

EDITORIAL

Introduction to *theory of mind and autism*

Since the publication of Kanner's (1943) original paper, many significant advances in the understanding of the etiology, course, and sequelae of autism have occurred (see, e.g., Cohen & Donellan, 1987; Dawson, 1989; Rutter, 1968, 1983; Rutter & Garmezy, 1983). Although the scientists engaged in empirical work on autism have been trained in a diverse array of disciplines—including linguistics, the neurosciences, psychiatry, and clinical and developmental psychology—over the past decade the most exciting contributions increasingly have shared the developmental psychopathology perspective. A basic tenet of this approach is that normal development can elucidate conceptualizations of abnormal functioning and that, reciprocally, the exploration of psychopathology can shed

light on normal ontogenesis (Cicchetti, 1984).

Beginning with the classic work of Hermelin and O'Connor (1970), investigators have utilized theory and research conducted within a normal developmental perspective to guide their research on the causes and determinants of autism. In particular, much of the most compelling progress in the understanding of the attentional, cognitive/representational, neurobiological, socioemotional, and social-cognitive domains of autism has been informed by knowledge on normal development. The powerful influence of this approach is evident in the articles included in this special section. Efforts such as these will not only refine our theories of autism, but also will continue to inform our theories of normal development.

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