

CHAPTER 7

ATYPICAL SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF AUTISTICS

A major problem I see in the Autism community is that all of the time is spent talking about how deficient Autistics are in the area of social development without asking the following six questions:

1. **How are social skills/relationships typically developed in the first place?** Answer: Through social interaction with other humans. This starts with parents, other relatives and other adult authority figures. Eventually, we progress to peer interaction.

TYPICAL STAGES OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

(All info, except for ages 8+, was provided to me by an expert whom I cannot name. After providing me with the information for the chart, she broke contact with me on Facebook after reading my conclusions which are contrary to the preconceived notions that many in the professional teaching establishment have in regard the issues that I address in this chapter.)

0-2 Years: Solitary Play - tend to play alone, and there is little interaction with other children.

2-2½ Years: Spectators - will watch other children playing but will not join in.

2½-3 Years: Parallel Play - they will play alongside others, but not together.

3-4 Years: Associative Play - they begin to interact with others in play and start to develop friendships and the preference of playing with certain other children.

4+ Years: Co-operative play - playing together with other children and sharing goals for their play.

8+ Years: Children begin looking to their peers for more than just companionship, but for affirmation.

2. **Are Autistics given the same opportunities to develop their social skills/relationships in an EMOTIONALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT as everyone else?** Answer: For most Autistics, No!

AUTISM'S ATYPICAL NEUROLOGY'S EFFECT ON AUTISTIC SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

- a. Delays and/or abnormalities in the forming of various neurological pathways results in delays and/or impairments in the Autistic's Social Development by affecting their...
 - i. ...speech.
 - ii. ...hearing.
 - iii. ...sensory responses to the attempts of others to interact with them.
 - iv. ...ability to properly interpret the actions & reactions of those who are interacting with them.
 - v. ...progression in their stages of social development.
 - b. The process of brain plasticity MAY allow the Autistic to develop to various extents in many of these areas. This includes the possibility that Autistics MAY progress in the social developmental stages.
 - c. Autistics who have not progressed to a social development stage that is typical for their age will be more content with solitary play once they start school. This can make the Autistic an easy target for the bullies.
 - d. Autistics, who do progress to a social development stage that seeks to socialize with their peers, may socialize in a manner that would be viewed as "immature." This may give the bullies the ammunition to use against the Autistic, while leading the responsible adult to believe the Autistic is deliberately using "inappropriate means" to get attention.
3. **What is different about the social experiences of Autistics and non-Autistics?** Answer: Autistics are often delayed and/or impaired in developing the neuro-connections enabling them to progress from one social stage to another within the range of what is considered atypical.

- a. This will often lead to Autistics being delayed in reaching the social stage in which they desire peer interaction.
- b. When Autistics do reach the stage of desiring such interaction, their peers have already progressed to desiring interaction that would be deemed more age appropriate than what the Autistic desires.
- c. The results of this incompatible social desires:
 - i. "Best" case: "Only" social isolation.
 - ii. Worst case: Bullying, being wrongfully judged as provoking the bullying and avoiding social interaction.

I DON'T CARE WHAT ANYONE SAYS, I KNOW FOR A FACT THAT I THOUGHT THAT I WAS EMULATING MY PEERS. FURTHERMORE, I KNOW FOR A FACT THAT CONTRARY TO POPULAR MISCONCEPTION, I AM NOT IMMUNE TO SOCIAL PRESSURES. AFTER ALL, I HAVE WORKED TO OVERCOME ISSUES OF CODEPENDENCY. THE KEY COMPONENTS IN THIS PROCESS WERE OVERCOMING THE PAIN, RESENTMENTS & LOW SELF-ESTEEM CAUSED BY THE REJECTION OF MY PEERS AS WELL AS THE WRONGFUL JUDGMENTS OF VARIOUS ADULT AUTHORITY FIGURES.

So if social interaction plays such an important role in social development, and Autistics have been denied positive social interaction in an EMOTIONALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT, then how in the world do you expect them to develop socially?

4. **If Autistics are given the opportunities to develop their social skills/relationships in an EMOTIONALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT at some point in their lives, will the skills/relationships develop?** Answer: YES! I am proof of this.

The difference between me and other Autistics who [fiercely reject this view](#); my 12 Step and church involvement [which](#) enabled me to associate with people who accepted me unconditionally. This created a healthy environment for me to develop social skills. If you ask those Autistics who [opposed](#) me to name one group of individuals who they felt unconditional acceptance from, they cannot answer you because they have never felt unconditional accepted by anyone. So their refusal to believe that a group that gives them unconditional acceptance could help them develop social skills may be rooted in their inability to believe that they could ever receive unconditional acceptance from any group of people.

