

NEWS

Community Newsletter: “Autism Voices” and the developing cortex

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12 SEPTEMBER 2021

Hello, and welcome to this week’s Community Newsletter! I’m your host, **Chelsey B. Coombs**, *Spectrum*’s engagement editor.

A flurry of tweets this week touted a new *Autism* study from researchers at McGill University in Montreal, Canada.

<https://twitter.com/journalautism/status/1434863588955598849>

The researchers **piloted a new protocol**, called “Autism Voices,” for collecting the first-person perspectives of young autistic people. The method involves surveying parents or caregivers to develop a semi-structured interview tailored to an autistic person’s communication preferences and needs. The researchers used picture cards, for example, and participants could answer by writing, texting with emojis, drawing, pointing, speaking or using augmentative or alternative communication devices.

Autistic participants had the most positive experiences with the most flexible interviewers, who might ask an unanswered question in a different way before moving to the next one. And participants who were minimally verbal or intellectually disabled were able to offer their own perspectives so long as their needs were taken into account, the study found.

“This methodology and approach to engagement will ultimately lead to the empowerment of the autistic community and will promote their self-determination by including them as active stakeholders in research that affects them,” the researchers wrote.

<https://twitter.com/journalautism/status/1434863600032681984?s=20>

Michelle Dawson, an autism researcher at Hôpital Rivière-des-Prairies in Montreal, Canada,

quoted the study directly.

<http://twitter.com/autismcrisis/statuses/1434120196042723334>

The Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia, tweeted that it is important such work continues.

<https://twitter.com/OlgaTennison/status/1434730534555422720>

Elsewhere on Twitter, researchers raved about a new resource published in *Cell* that combines **chromatin and transcriptional profiles** in the developing human cerebral cortex.

<https://twitter.com/CellCellPress/status/1426319915322015744>

PlumX Metrics shows the paper's **social media splash**.

Investigator **Sergiu P. Pasca**, associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Stanford University in California, thanked his collaborators on the research, which he described as an “effort to understand the logic of lineage progression & map #autism mutations.”

<https://twitter.com/PascaStanford/status/1426388791355273216>

Ashley Watson, senior scientist at STEMCELL Technologies, called it an “incredible resource.”

<https://twitter.com/lashleywatson/status/1428745265058488323>

And **Yang Luo**, instructor of medicine at Harvard University, commented on the “many cool methods to dive into.”

<https://twitter.com/ylo86/status/1427307414236254208>

If you missed our 31 August **webinar with Laurent Mottron**, professor of psychiatry at the University of Montreal in Canada, you can now watch it on our site.

And don't forget to register for our 28 September webinar, featuring **Jeremy Veenstra-VanderWeele**, professor of psychiatry at Columbia University, who will speak about goals for developing new drugs for autism — and the barriers researchers may encounter.

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, feel free to send an email to me at chelsey@spectrumnews.org. See you next week!

Cite this article: <https://doi.org/10.53053/DUZE8641>