

sapiens. She began to learn that what in her childhood had been labeled as disabilities could, in an adult woman, be translated in some instances into capacities. For example, her ability to close the world off and focus her mind, which she had admired in the gorillas, became something she could feel positive about.

Perhaps what is most telling and touching in *Songs of the Gorilla Nation* is how much individuals with an autistic spectrum disorder suffer for not understanding why they are so different. Prince-Hughes questions whether saving people from labels increases rather than avoids pain. At least with labels one can begin to understand. What she came to understand was that the characteristics of an individual with Asperger syndrome as described in *DSM-IV* are really descriptions of coping behaviors and “not descriptions, necessari-

ly, of innate orientation.” As she points out, people with Asperger syndrome seem not to reach out, and do not suffer from a problem of desire but of comfort. The fascination of Prince-Hughes’ autobiographical account is that she learns comfort from her intense observation of a gorilla community.

Prince-Hughes’ journey ultimately leads her to places of success, both professionally and interpersonally. Her sincerity shines through in *Songs of the Gorilla Nation*. Having broken through the expressive restraints of Asperger syndrome, Prince-Hughes is free to inform the reader in a simple and honest fashion that those who appear to have more “emotional depth,” for a panoply of reasons, share with few. After reading this rather moving account, you may come away feeling, it’s too bad gorillas don’t write books.

Autistic Spectrum Disorders in Children

edited by Vidya Bhushan Gupta;
New York, Marcel Dekker, 2004,
450 pages, \$185 softcover

Kate Erwin, M.D.

This is, quite simply, a gem of a volume. Clearly and concisely written, *Autistic Spectrum Disorders in Children* gives an easily digestible review of autistic spectrum disorders from history and definition through treatment and prognosis. It is one of the finest compendiums I have read that will benefit the care of these children. Because of its comprehensive approach and fluency of content it will be of benefit to the psychiatrists, pediatricians, psychologists, and social workers who practice among the developmentally disabled. It is a synopsis that residents and fellows can easily read and apply.

The tome begins with a history of the disorder and concise chapters on epidemiology and etiology. The heterogeneity of the disorders is well addressed, along with a wonderful discussion of the relationship between different symptoms and the likely areas of brain dysfunction. This discussion potentially opens doors to more thoughtful intervention.

One of the issues the book deals with well is the number and types of popular alternative approaches to treatment, including a review of diets and vitamin therapy, assessment of vaccine theories of etiology, gastrointestinal hypotheses, and facilitated communication. These can be difficult subjects to tackle well, and the contributors to this volume have done a fine job of treating each scientifically and respectfully. Each treatment is reviewed in terms of the thinking behind the hypotheses and the evidence.

Medication management and the range of neurobiological bases of symptoms are well explored and thoughtfully explained. For those of us who struggle to sort out appropri-

Learning and Behavior Problems in Asperger Syndrome

edited by Margot Prior; New York, Guilford Press, 2003, 326 pages, \$42

Caroline Fisher, M.D., Ph.D.

In this very informative book, Margot Prior has gathered a wide variety of authorities on Asperger syndrome to focus on the problem of school functioning. An internationally recognized researcher on the behavioral and cognitive aspects of autistic spectrum disorders, Prior is well qualified to do this. The breadth of expertise collected in this book is impressive and helpful: one chapter is written by a psychiatrist, another is by an educator specializing in autistic spectrum disorders in the school environment, and another is a first-person account of how one woman with Asperger syndrome experienced her school years.

The book is organized into two sections. The first, “Assessment and Management of Behavioral and

Learning Difficulties,” is very scholarly. Chapters in this section speak to the evidence for specific cognitive deficits related to Asperger syndrome that go beyond gross measures of IQ. These chapters offer ways to evaluate deficits for an individual and ways to understand how cognitive deficits relate to the particular behaviors seen among persons with autistic spectrum disorders. The second section, “Asperger Syndrome in the Schools,” is very practical. It offers scholarly but pragmatic approaches to making schools more comfortable and useful for people with autistic spectrum disorders and to help these individuals be more functional in school and later in life.

Overall, this is a very valuable book. It gives the reader a solid review of the literature, a toolbox of approaches to the student with an autistic spectrum disorder, and a new appreciation of how people with these disorders experience the world.

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