

Sensory perceptual issues in Autism and Asperger Syndrome

BOGDASHINA, Ol'ga. *Specifika smyslového vnímání u autismu a Aspergerova syndromu*. Přeložila Helena ČÍŽKOVÁ. V Praze: Pasparta, 2017. ISBN 978-80-88163-06-0.

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Author of the publication, Olga Bogdashina, MA, PhD, is a co-founder, programme leader and lecturer at the UK branch of the International Autism Institute and associate consultant (Autism) to the European Institute of Child Education and Psychology (ICEP Europe). Since 1994, she has been the director of the first day centre for children with autism in Ukraine and the president of the Autism Society of Ukraine. In her research and practise, she deals with sensory-perceptual and communication problems.

In 2017 a translation of the publication of 2003, by Olga Bogdashina, has emerged in the Czech market, which has inspired, by its concept, two different worlds; that with autism and that without. Autism represents a way of existence of a still growing percentage of people around us. This publication explains some basic issues concerning manifestations of behaviour of people with autism and may, at least to a certain extent, acquaint people with everyday situations faced by people with autism.

Experts involved in the issues of autism spectrum disorders analyze manifestations of behaviour they can see and are able to evaluate them, but they do not focus on the experience of autistic people themselves. Olga Bogdashina has gathered a lot of information from people with high-functioning autism and Asperger's syndrome and has produced a very impressive publication that gives insight into the issue of sensory perception "from the inside". She uses research by leading professionals involved in autism research, as well as those who are the best autistic professionals and scientists in the field of autism – i.e. the people with autism themselves (such as Temple Grandin, Donna Williams, Liane Willey and Jim Sinclair). By linking this research along with her own studies and using personal practical experience, she pursues practical impact of deviations in sensory perception of people with autism.

She succeeds in motivating readers to think about how to use the strengths of sensory perception in people with autism and how to stimulate those that are weakened.

Thus, the question is to what extent the sensory perception is the cause of deviations in behaviour. This question is analyzed by the author in the publication and is supported by authentic testimonials and examples from the life of people with autism, which appropriately balances the expert focus of the text.

The publication is divided to nine chapters. In the introductory part, the author acquaints the reader with the general terms and with meanings of individual terms as she understands them, despite the fact these terms are seldom used in practice for the time being, or different terms are used in practice.

The first chapter focuses on the controversy between dysfunction and atypical sensory experience. This way she establishes a unique view of the fact that what works otherwise (for most people), can be an advantage and a positive phenomenon in a person with autism. Through examples from practice, the author declares that the cause of social and emotional problems has a perceptual nature.

The second chapter deals with the general concept of perception. Evaluated is the meaning of sensory experiences, described is the relationship and the process between the sensory stimulus and the result interpreted by our brain. The illustrations accompanying the text are fully “functional”; they can be used to check how visual illusions work or how to find a “blind spot” on our retina.

In the third chapter are defined sensory experiences that relate to autism. Determined phenomena are then evaluated in a complex way with the effort of maximum interconnection in individual areas of sensory perception and their impact in real life.

The fourth chapter deals with the perceptual styles of people with autism. This chapter, along with the following, fifth chapter on cognitive styles, provides the reader with a description of nonstandard sensory perception and its influence on the cognitive process and its own way of thinking.

The sixth chapter follows sensory differences. Here, characterized are atypical, but in people with autism common situations associated with sensory perception.

The seventh chapter evaluates the possibilities of therapeutic intervention. It deals with basic therapeutic approaches that can be utilized within the development of sensory perception of people with autism.

The eighth chapter deals with the sensory perception profile and contains a table, the so-called spectral graph, which serves to record the strengths and weaknesses of sensory perception. It is grouped into 20 categories that evaluate all 7 sensory systems (sight, smell, hearing, taste, proprioception, vestibular perception). In the end, the publication contains a free translation of the Sensory Profile Checklist Revised (SPCR, which includes 232 questions that serve as a complementary material to develop a sensory perception profile), a record sheet and a key to evaluate the method.

The chapters are supplemented with subsections with the title „What to Note“, the purpose of which is to identify and interpret some behavioural manifestations of people with autism affected by perceptual difficulties.

The last chapter evaluates the practical impact of sensory perception on the life of people with autism. The author emphasizes that, in order to create the right intervention method, it is necessary first to evaluate the perceptual deviations of each individual and to see how the person perceives the surrounding world; for example, how a person evaluates what he/she sees or hears. If we would be able to understand that our sensory perception would be different from that which people with autism do have it would be a basic prerequisite for the success of mutual co-operation of our perceptual worlds.

I am very pleased to recommend to readers a publication that examines the issue from several different angles and, by its nature, states that people with autism are the best professionals in the problems of autism. Although I would recommend the publication to a professional audience, even the parents of autistic children (especially in the more severe forms of autism spectrum disorders) will surely come into their own in it, and even those who have an interest and desire to get into the life of people with autism at least to a certain extent.

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