

NEWS

Community Newsletter: Anti-racism in clinical practice, bilingualism and autism

BY CHELSEY B. COOMBS

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Hello, and welcome to this week's Community Newsletter! I'm your host, **Chelsey B. Coombs**, *Spectrum's* engagement editor.

I want to remind you of a **new *Spectrum* survey** about how autism researchers are approaching scientific conferences through the end of the year. Are you ready to get back to the unique in-person experience of the Society for Neuroscience conference? Or will you be watching the action from your lab (or couch)? We would be grateful if you would **share your thoughts**.

Our first social threads this week come from **Diondra Straiton** and **Aksheya Sridhar**, graduate students in clinical psychology at Michigan State University in East Lansing. The pair published a call to action in *Autism* about how clinicians in the field can help end anti-Black racism in autism assessment, treatment and care.

1/3 ****Pls share!**** Ever wondered how you can address anti-Black racism in your work as an autism clinician? **@AksheyaS** and I just published an OPEN ACCESS paper on exactly this topic in **@journalautism!** Check out our recs and appendix of training resources: **<https://t.co/Ng52lg71IK>**

— Diondra Straiton (@DiondraStraiton) **September 17, 2021**

?? New open-access pub, now out in **@journalautism** **<https://t.co/fXQ8cRjiw1>**

@DiandraStraiton & I are proud to share our short report describing anti-Black racism in clinical work w/ **#autistic** populations.

— Aksheya Sridhar (@AksheyaS) **September 17, 2021**

“Clinicians have a responsibility to understand how anti-Black racism influences access to quality assessment, accurate and timely diagnosis, autism-related services, and high-quality care for Black individuals on the autism spectrum,” they write.

They offer five recommendations, including that clinicians should listen to what Black autistic people think about their organization, remember that anti-racist learning is ongoing and become anti-racism advocates.

The paper also includes appendices with suggested anti-racism readings and training materials for clinicians. Sridhar tweeted that a website to accompany the paper is coming soon.

We outline specific recommendations & include an appendix of resources that practitioners may find helpful as they work individually, & in their organizations, to advocate for systemic change in addressing anti-Black racism in our field. Stay tuned for an accompanying website!

— Aksheya Sridhar (@AksheyaS) **September 17, 2021**

Autism researchers and clinicians gave the paper high praise. **Sarah Edmunds**, assistant professor of psychology at the University of South Carolina, tweeted that she is excited to implement these suggestions.

Can't wait to read this and apply in my own work! **@DiandraStraiton** & **@AksheyaS**, congratulations! <https://t.co/WrrNf826LS>

— Sarah Edmunds, PhD (@SarahREdmunds) **September 20, 2021**

Kristen Bottema-Beutel, associate professor of teaching, curriculum and society at Boston College in Massachusetts, tweeted that she has added the paper to her teaching syllabus.

Just added this to my syllabus, excellent work!

— Kristen Bottema-Beutel (@KristenBott) **September 17, 2021**

Also this week, Rachael Davis, a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, tweeted about **bilingualism and autism**, based on a commentary she co-authored.

New **#autism** and **#bilingualism** commentary paper out by **@BerengereDigard**, **@SueReviews** and me, talking about autism & equal opportunities for language learning: <https://t.co/RiqsDE30oc> ??

— Rachael Davis (@rachaelvdavis) **September 22, 2021**

Studies show that bilingualism can benefit autistic children by strengthening family bonds and boosting self-confidence, she and her colleagues wrote. But many parents worry that it can also cause confusion or language delay. Despite no evidence supporting that view, some clinicians and educators continue to advise parents against raising their autistic children to be bilingual.

Lorna Hamilton, associate professor and associate psychology at York St. John University in the United Kingdom, as well as one of the commentary's reviewers, wrote that it was "great to see it out in the world."

Pleasure to review this important and timely paper. Great to see it out in the world

— Lorna Hamilton (@DrLornaHam) **September 22, 2021**

Naima Bhana, assistant professor of special education at Niagara University in Lewiston, New York, tweeted that she has faced similar issues professionally and personally and called the piece “insightful.”

I have experience very similar issues in my professional and personal lives (i.e. not wanting autistic student to learn mother tongue because of fears of limited vocabulary) this is a very insightful piece, particularly to share with others who are not familiar with bilingualism

— Dr. Naima Bhana (she/her/ella) (@BhanaNaima) **September 22, 2021**

And finally, **Noah Sasson**, associate professor of behavioral and brain sciences at the University of Texas at Dallas, tweeted his thoughts on studies that purport to be about autistic people, but are really about autistic traits.

I keep seeing papers titled something like “Examining X in Autism” only to read deep into the paper to see that no actual autistic people participated, only people in the general population who were given a measure of “autistic traits”. Can we stop doing this please?

— Noah Sasson (@Noahsasson) **September 20, 2021**

It’s fine to do a study of autistic traits. Just say so in the title! Be up front about it.

— Noah Sasson (@Noahsasson) **September 20, 2021**

Clare Harrop, research assistant professor of allied health sciences at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, tweeted her own frustrations with this practice.

I’ve found this exceptionally frustrating recently while doing a lit review for a grant.

Everytime I think I've found a good paper, it's traits

— Clare Harrop (@ClareHarropPhD) **September 20, 2021**

“This of course would also apply to every animal study, **David Mandell**, professor of psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania and *Autism* editor-in-chief, noted in reply.

This of course would also apply to every animal study.

— David Mandell (@DSMandell) **September 20, 2021**

Don't forget to **register for our 28 September webinar**, featuring **Jeremy Veenstra-VanderWeele**, professor of psychiatry at Columbia University, who will speak about goals for developing new drugs for autism — and the barriers researchers may encounter.

That's it for this week's Community Newsletter! If you have any suggestions for interesting social posts you saw in the autism research sphere, feel free to send an email to me at **chelsey@spectrumnews.org**. See you next week!