information. This information is not always accurate or helpful. There are two reasons for this. The first is distortions that come from the hubris of academia. This institution has a long established practice of foisting off labels, categories, descriptions, and definitions as if they were understanding. The second reason is distortions that produce profits. The medical system is first and foremost a business. There is money to be made assigning labels and peddling remedies while processing people as components.

These two systems with their own agendas and interests often end up muddying the waters for those who seek to understand. One has to wade through many assertions and declarations to try to find a nugget or two of truth that can actually be useful.

A third obfuscating institutional system is the educational system. This system is less a source of information, but more threatening in its operation. The government industrial educational complex has managed to be able to claim credit for student success while blaming students as “disabled” for student failure. Protected by an almost impenetrable blanket of self-righteousness, and a teary-eyed claim of benefiting children, they often act to cull from the herd those children that would require effort on their part to deal with. Bright children learn more and dim ones learn less regardless of what a teacher may do or not do.

Like another institutional system, prison, school is a place where weakness is exposed and exploited. Failure to comply with teachers and failure to conform to students often results in being subjected to ridicule, bullying, and a host of anxiety producing situations that can cripple the development of a child.

Chapter 2 — How behavior became pathology

There are some physiological conditions that result in behavior problems such as with some tumors or brain injury or malformation such as with severe autism. However, these are not very common and are usually so profound as to distinctly herald a causative pathology. However, recently the range of what is considered “normal” has been narrowed. There was a time prior to mandatory public education when a diversity of behavior was more widely accepted. Being a character, unique, or different was not the anathema it is today.

By way of background, we can examine what came to be called ADHD. Henry Ford perhaps best demonstrated the efficiency of mass production. This was greatly expanded during world war II. So many people had come to accept the mass production of war material such as tanks and planes and the mass processing of soldiers and sailors that the continuing mass processing of children in school was never questioned. However after the war the intensification of the mass processing began to reveal problems. Not every child could pass through the system without difficulty. However, no one seemed to question the assumption that uniform conveyor-like processing was suitable for all children.

Charitable organizations like the Easter Seal society had grown during the early 20th century into massive financial fund raising machines. They funneled many of their donations into medical research to find cures for various childhood diseases. The vaccine for polio was greatly aided through their funding. In 1963 the Easter seal society held a meeting with the National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Blindness Public Health Service that resulted in a paper published in 1966, DHEW publication (NIH 76-349). This document was written by Sam D. Clemets an associate professor in the University of Arkansas Medical School. The paper was titled "Minimal Brain Dysfunction in Children". This was the result of "task force one" which was supposed to provide a definitional emphasis from a medical perspective. This report acknowledges that there is no physiological causative condition. However, as can be seen from the paper title, there was every expectation of medical technology finding one eventually.

Essentially, the assumption was that difficulty in being processed in the school machine was indicative of some defect or pathology (as yet unknown) in the child that required intervention and correction.

Task force two was supposed to recommend educational solutions but then also redefined the definitions of the first task force such that by 1972 the following criteria was widely accepted;

- (a) hyperactivity-constant, involuntary elevation of general activity level;
- (b) attention-concentration deficits-inability to persist in an activity for long periods of time;
- (c) impulsivity-inadequate inhibition or mediation of behavior by the higher thought processes;
- (d) disobedience-difficulty reported by parents or other authority figures in controlling the child's conduct by routine disciplinary methods;
- (e) reduced capacity for delaying gratification;
- (f) academic achievement below the child's measured intellectual ability;
- (g) generalized unhappiness and lack of self-esteem;
- (h) presence of troublesome behavior patterns, such as temper tantrums, destructiveness, and school truancy;
- (i) so-called "soft" neurological signs, including clumsiness, poor balance, impaired fine motor coordination, and deficient visual-motor organization; perceptual and cognitive dysfunctions, such as visual and auditory discrimination problems and reduced capacity for abstract concept formation.

It is not difficult to see that rather than a pervasive medical condition, like polio, seeking a solution like a vaccine, what is represented is the discontent of teachers (and by them of parents) requesting aid in processing difficult components through their educational machine. It is strange that everyone assumed that children were “defective” rather than the idea of uniform bulk processing of children was not ideal.

The discovery of a “cure” lay in the availability of amphetamines which were discovered just before WWII and used by both sides. After the war many people used the drug both legally and illegally to boost work performance.

The medical “treatment” of ADHA

To use an illustration: If an employer declared that shoveling 3 tons of bulk material each day was the minimum acceptable job performance and everyone was required to meet this standard, it might be expected that women, children, the aged, and the infirm might fail to meet this standard. They might even be declared “shovel disabled”. However, if a medical doctor gave them a prescription for amphetamines, they might be able to meet the standard. It would thus appear that support for the validity of the diagnosis of “shovel disability” had been found.

It is sad that the practice of giving amphetamines to children grew to such widespread proportions bolstered by the apparent “success” of behavior that was made more compliant. Rather than assuming that this drug “fixed” some as yet indiscernible medical condition, a more likely thesis might be that the drug accelerated physiological function that resulted in less dissonance with neurological function. However, no one was really interested in the real explanation as long as there was a mechanism for making children more compliant. This “cure” seemed to substantiate the view that an unknown physical defect was fixed with medication.

