

NEWS

Community Newsletter: Autism training for Black parents, Google's built-in gender bias

BY SPECTRUM

13 MARCH 2022

This week's newsletter is a tale of two tweets, one marking important progress and the other a lack thereof.

On Monday, the journal *Autism* highlighted a paper about **a new parent training program**, Spectrum of Care, developed by the Black community for the Black community. **Michele Villalobos**, associate professor of pediatrics at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City and part of the research team, wrote the journal's thread about the work.

The team wanted to take advantage of the success of training programs for parents of autistic children, and to craft an intervention that integrated Black families' "cultural heritage and assets," the thread explains. "Few studies have included Black families or acknowledged ongoing historical trauma and engagement in medical research."

In a novel practice-based approach, authors **@ColorofAutism**, **@mvillalobosPhD**, **@Iheomalruka**, Jill Locke & Brian Boyd describe Spectrum of Care - a parent training program developed by the Black community for the Black community

????by **@mvillalobosPhD**<https://t.co/u790RjSPjd> (1/11)

— Autism Journal (@journalautism) **March 7, 2022**

They worked with 147 Black parents over three years and followed up with surveys and semi-structured interviews. After the training, parents generally reported higher ratings of empowerment, efficacy and confidence.

Overall, parents reported higher ratings of empowerment, efficacy & confidence post training. We identified parent-provider cultural concordance and circle of support/team building approaches as potential ingredients for future autism interventions in the Black community. (8/11) pic.twitter.com/LWmHASy5S2

— Autism Journal (@journalautism) **March 7, 2022**

“The race-based trauma that Black people experience remains invisible, unaddressed, and unacknowledged in autism research,” the thread concludes. “The Black parent voices in Spectrum of Care have made it clear, we must acknowledge their history and process in our work moving forward.”

“Check out this **amazing paper**,” tweeted **Iheoma U. Iruka**, founding director of the Equity Research Action Coalition, a faculty fellow at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and part of the research team.

Check out this????????? amazing paper about the work of love being done by @ColorofAutism! So humbled to be part of this author group ??????????.
<https://t.co/Bb1QiCDGWu>

— Iheoma U. Iruka, Ph.D. (@IheomaIruka) **March 7, 2022**

Meghan Miller, associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the University of California, Davis, also retweeted the paper, commenting that it was “**really important work**.”

Really important work here from **@ColorofAutism**, **@mvillalobosPhD**, and colleagues.
<https://t.co/tharWroH0q>

— Meghan Miller (@mmillerucd) **March 7, 2022**

Timothy Verstynen, associate professor of psychology at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, created a Twitter stir on Tuesday — **International Women’s Day** — when he tweeted **an interesting observation** about how Google classifies famous neuroscientists.

I’m going to build a classifier to predict when Google labels a famous neuroscientist “teacher/educator” or “neuroscientist”. What feature should I focus on?

Hmmmm.... pic.twitter.com/tCto7FqPHz

— P(Tim|Verstynen) = 1 (@tdverstynen) **March 9, 2022**

Spectrum readers might recognize several names from the thread, including such luminaries as **Marlene Behrmann**, **Carla Shatz** and **Patricia Goldman-Rakic** — pegged by Google as “university teachers,” not scientists.

Lorna Quandt, assistant professor in educational neuroscience at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., called out Google’s **dubious distinction** between “university teacher” and “professor” with a sad/frustrated face emoji.

Also why even "University teacher"??? Is that not a "PROFESSOR"?

????

— Dr. Lorna Quandt, PhD ?????????????????? (@lornaquandt) **March 9, 2022**

Jason Fleischer, assistant teaching professor of cognitive science at the University of California, San Diego, responded that, after Googling about 50 academic women, his “eyeball meter says that the problem seems to often happen when females have complicated titles that the AI tries to **round down to something simpler.**”

So I looked at ~50 academic women, and my eyeball meter says that the problem seems to often happen when females have complicated titles that the AI tries to round down to something simpler. When doing that it can also pick a more stereotypically gender conforming title. [@BVBosch](https://twitter.com/WyloK0iCMb) [pic.twitter.com/WyloK0iCMb](https://twitter.com/WyloK0iCMb)

— all your base are belong to (@jasongfleischer) **March 9, 2022**

The rounding down isn't always wrong, he continues, although it would be better if it added "highly influential" or maybe "par excellence." But sometimes, "its really just WTF."

Sometimes in rounding down it's almost right. I mean this would be OK if it added "highly influential" or maybe "par excellence" to the Experimenter title [@MarderLab](https://twitter.com/MarderLab) [pic.twitter.com/6kIZFIkZU](https://twitter.com/MarderLab)

— all your base are belong to (@jasongfleischer) **March 9, 2022**

That's it for this week's Community Newsletter! If you have any suggestions for interesting social posts you saw, feel free to send an email to news@spectrumnews.org.

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