

Cognitive Architecture and Systemizing Drives: A Psychological Reading of Christopher Boone's Mind in Haddon's Fiction.

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Abstract:

Mark Haddon's novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is a mystery novel being narrated by a 15-year-old boy, who is diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. While literary scholars frequently analyse the text through the lens of disability studies, this paper presents a cognitive psychological examination of Christopher Boone's internal mental architecture. By employing two foundational cognitive theories i.e. Theory of Mind (ToM) deficit model (Mind blindness) and Weak Central Coherence Theory (WCC) this study analyses how Christopher constructs meaning, navigates complex social environments, and processes internal and external data. Christopher's unique ability of Mathematical brilliance is also notable apart from his acute sensory vulnerability by making Christopher as a distinct cognitive profile. This cognitive mapping demonstrates that Haddon's narrative structure serves as a literary simulation of a unique cognitive architecture, shifting the discourse from a deficit-based medical model to an exploration of alternative computational intelligence. This study dissects the cognitive mechanics that generate Christopher's worldview.

Keywords: Cognitive mapping, Theory of Mind (ToM), Weak Central Coherence (WCC), Cognitive architecture, Computational intelligence.

Introduction:

Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003) offers readers a deeply immersive journey into the mind of Christopher Boone, a 15-year-old mathematically brilliant boy. Set in England, the narrative begins as a detective story investigating the mysterious death of a neighbour's poodle dog called Wellington. However, it quickly evolves into a complex coming exploration of family dysfunction and cognitive

divergence. Written in the first-person narrative/perspective, the author provides an unprecedented literary simulation of an autistic cognitive style (Protagonist with ADS). Christopher prefers prime numbers, he values absolute order, and experiences profound distress over the unfamiliar environments. Christopher also possesses a unique aversion to the colours like yellow and brown. While literary criticism frequently evaluates the novel through sociological or disability studies frameworks, cognitive psychology offers an objective mechanism to understand the mechanics of Christopher Boone's mind. Rather than viewing Christopher's behaviour as an arbitrary collection of symptoms, cognitive psychology illuminates these habits as a systemic outcomes of a distinct cognitive architecture of the little boy's mind. This paper applies two seminal cognitive theories—Theory of Mind (ToM) and Weak Central Coherence (WCC)—to deconstruct Christopher's narrative voice, problem-solving methods, and especially his emotional vulnerabilities, highlighting the delicate balance between cognitive limitations and specialized intellectual strengths.

Theory of Mind Deficit:

The Architecture of Mind Blindness Theory of Mind (ToM) is the cognitive capacity to attribute mental states—such as beliefs, intents, desires, emotions, and knowledge—to oneself and others. This system allows individuals to understand that other people have beliefs and desires that differ from their own. In neurotypical individuals, this ability develops automatically during childhood. It forms the foundation for reading body language, detecting irony, and navigating social dynamics.

Christopher's narrative clearly demonstrates this cognitive profile. He processes the world through visible, concrete data rather than inferred social cues. Early in the book, he shows a page of sketched emoticons given to him by his teacher, Siobhan. While a neurotypical child naturally decodes an angry look or a sad sigh, Christopher must cross-reference physical expressions with an internal catalogue of drawings. If an expression does not match his list, he cannot infer the underlying emotion. This highlights his mind blindness. He cannot naturally read the invisible thoughts of others, so Christopher treats human faces like complex, unreadable puzzles.

This difficulty extends directly to how he reacts to deception. Christopher cannot tell a lie because doing so requires a complex mental map: the liar must know what the listener believes, and then construct a false statement to alter that belief. Christopher's mind blindness makes it hard for him to run these multi-layered social simulations. Likewise, when people lie to him, his system destabilizes. When he discovers that his father lied about his mother's death, the collapse of his world is not just an emotional shock; it is a massive data error. He cannot understand why his father would construct a false reality, because he struggles to calculate the complex emotional motives behind deception.

Weak Central Coherence: Processing Parts Over Wholes:

Weak Central Coherence describes a processing style that prioritizes local details over global context. Individuals with WCC process information in a piecemeal fashion, focusing on individual pieces rather than synthesizing them into a whole.

The novel's central character Christopher Boone, serves as a literary embodiment of Weak Central Coherence (WCC) theory, which states that the autistic individuals preferentially process local details over the global context. Rather than synthesizing environmental stimuli into a holistic "big picture," Christopher exhibits a hyper-focus on fragmented, constituent parts. This cognitive profile drives both the narrative structure and his interpersonal interactions. Christopher has severe sensory overload in complex environments like train stations, where he is unable to filter out some data.

Mathematical Brilliance as Computational Intelligence:

While Weak Central Coherence can cause sensory overload, it also powers Christopher's remarkable computational intelligence and mathematical brilliance. His mind is built for deep focus, algorithmic thinking, and advanced pattern recognition. Because he is not distracted by social contexts or generalized abstractions, he can dedicate his full cognitive energy to organizing structural data. Christopher uses mathematics as a tool to create order and soothe his anxiety.

The young man is Christopher John Francis Boone, and he is unique because he is severely autistic. He is also a savant genius who knows the capital city of every country in the world, every prime number up to 7,057 and much more of equal importance, which he makes sure his readers know as well before the tale is finally told. Christopher has many delightful quirks of character, including a preference for prime over cardinal numbers. He numbers his chapters according to primes: 2, 3, 5, 7, 11 etc., continuing through Chapter 233. Christopher cannot stand to be touched or caught up in the confusion of being around many people, especially in small spaces. He reacts to such negative stimuli by screaming, moaning, hitting, hiding and threatening people with his Swiss Army knife, which has a saw blade that could cut off a finger. (*BookRags*)

Alternative Computational Intelligence: Beyond the Deficit Model

Rather than seeing Christopher as a child being affected with Autism, this paper avoids the clinical side and evolves in portraying Christopher as a person who seeks the world with difference, his view upon the world and the way he observes certain things turn into his plus point as an alternative computational intelligence. He excels in maths which can be taken as an exceptional quality beyond autism as an escape from ordinary. Even though he cannot process things in full, he eventually focuses on whatever he knows. When he discovers about his family dysfunction he immediately chooses to look for his mother instead of staying with a father who made him believe upon the false information about his mother, he also finds his father confronting about his act of murdering the neighbour's dog. The protagonist chooses his own path towards truth and also faces multiple difficulties while reaching out to his mother.

It wasn't long before I was as obsessed as Christopher, an autistic teen with a proclivity for mathematics, with the mystery of who killed his neighbour's dog – the central plot node around which the novel is spun. And, it didn't take much to preoccupy my mind with the emotional Rubik's Cube that seemed to constitute Christopher's way of understanding and dealing with his parent's separation, his father's deceitful cover up of his mother's departure, his school's reluctance to let him take more advanced examinations and his overall navigation – physical, social and affective – of day-to-day life. (*Sophie Chamas*)

Conclusion:

Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* offers a detailed look at an atypical mind through its first-person narration. Evaluating the text through cognitive psychology reveals the structured logic behind Christopher Boone's unique worldview. Simon Baron-Cohen's Theory of Mind model explains his literal use of language and his difficulties reading social cues and deception. At the same time, Uta Frith's Weak Central Coherence theory sheds light on his exceptional eye for detail, his vulnerability to sensory overload, and his remarkable mathematical abilities. When combined, these two theories show that Christopher's behaviours are not random symptoms of a disorder. They are part of a consistent, functional cognitive architecture. Christopher's journey shows that while his mind operates differently, it has its own deep internal logic and computational intelligence. Ultimately, the novel prompts us to expand our understanding of human thought, communication, and intelligence.

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