In a way, a big enough hammer can force a square peg into a round hole, but only at the expense of breaking off the corners.

Prior to the industrial revolution children were seen in a different light. Today they are often seen as organisms in the burdensome custody of which is shared with schools, and various activity groups until they are able to move out on their own. Anything that can make their management easier can be seen as beneficial.

Chapter 3 - The story of Aspergers

In the 1970s and 80s the educational field of learning disabilities was a growth industry fueled primarily by the “discovery” of attention deficit disorder (ADD) (after having shed the pejorative sounding “Minimal Brain Dysfunction” moniker). Since then, there has been a sort of explosion of diagnosable categories. There is an alphabet soup of categories of learning “disabilities”. Acronyms like ADHD, APD, AS, CAPD, EFD, HFA, LD, OCD, ODD, PDD, SLD, etc. abound in an environment where there is money to be made with each new category.

In 1991 Uta Frith translated a previously obscure paper by Hans Asperger into English. By 1992 “Aspergers” had become a diagnosable condition. In 1994 it was listed as a distinct condition in the psychiatric “bible” the DSM4. By 2013 the DSM5 had swept the condition under the “rug” of autism as part of the new “Autism Spectrum Disorder”.

To consider why this diagnosis became popular so quickly and then after nineteen years was relegated to the relative obscurity of an appendage to another diagnosis is to look beyond just the passing of a fad.

In 1944 Hans Asperger had identified a group of characteristics from four children he had observed. In 1981 Lorna Wing who was familiar with his work coined the term “Aspergers Syndrome” to describe children she had observed as well. One reason for both Hans and Lorna as well as those who came across their research to consider these characteristics as identifying a particular group is that they are so distinctive.

Asperger described his patients as like "little professors". Even though he considered their social awkwardness as similar to autism, he thought these children would have success later in life.

Asperger characteristics;

Excessively focused on special interests

Difficulty making friends

Difficulty looking others directly in the eye

Communicating with others may be impaired

May run off on tangents

May not allow opportunity for the other person (or people) to say anything

Over-sensitivity to stimuli through the five senses – including light, taste, and textures

Overly reliant on fixed routines

Difficulty handling changes to the daily routine

May throw temper tantrums

May have above average IQ

Since “experts” do not understand why these traits should appear, they surmise that it must be the result of some autism mechanism in a similar way to how experts decided that poor school performance was a result of minimal (undetectable) brain damage. Reclassifying Aspergers as autism produces little practical help and can even muddy the waters of research.

It is the intention of this book to follow a more useful path by considering that Aspergers describes a group of characteristics most likely caused by a similar neurological variance as opposed to a neurological defect.

Since Asperger people may have more intentional thought processes, it would follow that they may not find much value in a diagnostic process that is built on categorization. It is the purpose of this book to provide a more functional descriptive frame of reference from which management strategies and coping skills can be brought to bear resulting in less anxiety and a better chance at a happier life.

Chapter 4 - A Different Language

There was a Twilight Zone TV episode where a girl had been tragically orphaned. Her parents had been rather reclusive. Everyone thought her lack of talking was a defect or rebellion. It was revealed that her parents had raised her to be telepathic. Instead of the grievous disability that others thought she had, she was shown to have an exceptional but indiscernible advantage.

The person with Aspergers has a somewhat similar dilemma. If an Aspergers person has to take a lot of time to process the information he has received, it can appear that he is retarded. If he blurts out what he is thinking without processing, he can appear like a smug know-it-all. If the processing leads to conflicting results and crippling anxiety, he can appear mute, disinterested, or obstinate.

In a way similar to someone speaking a foreign language, words may have to be taken in, translated, processed, and retranslated before responding. However, for the Aspie the processing can involve many divergent pathways. Ambiguity and imprecision is always troubling for an Aspie it can either bog down processing or can be ignored and replaced with assumptions.

An example of the difficulty this presents might be seen in dealing with the common greeting, “How are you?”. In attempting to respond one processing path is an assessment of current and recent health. Another path is what information is proper to share, another path is assessing the actual interest level of the person asking, another processing path is a mental search of similar encounters to determine if a response falls within the bounds of expected responses. A more reflexive person might just simply reply, “fine”.

Neuro-typical people do not generally wring their hands over attempting to parse exact meaning or reflect on possible reactions, but simply rely on reflex and convention.

For most people the world is perceived in a less intense way and their thoughts are mostly reflexive. Only occasionally, perhaps at times of crisis, are they faced with switching off what might be called an “autopilot”. The “go along and get along” flow of easy congeniality and comfortable social interaction can provide a buffer to some of the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” life offers. For example, a salesman who took it personal every time a door was slammed in his face, might not be able to continue in his job.

If most of the people in the world had Aspergers, those who were not so processing intensive in their thinking might be seen as having a sort of slumbering complacency and could be considered as “disabled”. This is reflective of the human tendency to perceive difference as defect. As it is, those with Aspergers are in the minority. Those with an occupation that requires evaluation of others such as teachers, doctors, and social workers often look only at external characteristics and frequently see Aspergers differences as disability.

