

# AUTISM



@MANCHESTER

## NEWSLETTER SPRING 2022

Welcome to the Spring 2022 edition of the Autism@Manchester newsletter. There has been lots of high-quality research in development in addition to grants, master's awards, webinars and collaborations which are described in this edition of the newsletter.

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## NEWS ROUND UP

- November 2021: **Dr Emma Gowen**, shared her experience of participatory autism research with Early Career autism researchers as part of Autistica's Early Career Training Programme.
- **Dr Emma Gowen** was invited and has taken up the opportunity to be on the Scientific review panel for the Autistica annual conference [<https://www.autistica.org.uk/get-involved/research-conference>]
- **Dr Kathy Leadbitter** gave a talk at the UCL Centre for Autism and Education on 13<sup>th</sup> Jan 2022. It was entitled: An evidence-based, ethical and person-centred care pathway for autistic children and their families: How can we make this happen?
  - Watch the full webinar at <https://youtu.be/NMDE7-RbnX4>

## GRANTS

- **Drs Ellen Poliakoff** and **Emma Gowen** have been awarded funding to work with artist **Dr Antony Hall** to develop and use art-science experiential workshops to address sensorimotor processing in older adults with autism and Parkinson's.
  - The project will increase understanding of how movement is affected in both autism and Parkinson's and under what conditions it may be improved to inform support and future intervention.
  - The title of the project is "**Experience in Action: An art-science collaboration to explore sensorimotor processing in older adults with autism and Parkinson's**" and the team were awarded £5,976 from The Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing (MICRA) seed corn fund.

- **The Frontiers research topic**, Autism: Innovations and Future Directions in Psychological Research has been completed and published in Frontiers in Psychology.
  - The topic was guest edited by Dr Emma Gowen, together with Drs Laura Crane (University College London) and Christine Falter-Wagner (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich).
  - The topic contains five contributions from members of the Autism@Manchester network:
  - Gowen. E, Crane. L and Falter-Wagner. C.M (2022) Editorial: Autism: Innovations and Future Directions in Psychological Research
  - Buckle.KL, Leadbitter.K, Poliakoff.E and Gowen.E (2021) “No Way Out Except From External Intervention”: First-Hand Accounts of Autistic Inertia
  - Parmar.K, Porter.C, Dickinson. CM, Pelham.J, Baimbridge. P and Gowen. E (2021) Visual Sensory Experiences From the Viewpoint of Autistic Adults
  - Leadbitter.K, Buckle.KL, Ellis.C and Dekker.M (2021) Autistic Self-Advocacy and the Neurodiversity Movement: Implications for Autism Early Intervention Research and Practice
  - Sturrock. A, Adams. C and Freed.J (2021)  
A Subtle Profile With a Significant Impact: Language and Communication Difficulties for Autistic Females Without Intellectual Disability
- Read more and find these publications here:  
<https://www.frontiersin.org/research-topics/11742/autism-innovations-and-future-directions-in-psychological-research>

- **Sturrock, A., Guest, H., Hanks, G., Bendo, G., Plack, C., & Gowen, E. (2022). Chasing the conversation: Autistic experiences of speech perception. *Autism and Developmental Language Impairments*.**
  - Publication of the first academic paper dedicated to autistic people's experiences of speech perception. Created by a participatory research group of hearing researchers, autism researchers, and autistic researchers, based on research ideas generated by the Autism@Manchester expert by experience group.
  - Read the full paper here: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/23969415221077532>
- **Parmar KR, Porter CS, Dickinson CM, Baimbridge P, Pelham J, Gowen E. (2022) Autism-friendly eyecare: Developing recommendations for service providers based on the experiences of autistic adults. *Ophthalmic Physiol Opt*.**
  - Read the full paper here: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35315935/>

### AWARD FOR MASTERS PROJECT

#### Arianna Paricos

#### Assistant Research Psychologist

School of Life and Health Sciences  
Aston University

My thesis for MSc Clinical and Health Psychology – **Achieving Best Life Outcomes for Autistic Women Without Intellectual Disability** – received the award ‘Best Dissertation’ for my course and we are now pursuing publication. The Autism@Manchester expert by experience group supported me with the with study design and recruitment and the insights shared were highly valuable for ensuring our approach was both appropriate and in line with the priorities of the autistic community. Equally, as a student researcher the input from Autism@Manchester was personally beneficial through teaching me about the importance of expert-by-experience inclusion in study design.

We interviewed autistic women about the things that are important for achieving good quality of life and self-defined best life outcomes. Having a positive sense of self in terms of self-understanding, identity, and confidence, feeling supported by others, having the freedom to choose how to spend their time and live their life, and inclusivity considerations from neurotypical people and environments were identified across all the interviews as key factors for good quality of life. These findings are important as they suggest that current quality of life questionnaires may not be capturing the factors that are important and relevant for the quality of life of autistic women. There are also potential implications for the diagnostic process as our findings suggest a positive psychology approach may be beneficial for individuals’ sense of self and post-diagnosis peer support may aid feeling supported. We hope that this study will encourage further participatory research with autistic women to improve representation, understanding, and support.

On Friday 23rd July 2021 Drs Daniel Poole, Luke Jones, Emma Gowen & Ellen Poliakoff hosted a full day webinar on time perception in autism: **“Time & Autism: Are we asking the right questions?”**

**Watch the talks:**

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLXsiVGN7QK3yfoa4X0hmTIFj4qdDfi54P>

**And posters:**

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLXsiVGN7QK3yUeGtH80ZsMQQtgFwgXdn4C>

The ‘Autism at Manchester’ YouTube channel hosted a webinar focusing on how people with autism explore and perceive time; with a particular focus on whether current research on this topic is asking the right questions. This webinar represented the end of an ESRC funded project investigating Time perception in autism, which was a collaboration between the University of Manchester Beam Lab and the Time perception Lab.

