

Developmental Process of Self-Image in an Autistic Child

— Relationship between Self-Consciousness and Consciousness of Others —

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Abstract : A boy diagnosed as autistic based on the DSM-III (R) criteria was referred to an educational guidance session at the National Institute of Special Education (NISE). In early childhood, the child was found to have difficulties in language and social development, but intelligence testing found him to be within the normal range. The child was observed to exhibit phases in his release from his autistic world through verbalization in his development during six years of elementary school education. In the process, he verbalized his internal world, in particular, his self-image. This was charted over a period of six years as he made good progress in his social development.

This report describes the child's developmental process and provides an analysis focusing on the following issues: 1) the developmental process during his infancy and early childhood 2) social development during elementary schooling, and 3) the developmental process of his verbalized self-image and its changes in the middle and upper grades of elementary school.

Key Words : Autistic Child, Self-Image, Self-Consciousness, Consciousness of Others, Sociality

I Case Introduction

The subject lives with his parents and elder sister. He first attended sessions at NISE 12 months prior to entering elementary school and attended sessions regularly a monthly basis until graduation from elementary school, a period of seven years.

This paper reports on the developmental process until his graduation from elementary school and is based on the detail record kept by his mother in her childcare Diary as well as case records.

1. *Life History*

The child weighed 2800 grams at birth and started walking at 15 months.

2. *Time Taken to Recognize the Problem and Subject's Behaviour*

The child's parents became concerned at his slow language development at approximately 24 months and at his unusual behaviour at about 30 months. 1) He became particularly interested in the specifics of weather forecast reports on television and he made his mother repeatedly read forecasts printed in the newspaper. 2) He settled on a particular route he liked to walk on a daily basis and any deviation resulted in shouting and crying. He only walked on the edge of the road and if any people were standing in his way and he could not avoid them, he cried. 3) Even when with his age peers, he ignored them and continued to move a toy car back and forth for long

periods while lying down. When passing other children, he closed his eyes, pulled his mother's hand, and walked on by. He noticed even the finest of detail and would not tolerate even the smallest of deviations such as the arrangements of miniature cars. He was also fixated on label marks and logos.

3. *Counselling History*

When the subject was four years and five months of age, his mother sought advice at a child guidance clinic on how to help him attend a group therapy session aimed at mitigating his hyperactivity. At the time, she was advised to visit her child guidance centre. One month later, the boy was diagnosed by his medical practitioner as being "mildly autistic," and it was recommended that he be placed in an educational setting with other normal children.

At age five and a half, his mother took the advice of a worker at the children's centre where the boy often played and visited NISE. According to the mother, the boy was exhibiting the following 1) When absorbed with letters and numerals, he was unable to stop, 2) When something out of the ordinary happened, such as the page of a book ripping, he panicked and became overly excited, and 3) he started to talk a lot and followed rules in the home. His family hoped that he would do the same thing outside of the home.

4. *Educational History*

For two years prior to entering elementary school,

the subject attended guidance sessions in a group setting of six to eight children. These sessions lasted for approximately 150 minutes and were held three times each week at a club for young children at the Children's Centre. Following consultation concerning educational placement, the boy entered a normal class in an elementary school.

5. *Intelligence*

Intelligence testing at the NISE when the subject was eight years old found his score was within the normal range with a WISC Verbal IQ of 88, Performance IQ of 86, and a Full Scale IQ of 86. Analysis of weaknesses revealed by testing found that he achieved low scores on general knowledge and picture arrangement. From this it was inferred that he was weak in contextual reading. Although the boy's responses to several questions in general knowledge and picture arrangement were incorrect, he did offer correct answers at the end of the test. It was possible that he was being mischievous and that his actual IQ score is higher.

II Development During Infancy and Early Childhood

1. *Developmental Process of Emotion and Play*

From two to three months after birth, the boy responded verbally when he saw the faces of others. He laughed, slept well, and did not trouble his caregivers. Yet at three months, he began crying continuously for no apparent reason.

At four months he began crying at the approach of strangers, or if they hugged him. At five months, he started to cry when he entered a new place even if carried on his mother's back. At age six to seven months, his negative reaction to new people or places intensified. In contrast, when he was taken from his mother's lap, he showed no sign of protest and, in addition, did not follow his mother when she moved out-of-sight. He smiled when his mother played "peek-a-boo," but never imitated her gestures.

