

SPOTTED

Software solutions; Sesame spectrum

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Software solutions

Google Glass may help children with autism better recognize others' emotions using software that trains them to read facial expressions, **reports an article in *Wired*** this week. To test this idea, the researchers turned the app into a game: It challenges a child to identify someone who is happy or sad, for example, by focusing her gaze on an individual making the corresponding facial expression. If the child does so correctly, it awards her points.

Catalin Voss, a student entrepreneur at Stanford University in California, teamed up with autism researcher Dennis Wall to test the software on 40 children with autism, and they are **recruiting** 100 children for an at-home trial.

However, **Steve Silberman**, author of "**NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity**," points out that this is not the first time researchers have attempted to teach children with autism to recognize emotions from facial expressions.

"The problem is that [kids on the autism spectrum] may not map the schematics — the simplified versions of emotions — to more complex human expression," he told *Wired*.

SOURCES:

Wired / 19 Oct 2015

Clinical trial will test if Google Glass can help kids with autism

<http://www.wired.com/2015/10/google-glass-autism-clinical-trial/>

Sesame spectrum

On Wednesday, Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit organization behind the popular children's

television show “Sesame Street,” launched a new initiative featuring its **first muppet with autism**. Julia, the muppet, is intended to raise awareness about the condition. Through Julia’s eyes, viewers aged 2 to 5 will see what life with autism is like and will learn how to interact with friends on the spectrum.

Apps and online videos will also help families of children with autism by demonstrating ways to manage daily tasks such as brushing teeth, going to bed or crossing the street, **reports People**. At the same time, the social media hashtag #SeeAmazing will keep the conversation going among adults online. “By opening up a dialogue, we are trying to get rid of any discomfort or awkwardness,” **Sherrie Westin**, executive vice president of global impacts and philanthropy at Sesame Workshop, told *People*. “It’s time to increase understanding.”

SOURCES:

People / 21 Oct 2015

Meet Sesame Street’s first character with autism: ‘We want to create greater awareness and empathy’

<http://www.people.com/article/sesame-street-introduces-autistic-muppet>

Facilitated fallacy

Earlier this month, a jury found Anna Stubblefield, a former professor of ethics at Rutgers University in New Jersey, **guilty of two counts** of aggravated sexual assault against a 35-year-old intellectually disabled, nonverbal man with cerebral palsy. Stubblefield had for several years served as the man’s facilitated communication therapist. Developed in the 1970s, that widely discredited method is still considered by some to be a way to help people with severe communication disabilities express themselves. The disabled individuals point to letters or words that the facilitator interprets either by directly guiding the individual’s hand or stabilizing his elbow or arm.

In a long *New York Times Magazine* **article about Stubblefield’s case**, writer Daniel Engber notes that the method hinges on the assumption that the people typing are competent but unable to express themselves. At Stubblefield’s trial, however, the jury agreed that the man she claimed to have fallen in love with was incapable of consenting to sex, and backed the state’s declaration that he has the intellectual capacity of a toddler. Facilitated communication also did not pass New Jersey’s test for scientific evidence, Engber writes.

SOURCES:

New York Times Magazine / 20 Oct 2015

The strange case of Anna Stubblefield

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/25/magazine/the-strange-case-of-anna-stubblefield.html>

Teen angst

Teenage years can be trying even for those who find socializing to be a breeze — much less those on the autism spectrum. “**How to Dance in Ohio**,” a new documentary premiering on HBO on 26 October, highlights the unique challenges that teenagers who have autism face.

Rather than try to encompass the entire adolescent experience, the film focuses on the lives of three shy girls as they prepare for a teen rite of passage: prom. The camera follows the girls for 12 weeks as they practice social skills, pick out dresses and eventually arrive at the dance with their dates. “I felt like it was the most relatable way to tell the story about coming of age, on the autism spectrum, to people who don’t necessarily relate at all,” director Alexandra Shiva **told *Vanity Fair***.

SOURCES:

How to Dance in Ohio /

How to dance in Ohio

<http://www.howtodanceinohio.com>
