

NEWS

# Community newsletter: Camouflaging, phenotypes, autistic people in academia

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.

First I want to remind you again about our ***Spectrum* reader survey**. We want to know what you think about our site and how we can make it even better. Participants have a chance to win one of 30 *Spectrum*-branded bags or notebooks, or one of our three *Spectrum* books. The last day to submit the survey is this week, on 5 March, so please send in your feedback ASAP.

We're starting off this week with another article on camouflaging, published in *Autism*, called "**Camouflaging in an everyday social context: An interpersonal recall study**." Study investigator **Julia Cook** wrote a thread about the work for the journal's Twitter account.

New **#OpenAccess** paper exploring autistic adults' experiences of camouflaging in everyday social situations.

Camouflaging in an everyday social context: An interpersonal recall study, by **@DrJuliaCook @LauraMayCrane @Laurahull & @WillClinPsy**<https://t.co/O8b0iXefjM>

A thread!????

— Autism Journal (@journalautism) **February 22, 2021**

"Traditional qualitative research techniques alone, which rely solely on retrospective accounts,

often cannot yield the detailed and precise information required to develop a more comprehensive understanding of social phenomenon,” the paper states.

So Cook and her colleagues turned to ‘interpersonal process recall,’ in which autistic participants spoke with a non-autistic stranger for 10 minutes and then watched recorded footage of the conversation. While watching, the participants pointed out camouflaging behaviors and discussed their experience of the interaction and social interactions in general.

**Michelle Dawson**, an autism researcher at Hôpital Rivière-des-Prairies in Montreal, Canada, tweeted a quote from a study participant about how that woman selectively shares information about herself with non-autistic people.

“I guess I’m acutely aware of [autistic] blokes that are like ‘I like trains. I like buses,’ and I don’t want to be seen like that you know?” the participant said.

“I guess I’m acutely aware of [autistic] blokes that are like ‘I like trains. I like buses,’ and I don’t want to be seen like that you know?” <https://t.co/byXbwiZ9La> autistic adults who camouflage discuss camouflaging

— Michelle Dawson (@autismcrisis) **February 20, 2021**

“Formal autism interventions explicitly teaching, for example, non-autistic social behaviours, may have the unintended consequence of explicitly or implicitly reinforcing the notion that autistic people need to present and interact in line with non-autistic expectations and norms in order to be accepted and valued by society, and in turn, encouraging camouflaging,” the study noted.

**Ginny D’Odorico**, a graduate student at University College London in the United Kingdom, echoed that sentiment, tweeting, “... interventions autistic people are often subject to around social skill development target normative behaviours rather than their own. The experience then becomes dysregulating rather than supportive.”

Really important study Laura, well done all ????  
as interventions autistic people are often subject to around social skill development target normative behaviours rather than their own. The experience then becomes dysregulating rather than supportive.. **#autismacceptance**

— Ginny D'Odorico (@Ginny4S) **February 20, 2021**

Another thread that generated a lot of discussion this week came from **Kevin Mitchell**, associate professor of genetics and neuroscience at Trinity College Dublin in Ireland. “The key to doing genetics well is really deeply understanding your phenotype. Genetics by itself won't just reveal the biology,” he wrote.

An observation: The key to doing genetics well is really deeply understanding your phenotype.

— Kevin Mitchell (@WiringTheBrain) **February 25, 2021**

**Ariel Levine**, Stadtman Investigator at the U.S. National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, agreed, saying, “Probably true of any area of biology in which you manipulate something at one level and study the phenotype at another.”

Agreed! And probably true of any area of biology in which you manipulate something at one level and study the phenotype at another. Ex. Optogenetic perturbation —> behavior.

— Ariel Levine (@ArielJLevine) **February 25, 2021**

**Shane McKee**, a consultant in genetic medicine at the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in Northern Ireland, tweeted, “This is why we need genotypes & phenotypes connected in our data structures. This is why Clinical Genetics is important.”

Look, if you don't listen to ME, listen to KEVIN! This is why we need genotypes & phenotypes connected in our data structures. This is why Clinical Genetics is important.  
**#GenOCEANIC** <https://t.co/Z77i82uAhc>

— Shane McKee (@shanemuk) **February 25, 2021**

**Carlos E. Alvarez**, associate professor of pediatrics at Ohio State University in Columbus, commented, “100% agree/100% disagree; and clarifying is not simple,” and then suggested a thought experiment.

Thought experiment: 2 scenarios: 1/ we don't know dog, mouse and human genetics of narcolepsy and pursue a deep phenotype approach; 2/ we only know phenotype as sudden falling asleep during wakefulness, but know the genetics I described above. (But not suggesting it's universal)

— Carlos E Alvarez (@CarlosEAlvare17) **February 25, 2021**

“There are indeed some examples of serendipitous genetic findings that did reveal unexpected biology,” Mitchell replied, “But for every example like that I think there are many more where the success of the genetics rested on deep understanding of the phenotype or phenomenon to begin with (not at molecular level).”

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— Kevin Mitchell (@WiringTheBrain) **February 25, 2021**

And finally, we have a tweet from **Gill Loomes-Quinn**, a socio-legal scholar who founded the Open Justice Court of Protection Project: “I think we need to work on a pedagogy/methodology for **#AutisticsInAcademia** - Our nervous systems handle information and stress differently, and we process and analyse differently. This means we need our own ways of working - rather than trying to imitate neurotypical academics.”

I think we need to work on a pedagogy/methodology for **#AutisticsInAcademia** - Our nervous systems handle information and stress differently, and we process and analyse

differently. This means we need our own ways of working - rather than trying to imitate neurotypical academics...

— Gill Loomes-Quinn (@GillLoomesQuinn) **February 22, 2021**

**Cath Camps**, deputy director and academic manager of the University of South Wales' Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching, said this need has become even more important with the move to online learning.

Absolutely agree with you @GillLoomesQuinn. I think the move online in particular, needs to be carefully explored from the autistic lecturer perspective.

— Dr Cath Camps (@CathCamps) **February 22, 2021**

That's it for this week's edition of *Spectrum's* community newsletter. If you have any suggestions for interesting social posts you saw in the autism research sphere this week, feel free to send an email to me at [chelsey@spectrumnews.org](mailto:chelsey@spectrumnews.org). See you next week!