

Discovery of Trauma Induced Autism - Three Case Reports and their Review

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Abstract

Autism is characterized by perpetual and unrelenting hyperfocus, the state of intense single-minded concentration fixated on one thing at a time to the exclusion of everything else, including one's own feelings. Most cases of autism appear to be congenital in origin. This report opens the door to the possibility that some cases of autism may be caused by extreme trauma. Three subjects were examined whose documented autism was precipitated by a single event that was experienced as so horrific as to make life too painful to continue living. In each case, the brain instantly responded by permanently altering its neurophysiology so that the person never again experienced emotional pain. Instead of ending their painful lives, these people put an end to emotional pain in their lives – with the unfortunate consequence that they also ended their ability to receive pleasure.

Keywords: Trauma; Cingulate Gyrus (CG); Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); Trauma Induced Autism (TIA)

Introduction

Autism is perpetual and unrelenting hyperfocus, the state of intense single-minded concentration fixated on one thing at a time to the exclusion of everything else, including one's own feelings.

- Hyperfocus appears to be caused by a dysfunctional cingulate gyrus (CG), that part of the brain which focuses attention.
- Forty-four traits caused by hyperfocus are documented in Appendix A.

Until 2018, all my experiences of autism supported the hypothesis that autism is congenital. Although symptoms of autism may not become apparent for several years, the unique neurophysiological anomaly that is autism appears to be present at birth. This was the conclusion I had reached after studying 21 autistic people, including myself and three family members.

Literature Review

While reviewing my notes in 2019, I noticed that four case histories similar in that each person had suffered a single incident of extreme trauma. I was able to re-interview three of these people, and the evidence provided by so doing led me to conclude that in each case it was the trauma that had induced the autism.

Differential diagnosis

At the time of re-examination in 2019, all three subjects were determined to have autism rather than Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), according to the schedule of criteria below. From their histories it was inferred that their brains would have been profiled as neurotypical, if examined prior to their respective defining traumatic incidents.

PTSD is characterized by persistent mental and emotional distress caused by specific traumatic events or terrifying experiences. Trauma induced autism (TIA) is an extreme coping mechanism that changes the neurophysiology of the brain in situations where one feels that his/her entire life is too painful to continue living. TIA prevents a person from ever feeling pain again, at the price of cutting off the ability to feel any emotion at all (Table 1).

| Variables | Autism | PTSD | Neurotypical |
|-------------------|--|--|--|
| Hyperfocus | Hyperfocus ¹ | N/A | N/A |
| Cingulate Gyrus | Dysfunctional | Functional | Functional |
| Amygdala | Inactive | Active | Active |
| Left Frontal Lobe | High alpha activity | High alpha activity | High beta activity |
| Social Aspects | Unable to understand and respond to the needs of others | Social skills unaffected by PTSD | Varying degrees of social skills, depending on personality |
| Emotional Effects | Incapable of feeling emotion. Processes emotions intellectually. | Resists memories of specific events that were emotionally devastating. | Emotions flow freely. |

¹Hyperfocus is defined as perpetual and unrelenting attention fixated on one thought or stimulus at a time, to the exclusion of everything else, including one's own feelings.

Table 1: Differential diagnosis of all three subjects.

The Litmus test for autism

All three subjects passed with flying colours the litmus test for hyperfocus, the unique and defining characteristic of autism. Hyperfocus prevents someone from dividing attention between two thought patterns or two stimuli at the same time. An autistic person talking to you is incapable of feeling any emotion in that moment. The surest way to find out if someone is autistic is to ask these five questions, to which you will receive the following responses [1]:

- How often do you cry? "Never" or "Rarely"
- How often do you laugh? "Never" or "Rarely"

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