

**Review: Autism: A new introduction to psychological theory and current debate** (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)

Authors: Sue Fletcher-Watson and Francesca Happé

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The autism research world has made considerable strides since the first edition of Happé's book, so it is timely that a new version now emerges. As perspectives are frequently diverse (Pellicano, 2013; Fletcher-Watson, 2019), co-authoring this outsider perspective update was a good choice. Nevertheless, full advantage of this was not taken, as the potential for oiling the wheels of inclusion for the autistic voice did not happen.

Fletcher-Watson and Happé have drawn together a resource that aimed to reflect contemporary developments critical for all interested in autism research. As a format, the pre-chapter summaries illustrated by Marissa Montaldi provide an excellent visual overview for those who process information better in this format, and the big question sections at the end provide essential signposting for where researchers should or could focus their thoughts and practice. However, an in-depth look at the significant contributions of researchers from the autism community is lacking (Milton et al., 2019; Yergeau, 2018; Woods et al., 2018; Chown, 2017; Chown et al., 2017; Ridout, 2016; Waltz et al., 2016; Kourti, 2014; Milton, 2012; Murray et al., 2005), as is full recognition of the "*nothing about us without us*" insider argument.

As the book observes, the considerable challenges and barriers faced by autistic people remain, and as autistic individuals mature, their insider expertise often renders their views at odds with the outsider parental voice (Crane et al., 2018; Grieve, 2012). This is an important point for the lived experiences of autistic teens and adults developing their own identities, and one which requires exploration. Critically, the overlap between the different positions of autistic people cannot be ignored as many are becoming academics to doctoral level, many are parents, and others work in a diversity of autism-facing fields.

One of the best parts of this book is the weaving of the opinions of autistic people into the endings of each chapter. These are critical in the provision of a more balanced perspective on autism research and the lived experiences of autistic people, and they are often juxtaposed to the arguments presented by the authors. This approach benefits the book in that if autism research is to progress in an inclusive fashion, the agenda of autistic individuals needs to lead. Refreshingly, this is acknowledged in the final chapter.

Theory is addressed on three levels throughout the text, prior to addressing the role played by the social model of disability. However, a more humble approach would have seen Fletcher-Watson and Happé first acknowledging an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of autism as argued from an autistic perspective (Chown, 2017; Yergeau, 2018). This is essential in placing the autistic voice to the fore in research in this field. Chown's book in particular presents an in-depth understanding and evaluation of autism theory, and reference to this would have complimented the text by Fletcher-Watson and Happé, whose book, in comparison, provides breadth of exploration. Chown explores those theories that are going to facilitate improved support for autistic people or the development of interventions. This contrasts with Fletcher-Watson and Happé's text as they question which route to follow—genetic, neurological, psychological or behavioural—thus separating these somewhat from the lived experiences and research priorities of autistics.

A second significant omission is a failure to include more detailed investigation into the key impact of two major theories raised by autistic researchers, namely the double empathy problem (Milton, 2012) and monotropism (Murray et al., 2005). Whilst authors accept that the latter remains to be empirically tested, the book would have benefitted from making strong links between applicable areas of neuroscience, double empathy and monotropism.

There are two worrying references regarding individuals who self-identify as autistic and who have chosen, for a range of reasons, not to go down the formal diagnostic route. Whilst raising this as an outsider area of interest is reasonable, to suggest that such individuals may be identifying with a group (diagnosed autistics) solely to obtain attention ignores the critical concept of insider expertise (Graby, 2012). Furthermore, the implication that mental health support is required can only be viewed as destructive. This stance demonstrates a lack of understanding of diagnosis, which is more complex than presented. Yergeau's (2018) text, complimented by autistic narratives presented in Murray (2006), opens up debate around rhetoric frameworks and counter-diagnosis narratives using queer terminology. This position is not reflected, other than with a cursory aside, by Fletcher-Watson and Happé.

By switching the focus from autism as an identity back to autism as a label, the book ignores sociological barriers imposed on autistic individuals. The use of the double-empathy problem and monotropism as lenses to facilitate this process would have provided insight at this stage. Inclusion of in-depth commentary on these approaches may perhaps have avoided the suggestion that at the behavioural level there is a need for different diagnostic tools for girls. If psychological approaches were to take this arguably backward step, endeavouring to carve up individual nuanced identities, this would result in a focus far removed from the agenda of autistic people and their families: improved support and opportunities.

There is a necessary mention of autism across the lifespan within all three levels as a whole, critically highlighting the dearth of studies around aging populations who may experience loss of scaffolding and late diagnosis, and attention is also given to young people facing challenges in relation to puberty and sexuality. Both groups experience a high incidence of suicidality (Cassidy, 2015), so it is critical that aspects such as environmental features are also understood. One way of addressing this would have been through the introduction of case studies explained at each of the psychological levels introduced, and with the ten autistic community members providing commentary on each chapter also adding their interpretation of the relevant case study.

As a whole, the book indicates the authors' individual styles, with participatory work and the autistic voice leading research being given more credence in some chapters than others. Whilst it builds on the original Happé book and acknowledges changes and developments, it is disappointing in that it fails to recognise that it is adding to theoretical perspectives from the autism community. Nevertheless, a key read for those studying autism and wishing to develop ideas to address the autistic agenda.

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