5. **If the early attempts to develop social skills/relationships are painful for Autistics because they were attempted in EMOTIONALLY UNSAFE ENVIRONMENTS, is it possible that they will eventually give up?** Answer: WHO WOULDN'T?
6. **Is it possible that the asocial/hostile personalities that many Autistics develop over the course of their lives could have less to do with neurology, and more to do with how they were treated in EMOTIONALLY UNSAFE ENVIRONMENTS during the early years of their social development?** Answer: YES!
7. **Are there EMOTIONALLY SAFE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS that Autistics function better in?** Answer: YES! Proof of this can be witnessed by observing an Adult Autistic support group with an open mind.

AUTISTICS' ABILITY TO DEVELOP "THEORY OF MIND"

"Theory of mind is the capacity we have to understand mental states such as: believes, feelings, desires, hope and intentions. It's the way we **imagine** other people's feelings or thoughts. We can create a mental picture of our own emotions or other people's feelings. This theory of mind enables us to understand the behavior people display is caused by **their** inner feelings, believes or intentions. We can predict some of those behaviors and anticipate on them. Whatever goes on in the mind of other people is not visible so it will remain a 'theory' we create for ourselves."
<http://www.asperger-advice.com/theory-of-mind.html>

The Autism community looks exclusively to neurology to explain why many Autistics do possess this social skill/relationship deficiency, while neglecting to ask the same six questions that they should be

asking about the development of social skills/relationships in Autistics and non-Autistics alike. Most of the non-Autistics who want to teach social skills/relationships/"theory of mind" to Autistics are also in complete denial when it comes to just how unproficient non-Autistics are in their own social skills/relationships/"theory of mind." Proof of this...

1. ...comes from my personal experience while attending a general purpose 12 Step Support group, which I attended for issues related to codependence. It is amazing how much you learn about human beings in general when you sit with a group of humans that know that if they want to put their lives back together, they need to dump the facades they have been projecting all of their lives and start telling the truth about who they really are.
2. ...is found in how much time and money people spend on therapists, books, videos, classes, support groups, seminars, etc. to teach them...
 - a. ...the importance of seeing things from the other person's perspective.
 - b. ...how to see things from the other person's perspective.
 - c. ...how their actions can affect other people in way they never intended.
 - d. ...how saying and doing certain things might be misinterpreted by others.
 - e. ...your perceptions of how others view you may be inaccurate.

Do you really think that all of these books, class, seminars, etc. have been created for the exclusive benefit of Autistics; or are non-Autistics the primary users of these resources in order to figure out how to get along with their fellow non-Autistic? If you want to see a clear demonstration about how effective non-Autistics are in their social skills/relationships/"theory of mind," look at how others react to their social media postings. Then look at how they react to the posting of others. Finally compare these reactions to the reactions involving Autistics. Then you can ask yourself, do non-Autistics clearly demonstrate they are superior to Autistics in their social skills/relationships/"theory of mind."

So how do people develop an effective "theory of mind?" By associating with others who tell the truth about how...

1. ...the circumstances in their lives affect them.
2. ...what others do and say affects them.
3. ...what they do and say affects others.

Such honesty is contrary to human nature, which compels most to put up facades for two main reasons:

1. Gain the approval of others.
2. Protect ourselves from experiencing repeated occurrences of disappointment, rejection, abuse, trauma, etc. by...
 - a. ...concealing our weakness from others.
 - b. ...drive away others who get too close to us before they have a chance to hurt us.

Anyone who is enslaved to the need to project such facades will not only be incapable of developing their own "theory of mind," but will also be incapable of teaching it to others. Children who are raised by parents who are incapable of teaching this to them will be hindered in developing this in their own lives.

Let me make it clear that I am not trying to repackage Bettelheim's "Refrigerator Mother" non-senses. Autism is not caused by mothers without the ability to nurture child. Furthermore, I have met non-Autistic children with parents who I would describe as refrigerators. The point that I am trying to make is that deficiencies in "theory of mind," as well as, social deficiencies in general, are not as unique to the Autistics as many of us have been lead to believe.

I can buy that Autistics may very well be delayed in developing this ability because neuroscience shows it to be true, but it also shows that the brain is "plastic," which means that there is always the possibility for

Autistics to eventual develop the neurological capacity to obtain this ability. Those Autistics who do gain this capacity can then begin developing their theory of mind ability the same way everyone else does.

