

Psychoanalytic Understanding of the Autistic Self

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Abstract : This continuous structuring of the ego through the developmental ages, starting with the body, has been understood through various perspectives from the object-relations world. Klein, Ogden, Winnicott to name a few, have been masters at helping mark a trajectory for the self to come to fruition. However, what constitutes those states, those relational structures, the dynamics of transference and the concept of inner objects has been more or less left unexplored in the psychoanalytic developmental theory. In this paper, through the help of a case study, Ogden's ideas of an autistic contagious position and Kleinian theory of object relations is proposed to visualize a lens that helps to understand the relationship of the autistic self and body and allows us to take a look at object relations through countertransference. With the help of case vignettes, an understanding of experience is seen as dominated in the autistic contagious position with the help of defensive structuring that is not only self-fulfilling and sensorial oriented, but is also a pre symbolic mode of relating to the other. The aim of this clinical, experiential study is to better understand the self-body and the self-other relationships, or the absence thereof, in the autistic world and states. The goal of the study was to find such a relationship between play, body, structuring of experience and an autistic self in these individuals through that. Aim being that psychotherapy is brought to fore in the world of autism. The method was case study with one on one intervention, that was psychodynamically informed and play therapy based. Some of the findings after a year of work with these individuals were that: in the absence of a shared vocabulary, communication in two contrasting individuals happens primarily through the assistance of the body. Somatic countertransference, for instance, is how one can be with someone in a therapeutic relationship - and with autistic adolescents it is a further complicated relationship. With a mind somewhere in infancy, and body experiencing adulthood, it becomes a challenge for the therapist to meet the client where they are. With pre-verbal states, play becomes such a potential space where two individuals could meet - a safe ground for forces to be contained. Play, then, becomes a mode of communication with such a population.

Keywords : autism, psychoanalytic, play, self

Conference Title : ICCPP 2020 : International Conference on Counseling Psychology and Psychotherapy

Conference Location : Vienna, Austria

Conference Dates : June 18-19, 2020