

SPOTTED

Ethnicity influence; human-brained rodents; graduate drain and more

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Ethnicity influence

Clinicians diagnose autism **more often in white children** than in minority children. A study published 3 November in *Autism* provides one possible explanation for the discrepancy: Black parents are less likely than white parents to **report concerns** about social skills or restricted or **repetitive behaviors** in their children.

SOURCES:

Autism / 03 Nov 2017

Race influences parent report of concerns about symptoms of autism spectrum disorder

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1362361317722030?journalCode=auta>

Human-brained rodents

Hoping to **increase the human factor** in rodent models of conditions such as autism, researchers have implanted **human brain organoids** into lab rats. One group also has implanted the organoids into mice and linked the implants to a blood supply, crossing into uncharted ethical territory, *STAT* reported 6 November.

Most experts say the organoids can't think, according to *STAT*. But, researcher **Christof Koch** of the Allen Institute for Brain Science told *STAT*, "the science is advancing so rapidly, the ethics can't keep up."

SOURCES:

STAT / 06 Nov 2017

Tiny human brain organoids implanted into rodents, triggering ethical concerns

<https://www.statnews.com/2017/11/06/human-brain-organoids-ethics/>

Socially disposed

The common perception of people with autism is that they lack interest **in being social**. An analysis of a series of interviews with young adults on the spectrum suggests otherwise.

The investigators used word counts to identify the **most commonly occurring phrases** in the interviews. The five terms people on the spectrum used most were 'people,' 'have to,' 'can/be able,' 'good,' and 'autism.' The researchers interpreted 'good' and 'can/be able' as positive expressions of ability, and 'people' and 'have to' as relating to the social struggle to fit in.

The findings appeared 28 October in *Qualitative Health Research*.

SOURCES:

Qualitative Health Research / 28 Oct 2017

"Hold me tight so I can go it alone": Developmental themes for young adults with autism spectrum disorder

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1049732317730329>

Graduation capable

Almost all students with disabilities — including autism — are capable of **graduating from high school**, two education experts argue in an essay published 4 November in *Huffington Post*. The fact that many of these students do not graduate is a fault of the system, not the students, the writers say.

SOURCES:

Huffington Post / 04 Nov 2017

Almost all students with disabilities are capable of graduating. Here's why they don't.

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/special-education-series_us_59fb588ae4b0415a420a55a6

‘Simpsons’ bond

For **Ron Suskind**’s family, Disney movies were an opening to **communication with his son** on the spectrum. But sometimes, **it takes “The Simpsons”** to bring families together. **Theresa Basile**, writing for *Vice* on 2 November, describes how the long-running animated show is a way for her brother with autism and their family to connect.

Watching the show every day keeps her brother Daniel feeling grounded and comfortable, so daily viewings are a family routine. It’s part of “doing whatever we can to make Daniel’s life easier,” Basile writes.

SOURCES:

Vice / 02 Nov 2017

‘The Simpsons’ helps my family connect with my autistic brother

https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/ne33gw/the-simpsons-helps-my-family-connect-with-my-autistic-brother

Graduate drain

Deep skills in **artificial intelligence** and **machine learning** have been critical to some developments in autism research, among other fields. Yet few American students are **attending U.S. graduate schools** in these and other sciences, *The New York Times* reported 3 November. Citizens of other countries make up the bulk of the student population in many schools.

SOURCES:

The New York Times / 03 Nov 2017

The disappearing American grad student

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/03/education/edlife/american-graduate-student-stem.html>

Not-so-unusual interests

Intense interests are considered a **key feature** of autism, with the assumption that the target will be trains, clocks and other mechanical objects. But results published 2 November in *PLOS ONE* suggest that teenagers on the spectrum have interests similar to **those of neurotypical teenagers**, including, of course, video games.

SOURCES:

PLOS ONE / 02 Nov 2017

Circumscribed interests in adolescents with autism spectrum disorder: A look beyond trains, planes, and clocks

<http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0187414>

Justice battle

Sara Ryan's son Connor, who had autism and **epilepsy**, drowned after having a seizure in a bathtub at the U.K. government-run facility where he lived. In a new book titled "**Justice for Laughing Boy**," Ryan describes the social-media **community that formed** around her struggle to ensure accountability for her son's death. *The Guardian* published an edited excerpt 11 October.

SOURCES:

The Guardian / 11 Oct 2017

My son Connor Sparrowhawk died needlessly. Anger spurred me into action

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/oct/11/connor-sparrowhawk-justice-laughing-boy-death-campaign>

Sexual orientation

A survey of more than 47,000 adults in the general population points to a link between autism features and **flexible sexual orientation**. Respondents with autism features were almost twice as likely as those without autism features to identify as bisexual, and three times more likely to self-report as fitting into no specific category of sexual orientation. The results were published 30 October in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*.

SOURCES:

Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders / 30 Oct 2017

Brief report: Sexual orientation in individuals with autistic traits: Population based study of 47,000 adults in Stockholm County

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10803-017-3369-9>

Data commons

Among the recipients of the National Institutes of Health's \$9 million for a **data commons** is **Paul Avillach**, who uses a **digital repository** to study Phelan-McDermid syndrome. The intent of the 12 awards from the institute is to produce a 'shared virtual space' for depositing data as a way to speed up biomedical discovery.

SOURCES:

National Institutes of Health / 06 Nov 2017

NIH awards to test ways to store, access, share, and compute on biomedical data in the cloud

<https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/nih-awards-test-ways-store-access-share-compute-biomedical-data-cloud>

News tips

Do you have a new paper coming out? Are you making a career move? Did you see a study or news story that you want to share? Send your news tips to **news@spectrumnews.org**.
