

NEWS

Community newsletter: Research on camouflaging; a new epigenome

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.

Before we get started, I wanted to remind you 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 take the survey is 5 March, so please send in your feedback ASAP.

Our first post this week comes from Amy Pearson, senior lecturer in psychology at the University of Sunderland in London. She tweeted about her new paper in *Autism In Adulthood*, "A conceptual analysis of autistic masking: Understanding the narrative of stigma and the illusion of choice."

Our ([@KieranRose7](#)) paper on masking just came out in [@AutismAdulthood](#) and you can access it here, or on the OSF in my pinned tweet. Really happy to see this in print, this paper was an absolute labour of love...<https://t.co/nv9y5BPVTO>

— Amy Pearson ([@DrAmyPearson](#)) **January 23, 2021**

Masking, also known as camouflaging, refers to when an autistic person suppresses certain traits or takes up other traits to conform to social norms. You can read more on this topic in our 2018 Deep Dive, "[The costs of camouflaging autism](#)." Pearson and her team used classical social theory to "understand how and why people mask by situating masking in the social context in which it develops." Research suggests that camouflaging is more common in autistic women and

girls, which could help explain why boys are diagnosed in greater numbers. But the researchers point out that “it is important that we do not impose gender norms and stereotypes by associating masking with a “female autism phenotype.”

In response to the paper, Simon Baron-Cohen, director of the University of Cambridge’s Autism Research Centre in the United Kingdom, wrote that it is “an important paper analysing what we mean by autistic masking and how continuing stigma towards autism may cause it.”

An important paper analysing what we mean by autistic masking and how continuing stigma towards autism may cause it. Masking makes life doubly stressful for an autistic person. Time to let them be who they are so they can feel accepted and respected
<https://t.co/8ANxAD2USn>

— Simon Baron-Cohen (@sbaroncohen) **January 24, 2021**

Psychologist Laura Jackson-Burrage tweeted in praise of Pearson’s argument that camouflaging should not be considered gender-specific, calling the paper “thought-provoking.”

I loved reading this. I think its great you’ve highlighted how masking is not gender specific and the terminology used to describe masking as a response to trauma of the social world is really thought provoking .

— Laura Jackson-Burrage ???? (@_laurajackson87) **January 23, 2021**

Katy Benson, a post-graduate researcher at Cardiff University in the U.K. remarked that it was “timely” and a “great piece of work.”

I love this, what a great piece of work!!! Very timely too, just putting together PhD proposal and planning my diss both of which look at neurodivergence and stigma. Well done guys
????

— Katy Benson (@KatyBenson20) **January 23, 2021**

Juuso Henrik Nieminen, a postdoctoral education researcher at the University of East Finland, echoed Benson's tweet, saying the paper was what he had been looking for, as he "needed a more nuanced understanding of masking + stigma" for his own work.

What a brilliant article, thank you! Exactly what I was looking for: I'm currently studying belonging and inclusion of disabled students in higher education and needed a more nuanced understanding of masking + stigma. Awesome, congrats for the publication! ????

— Juuso Henrik Nieminen (@JuusoNieminen) **January 23, 2021**

Next up, we have a tweet from Manolis Kellis, a computer science professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, about his group's newest paper in *Nature*, "Regulatory genomic circuitry of human disease loci by integrative epigenomics."

Our **#EpiMap** paper is now **@Nature**: systematic dissection of **#DiseaseCircuitry**, including predicted driver variants, enhancers, regulators, target genes, and relevant tissues/cell types across 30,000 genetic loci, 540 traits, 833 tissues
<https://t.co/75rulhGnWr> **#Epigenomics #GWAS** <https://t.co/6Txb2jrHlx>
[pic.twitter.com/bwP8QLiMv8](https://t.co/6Txb2jrHlx)

— Manolis Kellis (@manoliskellis) **February 3, 2021**

The paper discusses EpiMap, a new human epigenome reference that includes 10,000 epigenomic maps from 8,000 samples and annotates 30,000 genetic loci associated with 540 traits. Kellis calls it a "systematic dissection of disease circuitry." The researchers say their results "demonstrate the importance of dense, rich, high-resolution epigenomic annotations for the investigation of complex traits."

Wouter Meuleman, a computational biologist at the Altius Institute for Biomedical Sciences in Seattle, Washington, who worked on the study, called it a "roadmap on steroids."

Awesome to see this out now -- Roadmap on steroids!! <https://t.co/58ZEKSFv1x>

— Wouter Meuleman (@nameluem) **February 3, 2021**

Trinity College Dublin autism researcher Kevin Mitchell said it was a “powerhouse study.”

Regulatory genomic circuitry of human disease loci by integrative epigenomics
<https://t.co/NLgkW5phKO> - really a powerhouse study from @manoliskellis and colleagues

— Kevin Mitchell (@WiringTheBrain) **February 4, 2021**

Fahd Qadir, a graduate student at the University of Miami’s Diabetes Research Institute in Florida, called it “One of [his] all-time favourite preprints in 2020.”

So I read this paper when it was in @biorxivpreprint and was like..... you need one hell of an HPC to perform this analysis..... all I can say is WHAT A STUDY. One of my all-time favourite preprints in 2020 and def my amongst my favourite papers in 2021!

<https://t.co/9f6esrX9e2>

— Fahd Qadir (@Fahdqadir) **February 3, 2021**

Now it’s time for our favorite *Spectrum* story comment of the week! This week’s edition comes from Teresa Del Bianco, a postdoctoral researcher at Birkbeck, University of London, who called our Viewpoint article, “**Autism in girls: Jumping hurdles on the path to diagnosis,**” a “very insightful commentary.”

<https://twitter.com/teresaDBnco/status/1356951730961997824>

That’s it for this week’s *Spectrum* 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. See you next week!