



The Relationship Between Neuroscience and Internal Conflicts in a Psychodynamic Approach to the Treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorder

Name: Susan Sherkow

Affiliation: Associate Professor Albert Einstein College of Medicine and Mt. Sinai Hospital

Country: United States of America

Email ID: spsherkow@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The Sherkow Center for Child Development and Autism Spectrum Disorder, founded in 2012, applies a psychodynamic treatment approach to children, adolescents and adults with ASD. This presentation proposes models of treatment of ASD which integrate perspectives from neurobiology and psychoanalysis, and which outline the roles of neural connectivity and processing, along with the roles of intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics, in the diagnosis and treatment of autism. These models correlate with presumptive evidence that a disconnect between the thinking brain (the orbitofrontal cortex) and the emotional brain (the amygdala) underlies atypical social-emotional development.

Process notes and video material will illustrate how these ideas are applied in the formulation and treatment of two cases: a toddler treated from 3-8 years old, and a preadolescent treated from 9-14 years old.

This presentation will demonstrate a multi-systemic treatment approach that addresses all domains of the ASD child's life, and utilizes methods from multiple domains, including dyadic and family therapy, parent counseling, home treatment, intensive and frequent sessions, and coordinated team meetings. The integration of psychopharmacology, psychodynamic therapy, and overall attention to the details of a developmental trajectory create a comprehensive treatment paradigm, which continuously forms and reconfigures the psychoanalytic formulation so that each ASD individual can achieve their developmental potential.

The presentation will conclude by offering directions for future research and collaborative project development.

Participants will learn: 1) how proposed models of ASD organize existing etiological factors in the development of autism and as well as factors leading to autistic symptoms.

2) how psychodynamic techniques can address key deficits in ASD and the neurobiological correlates of these deficits.

3) how psychodynamic interventions integrated into a comprehensive treatment approach for ASD can promote genuine social connections.



Citations:

1. *Autism Spectrum Disorder: Perspectives from Psychoanalysis and Neuroscience*. By Susan P. Sherkow and Alexandra M. Harrison, with contributions by William M. Singletary. Jason Aronson, 2013, xxviii + 202 pp.
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3. Bachevalier, J., & Loveland, K. (2006). The orbitofrontal-amygdala circuit and self-regulation of social-emotional behavior in autism. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 30(1), 97-117
4. Keller, T. A., & Just, M. A. (2009). Altering cortical connectivity: remediation-induced changes in the white matter of poor readers. *Neuron*, 64(5), 624–631. doi:10.1016/j.neuron.2009.10.018
5. Dennis, E.L., & Thompson, P.M. (2013). Mapping connectivity in the developing brain. *International Journal of Developmental Neuroscience* 3:525-542.
6. Buchheim A, Viviani R, Kessler H, Kächele H, Cierpka M, Roth G, et al. (2012) Changes in Prefrontal-Limbic Function in Major Depression after 15 Months of Long-Term Psychotherapy. *PLoS ONE* 7(3): e33745. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0033745>

Susan P. Sherkow, M.D. is the Director of The Sherkow Center for Child Development and Autism Spectrum Disorder, is a Training and Supervising Analyst at the Berkshire Psychoanalytic Institute, and a Supervising Analyst and Instructor in the Child and Adolescent Division of NYPSI. She is on the faculties of the Departments of Psychiatry at Mount Sinai College of Medicine and The Albert Einstein College of Medicine. She has published in *JAPA*, *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, and *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, among others, on the topics of autism spectrum disorder, primal scene, intergenerational eating disorders, the diagnosis of sexual abuse in young children, watched play, and working in analysis with children under five. In 2010, Dr. Sherkow received the Ritvo prize in child psychoanalysis from the Yale Child Study Center.

Presenter Name: Susan Sherkow
Mode of Presentation: Oral/Poster.
Contact number: 212-722-0090