At 18 months, he became absorbed in reading picture books about vehicles and cooking books. He looked at them all day long, often turning the pages and wearing out the books. Occasionally he ventured outside with bare feet and became lost.

At 24 months, he became interested in television weather forecasts and muttered incomprehensibly when looking at weather charts in newspapers.

At 34 months, he started seeing eye-to-eye with others, looking back when his name was called, and missing his mother when she left. At this time, he

also started playing with other children outside, but his play was considered to be self-centred. He poked other children and made them cry, consequently earning him the reputation of a playground bully. This situation continued until he was four years old.

At about 42 months, he became interested in story-based picture books, and at 48 months, he enjoyed listening to stories being read to him.

When he was approximately three and a half years old, however, he was frightened by the sudden stopping of a car during his daily walk, and cried. Following this incident, he refused to venture out again. However, when invited to go for a ride in a bus or train, he was willing to go. His fascination with trains and buses escalated and he continually asked to go for a ride on the subway. His mother reluctantly took him, and this continued. When she was unable to take for a ride, and explained this to him, he shed tears and stared at a book. This continued for a month or so, and after this, he cried when walking on the edge of the road, often jumping off when surprised.

At 48 months, he showed interest in drawing and for more than a month made his mother draw for him. At this point, he began drawing by himself using a crayon, and became absorbed in his drawing. He also started playing with his older sister through singing and drawing. He also entered other people's houses and carried away pot plants, while he laughed loudly. This behaviour forced his family to keep a close watch on him.

At 48 months he was able to memorize songs from the television and could ride a tricycle with training wheels.

2. *Language Developmental Process*

The subject uttered his first word when he was 13 months old. His vocabulary, however, did not increase and simple "parrot-like" imitation of the speech of others continued. At 24 months, he started finger pointing, and at 30 months, his command of two word sentences was firmly established. At 36 months, he started referring to his family members using words such as "Okahan," meaning "Okaa-san" (mother).

At 36 months, he imitated the intonation of television announcers, repeated weather forecasts like a parrot, and forced people to repeat back to them while he read a weather bulletin aloud. At this time, he suddenly started imitating words, but juxtaposed them with no regard for meaning. For example, "Datsun" (a type of car) and "pitiful." He also used words in groups he had defined himself. For

example, when he wanted a biscuit he said "Cheese, milk, give me, biscuit." At 42 months, he was fascinated with opposites and enjoyed being corrected. He then began word play on a non-stop basis (e.g., saying "soup" while pointing at rice. When his mother replied, "No, it's not soup. It's rice," he would reiterate the word "rice" while continuing to point at the soup). He memorized Chinese characters from weather forecasts and maps, and used them for his opposite word games. This behaviour continued until he was 4 years old.

His first successful conversation occurred when he was 41 months old. At approximately four and a half, he could understand most of what his mother was saying, as well as express most of what he wanted to say.

III Elementary School Period Development

1. *Lower Elementary Grades: The First use of "I" and the Fear of Invasion*

<First Grade>

On starting elementary school, the subject began screaming. On another occasion, he explored the entire school building during a break in classes. The subject asked other students in his commuting group, as well as teachers, their ages and dates of their birthdays. He often spent time in class just doing what he wanted to do, but on coming home after school, he told his mother, "A-chan (A is his first name) worked from Page 25 to Page 45 in only one and a half hours, but why could other students only study the three words "tsu-ku-shi" (horse tail) during that time?"

In the second semester, his classroom teacher told the class, "We should all take care of B (a child with nephrosis), C (a child with hearing impairment), and A (the subject). On returning home, the boy asked his mother, "What's wrong with me?" This was the first time that the subject had referred to himself in the first person. Subsequently, when his class discussed a no-littering policy, he replied that he would "take care of what applies to myself from tomorrow," demonstrating his willingness to make an effort. Meanwhile, when one of his classmates visited his house and touched one of his favourite toys, he frequently became over-excited, repeatedly vomited, lost his appetite and, consequently, missed school from the next day.

