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Bargiela's "Camouflage: The hidden lives of autistic women" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Bargiela, S. (2019). *Camouflage: The hidden lives of autistic women*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 48 pp. \$15.99. ISBN 9781785925665

Camouflage is a graphic novel which introduces the readers to the hidden lives of women who appear on the autism spectrum. Written by clinical psychologist, researcher and designer, Dr. Sarah Bargiela, it is illustrated by artist Sophie Standing, who has designed predominantly within the human services and medical area. *Camouflage* is their first collaborative project, and they are currently researching their next book which tackles the subject of first pregnancy and early parenthood.

At the beginning of this book, the reader is introduced to a character “Amy”, a journalist in her twenties who has been diagnosed with autism. She acts as a guide throughout introducing the readers to various scenarios that may occur in everyday life, which are indicators of autistic tendencies. Factual information is provided with the author detailing the individual work of Leo Kanmer and Hans Asperger, who discovered and conducted scientific research in the 1940’s into the development of autism in boys. It wasn’t until the 1980’s that studies, by pioneer Dr. Lorna Wing, were finally conducted on females who appeared on the autistic spectrum.

The author outlines how autism between genders differs, and then proceeds to detail those differences. She explains how many women are either diagnosed late in life or never diagnosed at all. The primary reason for this has been attributed to how women have the ability to hide or camouflage themselves into any situation or relationship. This chameleon-like behavior is one of the primary indications of autism in women. The author proceeds to explore the autistic markers of restricted interests, repetitive behaviors and sensory sensitivities, taking the reader through the experiences of three different women under the four headlines of: “You’re not autistic”, “Pretending to be normal”, “From passive to assertive”, and “A social identity based on interests”. A final discussion is held on what’s next in the world of research, with the author providing further reading sources specifically on autism in women.

Camouflage is a marvelous book on such a broad and relatively new topic. The use of a graphic novel format could be seen as an unusual choice but in this situation, it is both effective and memorable. The page layout is extremely artistic and includes various font sizes and colors, along with dynamic design styles. The color palette and contemporary structure of the graphics is eye-catching, serving to draw the reader's complete focus and attention onto the subject matter. Although *Camouflage* is short in length, it contains plenty of vital information and observations. It is a beautifully illustrated piece of work, shining a crucial light on how gender affects autism.

Reviewer

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