

Theory of mind: autism



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The term theory of mind in cognitive psychology allows individuals to describe and understanding of other individual's mental state about their beliefs or thoughts no individual can be certain what another individual is thinking but can have a good understanding in what they may believe what they are thinking or about their thoughts Baron-Cohen (1997) theory of mind is exclusive to humans and allows humans to have a better understanding about the social world around and allows individuals to interact with other individuals in appropriate way Baron-Cohen (2003)

Autism is a developmental disorder which occurs in the first 2 years of the child's life and can affect approximately four in every ten thousand children (Baron-Cohen, Leslie & Frith, 1985), the disorder is more four times more likely for a boy to have the disorder than a girl (Gilberg and Coleman, 1992; Rapin, 1997). An individual who has the disorder may find it hard to interact with another individual and find it hard to understand what they are saying or understand the emotion of behaviour from another individual that also cannot understand their 'inner self' and the other individual's thoughts and beliefs. Early signs of autism in a child cannot keep eye-to-eye contact with another individual for a long period of time. (Swettenham et al., 1998) Also they cannot spontaneously play with a toy because it may be the fact their disorder cannot let them understand what the toy does. A study took place where individuals were asked to sort out pictures giving to them by category, children with the autistic disorder sorted the pictures out by objects example hat scarf (Weeks and Hobson, 1987) this shows that not all social communication is impaired but they have little understanding of what is being asked of them.

The “ Reading the Mind in the Eyes Task”(Baron-Cohen et al., 1997). Baron-Cohen et al. (1997, 2001a, 2001b) showed some individuals pictures of people’s eyes and where giving four different type of words describing emotion this study was allocated to individuals with autism and also individuals without the disorder but show some signs of the autistic disorder. Baron-Cohen et al. (1997) believes that is a ‘ pure’ test of theory of mind and believes that the results from this study can be an in sight to see if an individual has got the autistic disorder.

Children without the disorder start to use the terms ‘ think’ and ‘ want’ this shows they have some understanding of their inner self Most autistics children are delayed in learning a langue which can lead them to make new words up which is called neologising this make it harder for them understand communication and participate in social chat with other individuals Rutter (1987). An autistic individual finds it hard to keep up with the subject of conversation and also shows in ability to use feedback which (Bailey et al., 1996). Children at the age 2 ½ can to understand pretend play and the thoughts of other people when as children with autism have ‘ mind blindness’ this is an inability for them to understand social interactions which the individual finds it hard to develop a loving relationship with another individual. The disorder makes the individual find it hard to understand how some else is feeling and it’s difficult for the autistic individual to interact with another individual without warning and may feel cold or distant towards other individuals. (Karmiloff-Smith, 1988, 1992) believes that all children explore the environment around them and automatically think of hypothesis and testing them this allows them.

The social problems which under go in everyday life which autistic individuals have to face in everyday life, there has been studies which have been created to see if the problems they occur are related to the theory of mind. The Sally- Ann test false belief task was created to see if the individual on going the task had theory of mind skills or not. A child was introduced to two dolls called sally and Ann and where allocated with their own box with a marble hidden inside of it. The child was then told that sally has to go for a minute removing her from the scene and leaving her box behind this. The child is then told Ann is going to play a trick on sally and removes the marble from sally's box. Sally is then returned and the child is then asked where sally should look for the marble. A child with theory of mind will remember that sally doesn't know where her marble is and unaware that it is missing and will look it sally's box by using worlds for example ' he thinks' however a child lacking theory of mind skills will only see it from her point of view and would look in Ann's box Baron-Cohen, Leslie, and Frith (1985) Many children passed this false belief test which have the autism disorder. Nearly 80 percent of autistic children failed this task which shows that most of the children taking part have not got the inner ability to understand other peoples thought and emotions.

Baron- Cohen et al's (1992) brought out a checklist for autism to see if any children have the autistic disorder to allow parents or guardians to find out in case of the risk of developing the disorder. The most common signs of autism is mental retardation is most common with 75% of all cases (Rutter, 1979; Rapin, 1997) there is no strong evidence to prove autism is inherited disorder (Rutter, 1994) Autism is clearly understood as a developmental

disorder which makes it difficult for that individual to express him/her self and find it hard to understand any other individuals feelings or understand that they can feel emotions and ‘ think’ thoughts. There is not enough evidence to suggest that theory of mind can allow us to understand about autism to its full potential and that theory of mind describes the disorder to where it is completely understood.