THE PERCEIVED LACK EMPATHY, DESIRE FOR AFFECTION, ETC. OF AUTISTICS

According to the diagnostic criteria of the DSM IV, Autistics have a “lack of emotional reciprocity” (meaning: “lack of empathy”). This has been removed from the DSM V because it has long since been disproven. However, the APA has yet to formally recant this erroneous assessment altogether. It therefore continues to be advocated, especially those “experts” that automatically assume anyone who commits mass murders and serial murders are Autistics. I can show you news articles and posting on Facebook in response to the Sandy Hook school shooting that bears this out. A related misperception that non-Autistics have about Autistics is that we have no desire for affection, relationships, romantic relationships, etc.

For all the talk about how Autistics are supposed to lack “Theory of Mind,” which was addressed in the preceding section, the psychological/psychiatric community demonstrates deficiencies in their own “Theory of Mind” by...

1. ...concluding that Autistics lack empathy and the desire for affection, relationships, romantic relationships, etc. in the first place.
2. ...not realizing the consequences that Autistics continue to face because they have not formally recanted the erroneous assessment of Autistics lacking empathy altogether.

Nevertheless, the Autistic community cannot wait for the psychological/psychiatric to formally set the record straight on this subject. Therefore, it is up to the Autistic self-Advocates to provide a thorough and systematic rebuttal. This requires us to not only point out what it is that we are doing that they are misinterpreting as us lacking empathy and the desire for affection, relationships, romantic relationships, etc.; but also to explain what is actually going on in our heads at the time in question.

THE 5 POSSIBLE FACTORS AT PLAY WHEN NON-AUTISTICS BELIEVE THAT AUTISTICS ARE SHOWING A LACK OF EMPATHY, DESIRE FOR AFFECTION, ETC.

1. **Shut Downs:** These reactions are often misinterpreted as a lack of empathy when it involves the Autistic losing their ability to express their emotions due to an overload of brain activity.
2. **Paralysis by Analysis:** There are occasions when Autistics want to respond to someone’s pain; but are uncertain as to what the appropriate response is. The window of opportunity may close before they’ve figured out how they should respond.
3. **Over Reliance on Procedures, Rigid Protocols and Rehearsed Solutions:** Law enforcement, medical professional, military personal, etc. are trained to completely suppress their emotion during times of extreme stress in order that they can think clearly. For Autistics, who typically have hyper-sensitivity to stress, such emotional suppression can become a way of life.
4. **Sensory Processing:** Many Autistics...
 - a. ...have severe adverse physiological and/or stress response to...
 - i. ...to various forms of sensory stimuli.
 - ii. ...encroachments into their “personal bubble.”
 - b. ...do not respond to their name due to them not realizing that someone is calling to them.
5. **The Natural Consequence of Abusive Behavior:** I realize that there are many experts that believe that some people are born without the capacity for empathy. However, can they point to a single example of someone who showed a complete lack of empathy that did not suffer abuse and/or other traumatic events in their lives? I have never heard of such a person, including when I have watched documentaries on the lives of serial killers.

Many people learn to suppress as many of their vulnerable emotions as possible as a coping mechanism for enduring an overwhelming level of pain and grief. These vulnerable emotions include

love, empathy, compassion, fear, remorse, etc. Painful and traumatic experiences can lead people to believe that the expression of such emotions will only result in more painful and traumatic experiences. Based on my experiences in both 12 Step codependency/addiction recovery and Autistic support groups, I see little or no difference between the Asocial attitudes and/or “lash out at society” behaviors of many Autistics and victims of sex abuse and/or domestic violence.

ALTHOUGH THERE IS MUCH DISCUSSION ABOUT THE BULLYING OF AUTISTICS, THERE IS A TENDENCY TO NEGLECT THIS FACT AND VIEW EVERY ASPECT OF AUTISTIC BEHAVIOR AS A PRODUCT OF NEUROLOGY WITH LITTLE OR NO CONSIDERATION AS TO THE EXTREME CONSEQUENCES OF HOW AUTISTICS ARE TREATED.

Many Autistics demonstrate their capacity for empathy showing a great deal of empathy and affection towards their pets, as well as defenseless animals in general. I have seen for myself an Autistic who responded to the passing away of her cat by going through a grieving period that was comparable in every way to how people typically grieve the loss of human loved ones. Another Autistic who could not bring himself to put down his ailing dog responded to his mother's suggestion by asking her if she would want him to do the same to her when she gets old and frail. When asked why they are so fond of their pets, every Autistic that I have ever heard has responded by saying that their pets do not hurt and/or judge them.