Just like the person traveling to a foreign country, the person with Aspergers bears the burden of learning enough of the other language to be able to function. This is especially difficult for Aspie children as they have to develop their own normal (to them) processing abilities while also learning how to interact with those who do not share theirs.

There are many possibilities to explain neurological diversity such as, greater neurological processing speeds, more intense neurological signaling, a greater number of neurological pathways, or a more complex neurological interconnectedness. Regardless of the particular reason, what seems to be occurring is a brain dealing with what can be an overwhelming amount of information.

An illustration of the difficulty in dealing with information overload might be seen in the first Sherlock Holmes movie with Robert Downy Jr. There was a scene where he is waiting for Watson and Watson's fiancée at a restaurant. His attention is drawn in many directions as he observes the actions of others and picks up fragments of their conversations. The scene does a pretty good job of trying to have the viewer understand a little of the intensity of such perceptions.

Neurological intensity can go beyond just processing. Touch, taste, smell, sound, and light can also trigger an intense reaction. Just as certain stimuli can cause extreme discomfort, others can provide soothing or even pleasurable sensations. Some of the stranger behavior of Asperger children can be more easily understood from this perspective. The parent still has to instruct the child to moderate and have control over his own peculiar behavior.

The difficulty in dealing with an abundance of information is magnified in the development years of childhood. One way to illustrate this is to consider the normal transition from childhood through adolescence to adulthood. I have often used the fictional theme of telepathy to illustrate this transition.

If a person were to suddenly wake one morning with a telepathic ability, he might not be able to function as being bombarded with everyone's thoughts could be quite debilitating. If the same person had been a telepath for five years, he probably would have figured out how to tune out those thoughts or disregard them so that he could get on with his real life. I have compared this to the development of the ability to engage in abstract thoughts that is one of the hallmarks of adolescence.

A child of eight years old might be told by an acquaintance, "You stink", and not be much troubled by it. In five years, if told the same statement, the now teenager might begin asking himself if he really does stink, why would the person say that, or what did I do that would make the other person angry. A deeper and broader mental world is opening to him and many of the difficulties of adolescence derive from attempting to adjust to this new ability.

The Asperger child faces a similar difficulty but years earlier. In addition, the Aspie child does not have a previous or established context to serve as a foundation from which the onslaught of information can be dealt with.

Consider one of the first things a baby does is learn to recognize and visually track his mother's face. A lot of neurological processing is allocated to the visual perception of facial information. One reason that as an Aspergers child grows he may come to avoid eye contact is that the information he receives from this can be so overwhelming as to create a high level of anxiety.

Anxiety is often the result of not being able to feel comfortable in the midst of uncertainty. The neurology of Aspergers can frequently result in processing information (especially verbal or social) that produces inconclusive results or results with multiple and sometimes contradictory conclusions that can result in indeterminate states that remove certainty and result in anxiety.

One might make the case that what is called "selective mutism" is a simple variant of this neurology. For the child overwhelmed with neurological sensations and processing, it can seem that they have anything but an "intentional" life. The key to moving out of this apparent paralysis is to develop the skill to deal with uncertainty. Some Aspies plow right through with false certainty almost becoming bullies themselves. However, those crippled with uncertainty may find more success working to reduce exaggerated fear of consequence..

The character of Malcolm on the TV show *Malcolm in the Middle* was supposed to have a high IQ. He would frequently be brought to a point of indecision and effective paralysis as a result of his consideration of multiple possibilities, scenarios, and options. This also is illustrative of excessive neurological function.

Concentrated attention tends to attribute greater significance to consequences than is usually warranted. In addition, an Aspie can soften the impact of his communication by the cultivation of qualified or conditional expression.

For example, the basic “answering a question with a question” is a good standby. Using the qualifiers, possibly, could, seems, might, and appears can leave some wiggle room. Even leaving things incomplete or delaying can work, “I’m not sure”, “Let me get back to you on that”, “I can see both sides”.

The Aspie can be hobbled by thinking he has to control every outcome and that everything is as consequential as who to marry. Much of this stress can diminish as age accumulates experience. However, parents can help the child in skill and perspective development that can reduce the time it takes to better manager the anxieties of uncertainty.

Chapter 5 - Open borders

The metaphor of Aspergers as a foreign language and communication with more neuro-typical people as if negotiating in an alien country might be stretched a little to mix the geographical concept of border with the psychological concept of boundary.

Frequently Aspergers children (and even adults) interact with others in a socially inappropriate way. This is sometimes referred to as lacking a sense of boundary. Driven by what is desired and constrained only by what is imaginable, behavior and communication may exceed the limits of convention, propriety, and expectation.

The child who comes to rely heavily on his own interpretation of the world he senses is less likely to consider restraint unless he can become convinced that there is some benefit. The Aspergers child who enjoys the sensation of flapping his hands, will not very likely forego the sensation as the benefit of not “creeping out” others has yet to be fully appreciated.

Since neuro-typical people develop a type of social integration almost automatically, it should be expected that those not so automatically integrated would demonstrate idiosyncratic behavior.