<Second Grade>

When the subject came home from a school excursion during the first semester, he said, "Let's go

some place where no-one bothers me. Let's hide," and he hid in his closet. When a classmate entered his room, he said, "There is no safety zone for me," and pushed his friend out of his room. The number of things he considered to be his favourite and, hence, didn't want his classmates to touch increased. When his classmates visited him, he told them, "Don't come in for three minutes," and he hid his favourite things in excitement while uttering, "Things are more important than friends, or "I will guard my things and not let anyone in when my mother is not around."

During the second semester, when his mother was not home, his classmate tried to come into his house. The boy refused to let him in and the two argued. A neighbour came and asked his classmate to leave, and later, he wrote on a piece of paper "16 Prohibitions Regarding Friends" that included items such as illustrated reference books, maps, a flashlight, watch, and so on. He presented this list to his friends while telling them, "Read the list aloud." When a friend touched one of the prohibited items accidentally, the boy became angry and said, "You've just read about it a little while ago," and he grabbed his friend by the collar. Later, he came to play with his friends in a more relaxed atmosphere by establishing the following rules:

- When his friends visited him, he moved his favourite things from his room to upstairs, and covered them with a wrapping cloth.
- Things were classified into "for friends" and "for myself," and friends were not supposed to touch the latter.
- Things that cannot be moved from his room were covered with a wrapping cloth.

Later, when his friends visited him suddenly, he could allow them to touch his favourite things with the purpose of moving them.

During this time, he started to worry about what other people were saying about him. He asked his mother, for example, "Why am I famous (because other children in the class were talking about him)?" or "Am I a normal child?" When he visited NISE during this period, a nervous tic that manifested itself in the form of blinking was noticed for the first time. Both at home and at school, motor tics such as neck bending and twisting of the lips were also observed.

2. *Middle Elementary Grades: Shaken Self-Image and Taking the First Step towards Peer Membership*

<Third Grade>

When the subject was asked a question during a session, he often replied, "I'm not going to tell you."

While miming a hypodermic syringe, he also said, "diphtheria shot" (the subject was the centre of 'a scene' after entering school made in an effort to avoid getting the vaccine). He also told the researcher, "You don't have the right to live." As seen in these examples, he began to express refusals in a rather offensive manner. During this period, he often talked about his friends at home and recreated scenes of their games, as well as their speech and behaviour.

At school, he mentioned the name of his favourite girl and asked to be seated next to her. He chose to belong to a group to which she belonged, for example, on occasions such as an excursion lunch. Though his friends made fun of his romantic affection, he did not understand their sex-related vocabulary, and asked his parents what these words meant. Meanwhile, he engaged in a game of "strip stone" (a game in which the loser takes off an article of clothing), with his friends, and was left naked in the school grounds. He apparently did not mind this.

Concurrently, there were peer relationship problems caused by misunderstandings and in the third semester, his class was involved in a discussion on how to solve these problems. The frequency of facial motor tics increased during this period, and before the spring vacation, the facial tic changed to an opening and closing of his mouth and the making of a sound with his jaw. The problem, however, appeared to have disappeared during the spring vacation.

At home, he started to assert himself more and more regarding his daily schedule (he decided his schedule by himself and acted on it compulsively), as well as his clothing. In addition, during this period, his habit of questioning increased, and he persistently harassed people around him by saying things such as, "Please answer. I'm begging you," "Answer me please, even with a guess," or "Even a rough answer is all right." Such persistent questioning became particularly noticeable when his mother was busy with household chores.

<Fourth Grade>

After the ceremony marking the opening of the new school term, the subject told his mother that the replacement for his homeroom teacher was sad and he cried. The he asked his mother not to tell his sister about his crying. This was observed to be the first verbal expression of sadness.

His nervous symptoms broadened to include shoulder movements, and soon afterwards included the uttering of the sound "Ah, ah," as if coughing. Although the motor tic disappeared soon after this,

the sound habit remained and was loud enough to be heard from outside his house. During this period, when the subject ate, he cited where the food was produced and the nutrients it contained. When someone interrupted him in this, he felt obliged to restart the process. At the same time, his tic worsened. During school lunch, he continued this process with talking out aloud, but since it took time, he had to eat in a hurry and ended-up putting a large amount of food into his mouth at once and washing it down with milk. Due to this behaviour, his table manners deteriorated, and he was often told to behave himself. Consequently, his sound tic increased in frequency, but it disappeared immediately prior to the summer vacation.

