

09 - Theory of Mind

Theory of Mind

© SPMM Course □ The term Barnum effect or Forer effect refers to the widespread predisposition to believe that general and vague personality descriptions or predictions (often given by astrologers, horoscopes, and palmistry) have specific relevance to certain individuals. This effect has frequently contaminated research on personality assessment. □ Hawthorne effect refers to a short-term improvement caused by observing worker performance. □ Pygmalion effect or Rosenthal effect is a form of self-fulfilling prophecy wherein students with poor expectations from their teachers internalize their negative label and perform poorly, and those with positive expectations internalise their positive labels and succeed academically. Theory of Mind Theory of Mind (ToM) develops around age 3 ½ to 4 years. ToM refers to the understanding that other persons do have mental processes similar to self; in this context it forms an essential part of the social attribution process. Lack of development of the theory of mind (trait related) could explain the apparent lack of empathy seen in autism. In acute psychosis, state related deficits in ToM are noted i.e. the deficit is not pervasive but seen only when relapsing into positive symptoms. Poor ToM in association with reduced empathic ability is also demonstrated in conduct disorder and in antisocial personality disorder. First-order false belief tasks These tasks relate to the understanding that other people can have their own thoughts about a given situation. First-order tests involve inferring one person's mental state e.g. What Jim thinks. Wimmer and Perner (1983) noted that three-year-olds tend to fail whereas four-year-olds tend to succeed a false-belief task called Sally-Anne Test. Children are first shown the picture of Sally, leaving a chocolate on the counter before departing the scene. Anne later comes in and moves the object from the counter to a box. The children are then asked to predict where Sally will look for the chocolate when she returns to the room. Children aged 4 and above generally grasp the notion that Sally will hold a false belief and look at the place where she left the chocolate initially. 3-year-olds fail to ascribe this false belief to Sally. In the deceptive container task, a child is shown a closed candy container and is asked, "What's in here?" When the child answers 'candy', the container is opened, revealing a pencil. Later when the child is asked what she originally thought was in the container when she was first asked, Three-year-olds incorrectly answer "a pencil," demonstrating a lack of false belief whereas 4year-olds correctly say "candy."

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