



Mindblindness Theory: Touchstone for Interdisciplinarity

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Abstract

Simon Baron Cohen formulated mindblindness as a theory to explain the deficits existing in the autistic brain. These deficit metaphors, while deeply cognitivist, belie significant figurative and metaphorical techniques of persuasion of both lay and scientific audiences. Given the cultural currency of the theory, other scholars from humanities backgrounds applied it to literature studies. Lisa Zunshine is the most poignant case of a cognitive literary theorist applying mindblindness theory to the reading of narrative. Despite the seductive allure of applying cognitive neuroscience to literary texts, a rhetorical and ideological analysis indicates that the reliance upon deficit metaphors raises some serious concerns about autistic identity. because it raises doubts about autistic understanding of narrative. Psychologists concerned with these cognitive theories argue that mindblindness erodes the idea of communicative negotiation implicit in all human dialogue. What is truly fascinating is that because of the mindblindness theory, we now have more instances of interdisciplinary discussion about the phenomenon of autism than we had previously, an unanticipated benefit based on a dubious theory.

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