Often Aspie children are unaware of the distortion they give to information when they process it. If disorder gives anxiety and order gives security, an Aspie can dig his heels in regarding what is true, who said what, or who is at fault. This can aggravate communication because even though an Aspie is more inclined to precision, accuracy, and correct form (often to annoying proportions) he will accommodate distortion, revision and alteration so that he can reduce anxiety, and increase the comfort of certainty. This also makes him less likely to entertain the possibility he is wrong about something. A parent has to face and endure this uphill battle to correct their child when he actively refuses to consider anything in need of correction.

Children often ask embarrassing or awkward questions not being aware of the larger context of propriety. Aspergers children will exceed even this with expressing a rebuke to parents, demanding explanations for actions, and even expressing condescension. This is often because they see this behavior in adults and see no reason not to assume it for themselves. Having created a mental world for themselves of order, they can see no reason not to call others to account for any perceived disorder.

The Aspie child integrates the information he receives and creates an internal framework for receiving additional information. There is often a stark clarity in categories such as “right” and “wrong”. This can result in an intransigence or even belligerency as the child may not brook an assertion that his construct is in error or even incomplete. A common Aspie characteristic is defensiveness when challenged or even when there is only a perception of challenge. This defensiveness can result in internal anxiety that shuts off communication or initiates a counter-attack.

It has been said that there are two ways of learning, through your own experiences or through the experiences of others. The first can be much more painful. It can be difficult for Aspergers children to take instruction perhaps because instruction from others or their experiences seem too abstract. One illustration is that for some children the warning not to touch the stove because it is hot is sufficient. For the Aspergers child, having their hand briefly placed on a pot at about 140 degrees and told that is what “hot” means allows them to make the word “hot” a more real concept.

The neuro-typical child may require fewer harsh lessons as his more automatic integration to his world may not require his full attention.

Asperger children may be so inundated with sensory information and overwhelmed with processing possibilities, that there is little room left over for consideration of the reaction of other people. They might declare some observation or thought with little regard for the interest of the other person.

These children might understandably assume that others process information and react to stimuli the same way they do. It might be difficult for them to consider that others might not share their interests or have interests of their own to share. Living so much in their own head leaves little room to consider the possibility that others might have alternative methods of sensing or processing information.

Eventually Aspergers children can acquire enough experience to develop management strategies and coping mechanisms sufficient to function in the normal world. They may end up limiting exposure such as withdrawing to a point of minimal contact, forming a mask or simulated persona that acts as a sort of interface to the normal world, or plowing ahead with stubborn single-mindedness. Each of these strategies carries with it a heavy price.

Boundary issues are more prevalent with Aspie children. Even when they are told about rules for what is and is not acceptable, these rules are not easily integrated as they seem alien and unless the child can be convinced of the merit, the rules will probably be quickly forgotten.

It has been said of people that relocate from the city to a rural environment that you are never considered “one of us” until all four of your grandparents are buried in the town cemetery. The implication being that full integration is something you have to be born into.

Asperger people may not ever achieve full function in the neuro-typical world. A high degree of function can be achieved, but like ex-patriot communities, there is usually more comfort with those who share perceptions, experiences, and perspectives.

Parents of Aspie children may find more success guiding their children into paths that optimize their own inner resources as opposed to attempting to get them to comply with “norms” that are established by mechanisms that are unavailable to them.

Chapter 6 - Critical Perspective

One aspect of Aspergers is the ability to observe and comment on differences and inconsistencies. This can result in a seemingly endless stream of criticism. One can see how this characteristic would not win many friends.

An Aspergers child may desire to sort the information with which he feels bombarded into manageable groupings, patterns, and associations. This helps reduce the anxiety that can result from the uncertainty of unresolved stimuli. One result of this, particularly in children, is the internal certainty of opinions and ideas which can result in obstinacy. The reluctance to alter opinions and beliefs as a result of new information or correction can be an attempt to avoid an increase in anxiety associated with uncertainty.

The developing child who demonstrates critical or obstinate characteristics might benefit from having this characteristic explained to them and working to help them develop a sort of mental filing system where a compartment is established to hold some observations as an alternative to processing each observation as either good or bad, black or white, or right or wrong.

For example, a child might be encouraged to consider the first time they hear the expression, “The moon is made out of green cheese” to hold off routing this into the “wrong” file. If the child is unaware of this as a trope, it would sound very strange. He could be encouraged to route such strange statements into his mental “hold” file and tag it as needing additional information.

One of the many ways Aspergers children (and sometimes adults) irritate people is by proclamations, declarations, and assertions of opinions as absolute truth. Developing a habit of qualifying statements such as; “It may be that...”, or “It seems to me that...” can go a long way towards softening the impact of such assertions.

Neuro-typical people also notice differences but do not seem as vocal about their expression or seem to give them the significance as Aspies. This suggests that differences or inconsistencies create a type of dissonance the resolution of which is more necessary to reduce discomfort. Unfortunately this often leads to the attribution of “fault”, “wrongness”, or blame to what is observed and can feed a sense of superiority or self-righteousness.

Aspies tend to avoid forms of lying, not so much out of moral superiority but from both not having much skill and the discomfort these endeavors usually produce.

