

NEWS

Community Newsletter: Online theory-of-mind test, strengths-based autism diagnosis, mapping trajectories

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.

Our first thread comes from **Lucy Livingston**, lecturer in psychology at Cardiff University in the United Kingdom. She and her team created an **online, multiple-choice version of a test** that looks at theory of mind, or the ability to understand other people's desires, intentions and beliefs.

https://twitter.com/Lucy_Livingston/status/1413781335685148674

The **Frith-Happé Animations Test**, developed in 2000 by **Uta Frith**, emeritus professor of cognitive development at University College London in the U.K., and **Francesca Happé**, professor of cognitive neuroscience at King's College London, uses interactions between moving triangle shapes to assess theory-of-mind skills in autistic people. In the original version, participants described what they saw, which researchers then scored. To eliminate subjectivity from those scores, another team created a **multiple-choice version** in 2011, which the new work makes available online.

The online test works as well as previous versions, Livingston and her colleagues found, and again shows that autistic people have more difficulties with theory-of-mind skills than non-autistic people do. The new test is also easier for people to access outside of research settings.

https://twitter.com/Lucy_Livingston/status/1413782667842174977

Frith quote-tweeted Livingston, saying "Nice," and **Felicity Sedgewick**, lecturer in the psychology of education at the University of Bristol in the U.K., said it inspired some new study ideas for her.

<http://twitter.com/utafrith/statuses/1414532812749877250>

<https://twitter.com/SedgewickF/status/1414526489027092483>

Next up, a number of autism researchers took to Twitter to praise an *Autism* editorial that highlights how clinicians can use a **strengths-based neurodiversity model** instead of a deficit-based one to frame an autism diagnosis.

<https://twitter.com/journalautism/status/1412796046720307201>

“A strengths-based approach to share developmental and diagnostic information can change the way parents view their autistic children, which in turn change the way autistic children view themselves, leading to greater empowerment in adulthood,” the authors wrote.

The authors also suggest seven strategies for clinicians to achieve that goal, including setting a warm and positive tone, considering how interventions and treatments are framed and addressing caregivers’ support needs.

Meng-Chuan Lai, assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of Toronto in Canada, described the article as “great”; “yes please,” tweeted **Ann Memmott**, an associate and ‘expert by experience’ at the **National Development Team for Inclusion** in the U.K.; and **Danielle Christy**, an educational psychologist in Sacramento, California, hailed it as something “all practitioners should read!”

<https://twitter.com/mengchuanlai/status/1413321058476830725>

<https://twitter.com/AnnMemmott/status/1414645773116059648>

<https://twitter.com/inclusivepsych/status/1412953325977309187>

A *Spectrum* Deep Dive published this week took on some overlapping issues, looking at **how autistic people fare over time** in terms of both strengths and weaknesses, based on early behavioral markers and genetic variants.

“No matter what the outcome is going to be, that unknown is really challenging for families,” says **Anne Arnett**, a child psychologist at the University of Washington in Seattle, in the piece. “When you can take away the unknown, or at least give them some idea of what to expect over time, that can be an intervention in and of itself to help families prepare.”

That’s it for this week’s Community Newsletter from *Spectrum*! 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 **chelsea@spectrumnews.org**. See you next week!

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