During this period, the subject often uttered rude words such as, "shit," "pee," " penis," and "tits" at school. He made an effort to stop himself from saying these words, and said, "I will stop saying them when I become ten." On his birthday, he repeated the words over and over, and then made an effort to stop it at the exact moment of his birth. In November, he wrote a poem entitled "Shit and Penis," and said in closing, "I want to stop saying 'shit' and 'penis', but I cannot stop yet. I wonder why?" In the cartoon club to which he belonged (a school club activity), he repeatedly drew pictures of shit and penises.

In summer, the circle of people he would talk to expand beyond his parents and older sister. The circle now included younger children who participated in his swimming lessons (owing to his limited ability to swim, he was in a class for younger children), five or six year old children living in the neighbourhood, and his grandmother. In winter, he began playing with six other boys who were unable to join other peer group activities such as baseball. Their play was mainly based on a scissors-paper-stone game, and the chasing of each other. At the close of an essay entitled "Memories of my Third and Fourth Grades" which was written at the end of the fourth grade, he wrote, "We played the Arcene A (a boy's name) game, hen shit picking, and A's shit space and became really good friends."

The boy then reflected on his 10 years and wrote the following essay at the end of his fourth grade. It was entitled "Ten Years of My Life," and the following is an extract:

(Omitted). After entering school, because I made a scene to avoid an injection, I became famous right away; I was quick and good at calculations, but ran around during class and broke a plastic board.

Thanks to Teacher E as well as due to my own efforts, however, I suddenly became a good boy at the third semester of the third grade. I returned to my old self a little in the first semester of the third grade, but in the next semester, I became a better boy than ever before, almost to the normal level. In the third semester, however, I returned to my old self a little again. In the fourth grade, I got worse to the point in the first semester of the third grade. In general, I became noisy.

In the past (Omitted), I had many bad points, but now I understand them and am able to improve myself significantly.

3. Upper Elementary Grades: Release from Autism, and Am I handicapped?

<Fifth Grade>

The subject sang the parody song, "A's (a boy's name) hand has shit on it," and was told by girls that he was dirty. Since that time, whenever he wanted to sing the song, he told himself, "to get an injection," and made an effort not to sing the song. He also said that he was ignoring provocations from other children, but whenever he was made fun of by other children, he cried and was upset.

At the end of the first semester, he joined the boys ball game called "Propane," but he did not understand the rules of hand baseball and was told to only watch. At that time, even when his father watched baseball on television, he showed no interest.

Before going to sleep at night, he required a ritual to be performed of his mother saying "Goodnight," tapping his futon lightly, and turning off his light. On one occasion, his mother had to answer the phone just as he was about to go to sleep, and he cried. Even though his father took him to bed, he continued to cry until his mother came. Next morning, he told her, "Did you hang up in the middle of your call?" and "I felt bad about it." Around this time he said, "I wonder whether it's strange for a fifth grader to have his mother do this kind of thing?" and "Do you think every boy asks for this?" Soon after this, he stopped several of his long rituals such as those he required before sleeping, while taking a bath, or reading the weather data.

During the first semester he refused to go out after being scared by a stopping car), and said, "I have a car phobia these days," and "What if I were hit by a car?" He even cried, "Mother! I'm scared. My body doesn't move at all." Due to this problem, it took more time for him to come to the NISE, but he made a conscious effort to improve, and said, "I was better today than before, right?" In the second

semester, he felt joy at being able to go to swimming lessons alone, dropping into the book shop on the way home, and reading reference books for boys. He said, "Going alone is fun. I'm not scared by cars any more."

At swimming lessons, the boy started watching other children with disabilities in other grades. About one disabled child he saw, in particular, he said, "Sorry to say this, but he seems to be handicapped. He looks like D (a disabled student in another grade at his school). I am probably better than him." Also, in October, he said with a delightful look, "I don't understand why I used to go about naked in public." "Why don't people forget about things that happened before?" and "I wonder why people call me handicapped?" When his mother was out, he read the diary she kept on his development and asked her many questions about it.