The one form of lying that Aspergers people tend to be more vulnerable to is self-deception. There was an episode of Seinfeld where his friend George who had a reputation as a skilled liar was trying to quickly condense his lying expertise to help Jerry prepare to pass a lie detector test. He said, "It's not a lie if you believe it". This illustrates some of the confidence and comfort obtainable from self-deception.

Since neuro-typical people draw much of their inner life reflexively from their environment, they are more vulnerable to what the others in that environment think of them. They avoid internal dissonance by maintaining greater social compliance.

The Aspie who is more inclined to structure his own inner life, is more vulnerable to distortions that ease anxiety and boost confidence. As a result, memories can be altered and opinions can be shaped that deviate from the precision of truth as a result of the greater comfort to be found in achievement, superiority, and certainty.

A common parental error is excessive praise given to children. While encouragement is necessary, the distortion of truth to achieve self-esteem, may create more harm than good.

Chapter 7 - Creativity

The comfort derived from literalness which may contribute to an over-representation in occupations such as information technology, engineering, and medicine does not necessarily mean that an Aspergers person has a diminished imagination or is lacking in creativity.

Many Aspergers children (particularly girls) can have a rich imaginative inner life that is manifest in fantasy fiction, writing, drawing, and even video games. Since Aspies tend to seek out those things that comfort and avoid those things that cause anxiety, they may have more of a problem preferring a created world even at the expense of neglecting the real one.

In this arena self-deception can also cause problems. Aspies may see in their own work merit that exceeds reality. It can be more helpful to single out one small positive aspect worthy of comment rather than unwarranted praise given to an entire project.

Creativity in the traditional artistic world usually requires compromise as what is created needs to be sold to sustain a living. Unless a person happens to desire to express the same thing people want to buy, there can be disharmony.

Sometimes it is more advantageous to keep artistic expression restricted to “hobby” status so that compromise may not have to be dealt with. In addition, professional artistic communities often are riddled with drug and alcohol problems along with the entanglements of sexual perversions.

Creativity is not restricted only to traditional artistic venues. Craftsmanship of all sorts also fall into this arena. Even something like computer programming can be an outlet for creative expression.

As Aspies are less tied to the conventional, they are often able to bring fresh perspectives to the table. This can result in an infusion of novelty that can solve problems as well as open consideration of potentialities previously off the radar.

Problems can arise in a collaborative creative enterprise. Frequently Aspies encounter misunderstandings or cause them when working closely with others. This can be aggravated when issues of creative differences are encountered.

It is ironic that as much as Aspies criticize others, they can be devastated by criticism themselves. Creative expression always risks criticism and the Aspie who follows this path needs to develop thicker skin and an openness to constructive criticism which does not come naturally.

Chapter 8 - Seeing the tree rather than the forest

Tony Atwood (a famous Aspergers speaker) uses an illustration of what could be a brother and sister standing in front of a broken window. The brother is handing his sister a ball. He comments that most people tend to see in the picture an attempt by the brother to set his sister up to be blamed for breaking the window. He relates that most Aspies tend to observe that a ball of that size would be unlikely to produce the damage shown in the window.

Having a first response that is mechanistic is often cited as illustrating that Aspergers people have less empathy for people. This may not be an accurate conclusion to draw. For the Aspie, the determination of relational causality is more certain in regard to the ball and window. The boy and girl represent an image set for which no likely relationship can be determine without additional information.

It is these sort of examples that illustrate a significant difference in processing between Aspergers people and neuro-typical people. The Aspie is less likely to assume motivation. This avoidance in considering relational issues can make him more vulnerable to exploitation.

A person who lives a more predominately reflexive life may have a need to be more socially integrated in order to have the social stimulus that triggers his “reflexes”. An Aspie may be more likely able to stimulate his own interests and thus not feel as drawn to social engagement. This can lead to delayed social development or even a preference for a lower level of social engagement.

Being rather disconnected from the developmental social milieu, an Aspie can be an easy mark for someone to take advantage of. However, the accumulation of painful or humiliating experiences can result in an Aspie who’s first reaction to a social contact is a threat assessment.

Because Asperger people bring a lot of processing power to bear on that with which they are confronted, they often fixate on a single issue and neglect context, proportion, and background. It is a little like the Xmen character Cyclops who has powerful laser beams come out of his eyes wherever he looks.

An Aspie can bring an intensity of overreaction to whatever comes across his gaze as well. If aggravated by suddenness, threat, or accusation, a reaction can become quite aggressive.

Chapter 9 - Belligerency

There are two main dynamics that can drive an Aspergers person towards seeming belligerency. The first is a lack of common social frame of reference that can allow assumptions to assign malicious motives where none actually exist. The second is an insensitivity to others that fails to restrain behavior which can cause offense to the point of retaliation. In the first instance the Aspie is ironically bringing into existence that which was only imaginary. In the second instance he is unaware of being the cause of the reactions of others. In both cases he ends up causing that with which he has to contend.

While some Aspies can seem shy while seething internally or filled with resentment, others feel little restraint at expressing their displeasure. This can be reactive and the intensity can be proportional to the suddenness of the trigger, the magnitude of the perceived offense, the degree of perceived internationality, and the frustration of shattered expectations. The intensity of focus an Aspie has can also magnify the intensity.

An Aspie can get a reputation as a hothead or someone who over-reacts and cannot be trusted to keep sound judgment in a difficult situation.

