

Sociocognitive Models of Autism

Theory of Mind Hypothesis

- Ability to understand that you have different mind to mind
 - Understand others mental states and emotions
- Tested by the Sally-Anne task (Baren-Cohen, 1985)
- Abilities that rely on ToM
 - Committing social faux pas (Happe, 1994)
 - Recognising facial expressions (Baren-Cohen, 2001)
 - Struggle with joint attention (following gaze)
- Suggest that other symptoms of ASC (language and social difficulties) arise from ToM
 - Autistic people are 'mindblind'- blind to mental states of other people

Weak Central Coherence Theory

- The ability to process globally and meaningfully
 - Ability to look pass details and see the whole picture
 - Common in autistic people to not see the whole picture
- Measured using visuo-spatial paradigms (see small letters not big)
- Cognitive style of autistic people explains performance in tests
- Explains other elements of ASD
 - Routine- upset if something is changed
 - Language difficulties- can't understand irony/sarcasm
 - Not able to process wider context, process literal words (Kaland 2002)
 - Social problems- stuck on on thing someone said so cant process whole sentence

Executive Dysfunction Account

- The higher order things we do in our brain e.g. planning, reasoning and complex demands
- People with ASD resemble patients with 'dysexecutive syndrome' (Baddeley, 1988)
 - Frontal lobe damage
 - Difficulties planning, set-shifting and inhibition
- Cognitive style characterised by perseveration- can't switch from one task to another
- EF deficits and ASD symptoms:
 - Impaired generativity= impaired ability to generate new plan when routine abandoned (Turner, 1999)
 - Impaired mental flexibility and inhibition= problems understanding non-literal language (Mashal, 2011)
- EF deficits explain failure in ToM tasks
 - Inability to disengage from what you know is in the box (perseverating) so can't switch to the other perspective