<Sixth Grade>

When he entered sixth grade, the subject came to sessions alone, and on weekends and holidays, he went to amusement parks and other places with friends. His interest in the wether subsided, and in turn, he studied history, read the economic pages of newspapers, and watched the business reports on television. Meanwhile he took an interest in his report card, comparing his with that of his sister, or current grades with past achievement. He also asked his former homeroom teachers why they had given him low grades. He also complained about how difficult it was to understand sentences in his Japanese language class. Inspired by his classmates who were preparing for the Entrance examinations for junior high school, he talked about "good grades and good companies."

His interest about children with disabilities continued. When he visited NISE, he carefully observed other children and asked questions comparing himself to them. At school, he wanted to make children with disabilities in other classes the topic of conversation among his classmates. One of his peers, bothered by his persistence said, "He is not like that because he likes it." The subject then replied, "I am not like this because I like it. If he does not, he is sick." Another of his peers said, "You are not qualified to make fun of other disabled children." In addition, out of desire to be recognized by his peers, he joined in teasing a particular girl, but was worried that his older sister would find out about it. "She will get angry at me if she hears about it."

Just before graduation, he received a letter at school from his first and second grade homeroom

teacher who was teaching at another school. In the letter, he found out about a first grade boy who used to run backwards in the relay sprint, and he spat out the word, "Shameful!"

Reflecting on his elementary school years, he wrote the following piece entitled "Memories of Six Years" in a collection of graduation essays:

I entered the elementary school in 19XX. My homeroom teacher was Teacher E. After the Entrance ceremony, I made scenes around the school. In a relay sprint, I even ran backwards, I ran carrying a first prize flag. I troubled everyone in the school with my screaming voice.

I improved a little in second grade, but was still a trouble maker. I was not much better than in the first grade.

When I became a third grader, Teacher F became my homeroom teacher. Teacher F was quite strict, and I didn't like Teacher F at the time. I sometimes cried, but now I think Teacher F was a good teacher. I made progress during the third grade

In the fourth grade, Teacher G was my homeroom teacher. I was disgusting during the fourth grade. I went around naked in public, picked bird shits, and played the Arcene A (a boy's name) game I think that I, in this period, was imply enjoying my freedom rather than retrogressing.

When I became a fifth grader, I made a great leap forward. When we assembled, I behaved well. My studies went well. During this time, teacher H became my homeroom teacher.

I became a sixth grader, finally. (Omitted). It was the last time for everything and we had to guide the students in the lower grades as we were the oldest. It was difficult to guide younger students, but I tried hard.

When I reflect back on those six years, many things happened. .Recently, when I see my former teachers, they say, "You have become much better." I think I have too, I will try hard, even after I go to a junior high school.

IV Analysis

1. *Self-Consciousness and Consciousness of Others*

In the beginning of the first grade, the subject referred to himself as "A-chan" (A is his first name), but in the second semester, he used "I" for the first time. It is not clear when he first used "A-chan," in imitation of the way others named him, but when he was three, he referred to his family members using terms such as "Mother." When vocabulary referring to others emerges. It is often felt that the user has

established a self-consciousness and awareness of consciousness of others. The use of these words often indicates that the user can clearly distinguish himself from others. Also, since the use of the first personal pronoun implies the ability to weigh one's own desires against the desires of others, the use of "I" is thought to be confirmation of independence of will.

In this case, the emergence of the personal pronoun "I" indicates that he was able to consciously place his needs above the needs of others, and act independently. Yet, his responses as manifested by his objections to the actions of others, such as his friends touching his favourite toys, were quite limited, and he was easily excited and responded with a range of psychosomatic symptomatology.

In the second grade, he was able to verbalize his anxiety at having his private world invaded when his friend tried to enter his room. He acquired the means to refuse the intrusions of others through verbal communication. Further, even regarding his obsession of refusing to let others touch his favourite things, he could implement a defence mechanism by listing prohibited items and making others read the list.

These actions during the lower elementary school grades indicate that he could visualize himself as an individual who could understand and act alone. Such placement of himself against others, however, was limited to his relationships with friends when they visited his home. He was still unable to build these relationships with his school peers.