Hans Asperger referred to Aspie children as “little professors”. He might also have called them “little lawyers”. This tendency establishes a framework of argument and seeing the need to correct others. In a way, this establishes a foundation of arrogance (assuming the role of corrector of others), accusation (implying error), and control (holding others to account). It is easy to see why Aspies are often not viewed favorably. It also can be seen how this opening dynamic might contribute to a more hostile encounter.

A person might not object to being corrected regarding the current price of a postage stamp. However, if a person makes a comment about what he feels is wrong with the government, he might take greater offense if an Aspie were to imply or say he was wrong and start to correct him.

Just after WWII people would get into fist-fights over politics or religion. This is not in itself noble, it just reflects a time when what people thought was right and true was worth fighting for. Today society has transitioned away from the highest public value being truth to just feeling good. It is almost as if Aspergers people are anachronistic. They are often unaware that their comments and criticisms can violate the new public value by making others feel bad.

It has been said, “Do not ascribe to malice that which can more easily be explained by incompetence, indifference, or inattention”.

Since an Asperger person is not so closely tied to the social world around him, in this relative isolation he can more easily attribute mal-intent to the motives of others. This is done often because it is hard for an Aspie to consider how little intentional attention others may give to their actions or words.

Also contributing to the magnitude of reaction and providing a component of indignancy is the sometimes over-inflated sense of being in the right.

Aspies can be seen as belligerent, self-righteous, blowhards, and not without some justification. In order to avoid or minimize this, the Aspie should consider working to cultivate a delay mechanism in reacting to things in general, but especially to sudden occurrences. The time gained in such a delay can be used to take a critical and objective look at a situation so that inflammatory components might be identified and moderated. It is at this point that the internationality of the Aspie inner life can be turned to an advantage. It is not natural to moderate a reaction, but it is a discipline well worth developing.

Chapter 10 - Melt-downs

One of the most intense demonstrations of Aspergers (especially in children) is a complete and incapacitating loss of function when given over to rage, weeping, smashing, or other intense emotional release.

This is made even more strange to neuro-typical people as they can fathom no discernable reason that could explain such an excessive debilitating condition.

While an Aspie can appear as a rather “cold fish” to many, there can be an inner intensity not readily apparent. Sudden frustrations can produce an abundance of emotional energy with an intensity similar to the accumulating electrical charge in a thunderstorm, undetected until suddenly discharged as lightning.

Breaking things, hitting things, or for children often flailing at parents are all manifestations of attempting to discharge the energy of emotional intensity through a physical medium.

Aspies like to have an ordered life. This includes expectations. If sudden disorder is introduced, it can exceed the capacity to intentionally manage and restore order resulting in a collapse of control and a physical demonstration of disorder.

The passage of a melt-down can be relatively quick and the Aspie can be oblivious to the effect the event has had on nearby neuro-typical people who like hurricane victims just see a path of carnage and destruction.

Striking out, like swearing, can be an attempt to exert control out of chaos. Aspies who experience the same tempestuous forces, but keep it all internal, risk a corrosive effect imprinting on thoughts and feelings.

Both internal and external melt-downs can combine with an exaggerated perspective of being “in the right”, to create a sense of victim-hood or other distortion of reality compounding isolation.

As Aspies transition out of childhood, some skill is usually acquired to minimize the frequency and intensity of melt-downs. However, even adult Aspies or Aspies who have a less intense reactive dynamic are still vulnerable to the emotional avalanche that can occur without warning.

Like the straw that broke the camel’s back, attention should be given to accumulating stressors. Just as one cannot put off going to the bathroom without risking an accident, the identification of and management of accumulating stress can aid in melt-down prevention.

Chapter 11 - Being right

One result of a self-ordered intentional inner life is that one can achieve a great deal of comfort from what has been constructed. The reception of information that this order is in error or incomplete often creates unwelcome anxiety. This is often dealt with by rejecting the information as erroneous. Frequently an association of negative intent can be made with the source of the information that prejudices future communication.

In children this often presents as obstinacy, refusal of instruction, and outright rebellion. One might imagine what rearing a child like the character Spock on the TV show Star Trek would have been like. However, for the Aspie, logic takes second place to comfort. The child instructed to clean up his room may come to the conclusion that putting one or two things away is a fulfillment of the request and be indignant when challenged on this. He might find the assertion that he has failed to do what he was told to be insulting and worthy of rebuttal. In his mind being right means being in compliance with his conclusions more than an analysis of the original request. A parent may have more success in getting the child to explain his rational and then ask him to defend the point at which he concluded one or two toys was sufficient.

A famous psychology experiment used to illustrate what is called cognitive dissonance, shows that people will distort truth in order to reduce anxiety (dissonance). The neurological discomfort of dissonance for the Aspie is greater and subsequently his motive even stronger to rationalize.

A neuro-typical person compares his actions with the imprint of the world around him constructed almost automatically as he grew. “Rightness” thus determined carries with it a high degree of social convention and integration. In addition, dissonance can result in an almost automatic self-adaptive modification of the internal construct resulting in few “crises of conscience”..

