

This Week's Citation Classic

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Kanner L. Autistic disturbances of affective contact. *Nerv. Child* 2:217-50, 1943.

Eleven children, discussed in this paper, present a previously unreported congenital infantile psychosis, now known universally as 'early infantile autism' or 'Kanner Syndrome.' It is characterized by extreme aloneness and a desire for the preservation of sameness, with a variety of behavioral (cognitive, affective) symptoms derived from them. [The *Science Citation Index (SCI®)* and the *Social Sciences Citation Index™ (SSCI™)* indicate that this paper has been cited over 315 times since 1961.]

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"At the risk of being accused of unmitigated superstition, I do not hesitate to say that I seem to be endowed with serendipity, or 'the gift of finding unsought treasures.' I shall limit myself to the circumstances which brought about the inclusion of my 1943 paper on autism in Citation Classics.

"It was not a search for survival when in 1924 I accepted a job at the Yankton, South Dakota, State Hospital, offered to me on the recommendation of a postgraduate American student at the University of Berlin, whom I instructed in electrocardiography. Little did I know that, had I remained in Germany, I would have perished in the Hitler holocaust a few years later. A clear case of serendipity.

"My switch from cardiology to psychiatry served me well. A few published reports soon gave me a 'name' in the field. In 1928, Adolf Meyer had a place for me at his renowned Phipps Clinic. By 1930, an annex was put at my disposal at the adjacent pediatric hospital for the investigation of the rank and file of patients for the formulation of problems, the mastery of which would be made accessible as the psychopathological principles in dealing with children.' I did not

realize that this was to mark the origin of academic child psychiatry as a psychobiologically oriented discipline sui generis rather than a miniature subdivision of the adult model. The resulting 'Children's Psychiatric Service' of the Johns Hopkins Hospital, of which I was the director, grew into a major clinical, research, and teaching center. Children were referred from everywhere. Governments and private foundations established special training fellowships.

"The first— plurilingual—*Journal of Child Psychiatry*, of which I was an associate editor, appeared in Switzerland in 1934. In 1935, I published 'the first textbook of child psychiatry in the English language.' It has since had several editions and many reprints. It has been translated into several languages, and is still the standard text.¹

"In 1938, five-year-old Donald T., brought to my clinic from Forest, Mississippi, made me aware of a behavior pattern not known to me or anyone else theretofore. When I saw a few more children presenting similar characteristics, I reported in 1943 eleven cases in some detail in a now extinct journal, *The Nervous Child*. This is the article so frequently cited ever since.

"Interest in autism has become universal. The literature (books, monographs, periodicals, reprints) would fill many shelves. Television and lay magazines have not kept behind. As of now, there are in this country 102 chapters of the National Society for Autistic Children, spread over 34 states, and there are 66 Societies for Autistic Children in 31 countries all over the globe. Of course, there have been diagnostic quandaries, etiological eccentricities, and dogmatic claims from representatives of sectarian 'approaches.' But much progress has been, and more will be, made. All this started 40 years ago with Donald T., now a 45-year-old bank clerk, whose townspeople know him to be the first reported specimen of what many of my colleagues call 'the Kanner Syndrome.' How is that for serendipity?"

1. Kanner L. *Child Psychiatry*. Springfield, IL: C. C. Thomas Publishing Co., 1935. 527p.