

The Confluence between Autism Spectrum Disorder and the Schizoid Personality

Authors : Murray David Schane

Abstract : Though years of clinical encounters with patients with autism spectrum disorders and those with a schizoid personality the many defining diagnostic features shared between these conditions have been explored and current neurobiological differences have been reviewed; and, critical and different treatment strategies for each have been devised. The paper compares and contrasts the apparent similarities between autism spectrum disorders and the schizoid personality are found in these DSM descriptive categories: restricted range of social-emotional reciprocity; poor non-verbal communicative behavior in social interactions; difficulty developing and maintaining relationships; detachment from social relationships; lack of the desire for or enjoyment of close relationships; and preference for solitary activities. In this paper autism, fundamentally a communicative disorder, is revealed to present clinically as a pervasive aversive response to efforts to engage with or be engaged by others. Autists with the Asperger presentation typically have language but have difficulty understanding humor, irony, sarcasm, metaphoric speech, and even narratives about social relationships. They also tend to seek sameness, possibly to avoid problems of social interpretation. Repetitive behaviors engage many autists as a screen against ambient noise, social activity, and challenging interactions. Also in this paper, the schizoid personality is revealed as a pattern of social avoidance, self-sufficiency and apparent indifference to others as a complex psychological defense against a deep, long-abiding fear of appropriation and perverse manipulation. Neither genetic nor MRI studies have yet located the explanatory data that identifies the cause or the neurobiology of autism. Similarly, studies of the schizoid have yet to group that condition with those found in schizophrenia. Through presentations of clinical examples, the treatment of autists of the Asperger type is revealed to address the autist's extreme social aversion which also precludes the experience of empathy. Autists will be revealed as forming social attachments but without the capacity to interact with mutual concern. Empathy will be shown be teachable and, as social avoidance relents, understanding of the meaning and signs of empathic needs that autists can recognize and acknowledge. Treatment of schizoids will be shown to revolve around joining empathically with the schizoid's apprehensions about interpersonal, interactive proximity. Models of both autism and schizoid personality traits have yet to be replicated in animals, thereby eliminating the role of translational research in providing the kind of clues to behavioral patterns that can be related to genetic, epigenetic and neurobiological measures. But as these clinical examples will attest, treatment strategies have significant impact.

Keywords : autism spectrum, schizoid personality traits, neurobiological implications, critical diagnostic distinctions

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