The Asperger person makes a similar comparison, but his mental construct was largely established by himself. It is often missing many of the social context elements of the neuro-typical person. As a result, dissonance can trigger defensiveness. Since so much security and confidence is derived from the assurance that the construct is “right”, it can be difficult to entertain the prospect of modification.

Chapter 12 - Ingratitude

Asperger people often forego what might be called reflexive or even superficial gratitude. For example, a neuro-typical person might automatically say, "Thank you" to someone who picks up something they dropped. An Aspie might not say it because they are less programmed for automatic responses in general. It might require an intentional decision to say, "Thank you" predicated on a thought process that intentionally considers what an appropriate response should be.

Often Aspies are considered to be rude, inconsiderate, or even smugly superior because of such lapses. When what is deficient is the reflexive neurological processing that better matches what others expect.

If an Aspie brings the focus of his attention to bear on a particular act of kindness, he can recognize something that had been done for him and hold a deep appreciation. If he gives voice to the depth of his appreciation, he can be seen as odd for the intensity of his thanks.

This trait is not as obvious in children as they are naturally more selfish and self-focused and are less expected to think of others.

Chapter 13 - Sensory issues

One of the more puzzling aspects of Aspergers that perplex many neuro-typical people is the profound impact sensory stimulation can have. An Aspie may feel that wearing wool is like having his skin on fire. His reaction to wool often seems way out of proportion to someone for whom wool presents no particularly unusual sensation.

Regardless of whether it is touch, smell, taste, sound, or light, an Aspie can have a reaction that seems selfish to one who is used to overlooking slight annoyances for the sake of social propriety. It can be difficult for a parent to discern rebellious intransigence from sensory avoidance sometimes. One technique to use is to see if the offending stimulus can be narrowed. For example, the desire not to be hugged by an aunt might be narrowed down to a particularly strong perfume rather than a dislike of the aunt or of hugging. If hugging is a problem, a shoulder squeeze or a two handed Roman handshake might work as a substitute. An Aspergers child may not be able to quell a reaction, but he can be helped to learn management techniques and coping strategies to minimize the effect.

Ear plugs that only cut out half the sound or sun glasses that cut out intense light might serve to aid those facing challenges in those areas. If the same stimulus produces different results at different times, it may be that there is a compounding problem that has a psychological component. For example, a particularly unpleasant teacher who had a habit of tapping his pencil on his desk may have contributed to that particular sound having an even more unpleasant effect on an Aspie. Recognizing an augmenting component can sometimes help to “take the edge off”.

Just as some sensations can cause unpleasant reactions, there are some that can cause pleasurable sensation. Some like hand flapping, finger rubbing, face touching, or foot tapping may help to create a tactile sensation that establishes a sense of security and may be more pronounced during times of anxiety. There is a darker side to this as well. Some pleasurable sensations can come to be associated with arousal and become fixated in an impeding way with more intimate relationships.

Sensitivity to a particular sensation can range from a minor annoyance to a paralyzing shut-down. To most neuro-typical people these sorts of reactions can seem overly dramatic. In all fairness they sometimes can be (especially with children). However, it should be realized that being startled from a loud noise, even recoiling from a slight touch, or spitting out an unexpected foul taste can be the result of a shift of intense focus from other processing tasks all towards the source of the sensation.

A key element here is the “unexpected”. For the Aspie an ordered world is one with less anxiety. A sudden disturbance in expected orderliness can result in a cascade of processing “failures” as many tasks are interrupted. This can result in having to re-sequence tasks which can demand that all previous processing be redone. It is a sort of tipping of the apple cart that can result in frustration, anger, and even a melt-down.

An example might be complex computer programming. A person may have to hold many different functions in his mind and work out the relationships between them. If this mental process is interrupted, the construct may come crashing down and several hours may be needed to restore it to the point it was at before the interruption.

Sensory issues can be a single interrupting event, or a continual background distraction like a ticking clock or water dripping from a faucet. Children facing these issues can be directed to consider what steps can be taken to moderate the effect of these stimuli. For example, removing tags from clothing, using a fan as a sort of white noise generator to drown out background noise, dimming lights that may be too bright, or negotiating with siblings to schedule activity locations.

Sensory issues are largely neurological and less amenable to modification as a result of will-power or trying harder. Parents are encouraged to explore what experiments along the lines of stimulus reduction, habituation, or modification might prove successful and help the child have options to manage his environment to reduce the anxiety caused by over stimulation.

Chapter 14 - Peter Pan

Peter Pan was a fictional character who never grew up. One aspect of Aspergers that can be prominent in children is what appears to be a developmental delay in maturation. This can be more pronounced in adolescence when certain affectations developed in childhood are not abandoned when one might expect. For example, running barefoot though the grass, deriving pleasure from stuffed animals, or even clothing selections made with little regard for the reactions of others.

A young person grown accustom to living largely in an internal world may not easily give up the comforts of childhood. It can seem to be pointless to give up comforts and enjoyments without good reason. Sadly it is often ridicule, ostracization, or mockery that shatter the illusions of childhood..

Neuro-typical children form their inner world more reflexively and as they grow and develop, their inner world almost automatically adjusts to the new realities of their peer defined environment. For the Aspie, disconnected from that process, an apparent delay in maturation can also indicate (like childhood) a vulnerability by reason of naivete.