2. *Emotional Troubles Presented by the Autistic Child*

In the third grade, the subject imitated and repeated the games played by his friends and what they had said. This indicates his expansion of interest in those, other than his friends.

In actual peer relationships at school, he involved himself with a group of girls whom he could easily identify with his mother and sister. With boys, he started playing games one-on-one, using the scissors-paper-stone game, as well as the game of chase which he had invented and named. In the overall pattern of human relationships he had at school. However, he had much trouble, and his class discussed how to deal with it. Consequently, the nervous tics that had first appeared in the latter half of the second grade, increased in frequency.

At home, he frequently asked questions when his mother was busy.

In the fourth grade, his tics included, not only motor tics, but also sound tics. The former

disappeared first and the latter disappeared over the summer vacation. As his tics had become less severe or disappeared, they were considered to have a close causal relationship with school.

A review of the developmental process of the subject reveals that his continual use of rude words such as "shit" and "pee" at school in Grade Four, suggests that he had developed the symptoms of Tourette syndrome, according to the DSM-III(R) criteria.

Despite the tic symptomatology, during the fourth grade, the boy expanded the number of people he could converse with outside that of his family and the younger children he encountered in swimming classes and the local area. He also developed his own verbal ability and human relationships as can be seen by his playing with six other boys even though the play included negative aspects.

The subject's; (1) persistent questioning; and (2) repetition of rude words occurred at a stage when the number of his human relationships were increasing and he was under great personal stress. Thus, in Case 1, he obtained peace-of-mind by questioning his mother and hanging around her when she was busy; that is, when he was sure that she was staying in one place. In Case 2, he relieved stress by repeatedly using rude words. Ordinary children manifest such behaviour in their development, and it can be said that the boy also experienced this phase of development, even if somewhat delayed. Thus, it could be that this was only a temporary problem in the developmental process. It is, however, also possible that Case 2 was a verbal self-detrimental behaviour, and that the subject was sending a signal for help that he was unable to cope with the stress of his situation. It is believed that the latter idea implies the possibility for positive and negative treatment.

From the boy's developmental phases, such as persistent questioning and tic symptomatology during the mid-elementary school years, it is induced that autistic children experience emotional strife and inner conflict regarding human relationships, and that these troubles and inner conflicts occur only after children reach a certain developmental stage of self-consciousness.

3. Self-Recognition of Disability

In the fifth grade, the subject mastered the handling of provocations from friends and the teasing that is often intrinsic to boys paly. He also developed the ability to see himself objectively and ceased the long-term compulsive habits he had acquired, He also

made a conscious effort to adjust himself to overcome his fears and found enjoyment in doing other things.

At the same time, he developed the ability to self reflect, for example, reviewing his past behaviour with regret. He, thus, started noticing his own problems and verbalizing them with emotion.

In the sixth grade, due to inner conflicts arising from others calling him handicapped, he increased his interest in the differences between himself and other disabled children. These comparisons were made, also, with report cards. This behaviour, however, resulted in verbal communication with others and led to a desire to improve academically which he considered to be socially acceptable behaviour.

The boy also expressed embarrassment over his past. This he considered to be shameful when his former homeroom teacher mentioned it. This seems to indicate that difficulty he had in accepting a negative self image of his past, Such difficulty is often experienced by high functioning autistic children in the transition period from childhood to adolescence.. The period underscores the need for further refined psychotherapy to assist these children in developing their inner worlds.

4. Verbalization of Self-Image in Written Form

The self-image expressions used in essays written in the fourth grade indicate that he was making an emotional effort to accept his sensitive mental fluctuations, although at that point, such effort had not reached a concrete form. In comparison, an essay written in the sixth grade described the past as an object, and he could express each of the developmental stages in detail, even in concise sentences. This indicates his growth as a person.

It should also be noted that in the fourth grade, the subject composed poems and drew pictures when he was experiencing strong nervous tics.

These findings indicate the possibility for additional therapies for high functioning autistic children as an effective method with which to approach their inner world. In other words, in addition to a non-verbal approach such as miniature garden therapy drawing therapy which have been widely used, the projection method can be improved by using written language in the form of essays and poetry. Such an approach could make it possible for individuals to relate their inner experiences to their understanding of the world.