There is a significant role for a parent to play helping the child construct his inner life. Since this construct is less automatic, leaving the child to his own devices allows for developmental delay due to neglect as the child has little incentive to advance on his own.

Most Aspie children would resist the parental attempt to help them construct a more complete inner world because play is usually preferred over work. Parental attempts to aid development can be further impeded if the Aspie demonstrates a degree of mutism.

In a consumer culture where there are marketplace incentives to shape the populace towards delayed maturation and thus prolong susceptibility towards advertising influence, delayed development due to Aspergers may not be so pronounced.

Since much of an Aspies development is intentionally achieved by his own devices, at some point he will probably recognize that it is to his advantage to “put away childish things”.

Part of this perspective is the perception beyond immediate gratification. When the future becomes important, there can be justification to set aside transient diversions.

Chapter 15 - Absentmindedness

The ability to focus most of ones mental processing on a particular object of attention is often at the expense of secondary and tertiary objects. For example a child may become so focused on play activity that they forget about any chores or other responsibilities they may have.

While it is natural for children to be more neglectful, Aspies in general and Aspie children in particular can be frustratingly consistent in such negligence.

Aspergers people do not have the benefit of many of the mental formations that are acquired almost automatically by neuro-typical people. Aspies almost have to program themselves to compensate for some of these deficiencies. For example, slowly most Aspies develop a sort of mental reminder that arises every fifteen to thirty minutes with a “to do” list.

It can be very helpful to specifically undertake particular programming as such and make use of it so that it becomes more tangible. In this way Aspies can make advantageous use of internationality.

Chapter 16 - Friendship

One of the hallmark characteristics of Aspergers is difficulty in social interaction. Aspies can come on too strong, be too distant, and even go years without connecting with someone. The Asperger child can often have a strong desire for a friend, and after some poor experiences can end up being happy just with no one bullying him.

The Asperger young adult often contends with romantic possibilities. The contemplation of marriage was difficult enough in the past, but in modern times prospective spouses can have widely varying expectations of what constitutes marriage and family. As a general rule, the Asperger spouse will fail to provide a non-Asperger spouse with the affection, interest, and encouragement that is expected and the necessary “glue” to hold a marriage together.

Some of the same dynamics that hinder Aspergers people in marriage also work to make their friendships short lived. For example, it can be difficult for a person who brings an analytical perspective to bear on something like determining the correct frequency of contact (between too much and too little) to sustain a friendship. Failure to identify a “natural interval” can result in relationship death by either atrophy or smothering.

Throughout most of history one's siblings and cousins were ones friends. Modern society is more transient and what few children are born are quickly inserted into age segregated systems such as church and school.

Deep friendships can still form in the forge of adversity such as combat or prison. However, today most friendships are a result of a confluence of similar interests and work or geography. In a superficial and prosperous society "friendships" can be based on a sort of consumer preference such as if someone is entertaining, wealthy, influential, flattering, attentive, or has some useful skill such as computer repair. These people might have several people wanting to get to know them.

Most friendships and, sadly, most marriages end when one person does not feel their effort is rewarded sufficiently to continue. At least friendships can fade without rancorous custody and property disputes.

Given the shallow depth and tenuous nature of relationships in today's society in the first place, Aspergers people have an even more difficult time of it as they do not often have those qualities (except computer repair) that make them attractive in the social marketplace.

Most Aspergers people would not be described as charming, vivacious, life of the party, hail and well met fellows. In addition, most relationships require at least a minimal expression of interest in the other person and this is often where Aspies fall short. Not so much in the having interest, but in its expression.

Friendship requires not only an active interest to sustain it, but a willingness to overlook transgressions. A writer once commenting about the collaborative process said that as long as each person was willing to do 80% of the work, it would go well. The implication was that each person would think they are doing most of the work.

Given the inclination towards criticism, being “right”, a greater interior life, absentmindedness, and insensitivity, Aspies have an uphill battle trying to initiate and sustain a friendship. We are generally picked last for team activities in school and not always by reason of poor physical performance.

One can understand why Aspies are considered poor candidates for friendship. However, Aspie characteristics can be a distinct advantage in times of adversity and crisis. Faithful, resolute, undaunted, and unswerving can be attractive qualities in hard times when they are often otherwise considered as stodgy, obstinate, and boring.

Final Thoughts

There are many unpleasant characteristics of Aspergers. There are neurological reasons for them and they are usually reduced over time as skills and management techniques improve.

Those of us with Aspergers can benefit from the discomfort of facing some of the harsh realities of our situation. We may never become fully integrated into neuro-typical life. However, it is not necessary for happiness or to have a full and rewarding life.

There are also advantages to the intentional life such as the possibility of greater freedom, deeper understanding, and employment prospects where greater focus is financially rewarded.

Those with the Aspergers neurological variant are encouraged to embrace the intentional life and to view their internal construction with an eye toward continual modification and addition so that greater and better function is achieved.

Most of neuro-typical life happens automatically. To approximate this, the Aspie has to roll up his sleeves and build substituting mechanisms. This takes time, effort, and knowledge. The process starts when one cultivates the intention.