The aim of this webinar was to allow a range of different people (academics, researchers, people with autism and those related to people with autism) to share experiences, discuss research and gather an overall better understanding of how people with autism perceive time. The webinar began with autistic speakers sharing their own experiences with time, specifically how they perceive time and the struggles associated with this. This segment highlighted how people with autism find it difficult to conceptualise time and keep track of it, which can impact their relationships and day to day functioning.

Following this, key speakers presented research regarding time and autism in different areas. Dr Luke Jones highlighted the variety of ways time is studied within research, including duration perception and time passage judgements, emphasising how confusing time can be to study. Following this Professor Christine Falter-Wagner presented research on Autism and Social timing, a key area of struggle for people with Autism. During the lunch break short video posters about timing in autism were presented, with viewers given the opportunity to engage with the poster makers and ask questions.

**Examples of poster presentations:**

The image shows a poster presentation with the following content:

- Rationale**
- HUMAN NEUROSCIENCE**
- An aberrant precision account of autism**
- Precise Minds in Uncertain Worlds: Predictive Coding in Autism**
- Autism as a disorder of prediction**
- Link to review:** [QR code]

The image shows a poster presentation with the following content:

- Investigating Nonverbal Interpersonal Synchrony in Autistic Adults**
- Alexandra Georgescu, PhD**
- Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience**
- King's College London**
- @culture\_ada**
- Time and Autism Webinar 2021**

The webinar also included Dr Daniel Poole presenting the Autism Time study, which is a piece of research conducted as part of the Time perception in autism project. Here he explains the 'Temporal deficit hypothesis' which suggests that people with autism have reduced connectivity in the brain which impacts their internal clock and therefore cognitive and behavioural processes. He discusses two studies that try to characterise differences in timing for autistic and neurotypical adults, through questionnaire measures and visual/auditory timing tasks. Whilst the questionnaires highlighted lack of time understanding in autism, the battery of tasks failed to provide evidence for a 'timing deficit' in autism. This study reflects concerns that current research isn't asking the right questions and looking into the right areas when investigating time and autism.

Professor Mareike Altgassen followed, presenting research on prospective memory in autism, which is the ability to form intentions now and remember to execute them later. This process involves switching from a current task to the planned task at the correct time, which is something autistic individuals struggle with. The research highlights that event-based cues (which is when a certain event helps cue you to switch to the prospective task) may be more successful at helping autistic people engage in prospective memory tasks successfully. This research has practical implications for how prospective memory can be improved in people with autism.

### TIME KNOWLEDGE

- Problems learning about concepts related to time  
*"She has little understanding and cannot tell the time even at 12 yrs old. Her brain cannot understand the concept."*
- Focus on/avoidance of time  
*"She is almost obsessed with time because she doesn't understand it. It impacts every aspect of her life as she's constantly worried about being late or having too much to do and not enough time".*



Overall, the key speakers were successful in highlighting the importance of studying time and autism and raised the concern that current research looking into this might not be asking the right questions.

### HOW DO I REMEMBER TO GET TO MY MEETING ON TIME?

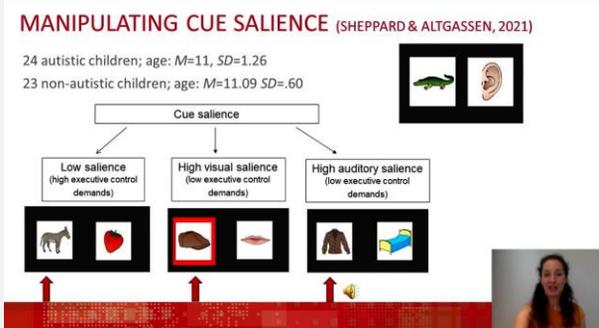
AN INTRODUCTION INTO PROSPECTIVE MEMORY PERFORMANCE IN AUTISM

Prof. Dr. Mareike Altgassen  
Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz, Germany  
Time and Autism Webinar, 23.07.21



### MANIPULATING CUE SALIENCE (SHEPPARD & ALTGASSEN, 2021)

24 autistic children; age:  $M=11, SD=1.26$   
23 non-autistic children; age:  $M=11.09, SD=.60$

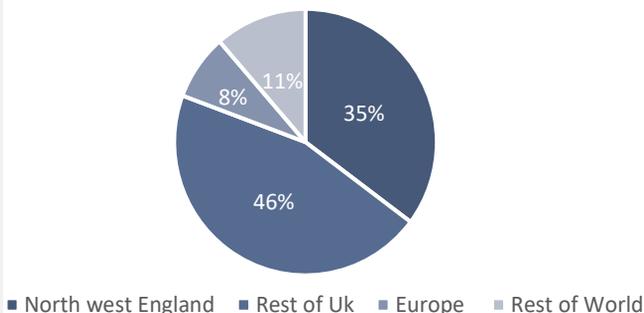


The online nature of the webinar meant it was successful in reaching a largely distributed audience. Whilst most viewers were from the UK, particularly northwest England, the webinar also had viewers from Europe and the rest of the world. Almost half the people who joined the webinar did so because of an interest in time and autism, whilst nearly 60% were academics or professionals. The webinar also captured a large autistic population with nearly 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of viewers being autistic themselves. The webinar included opportunities for the audience to engage with each other and the key speakers through the YouTube chat or by posting comments on a live google document, making this a very interactive experience. Most viewers claimed they were hoping to get a better understanding about research or potential strategies that they could employ to help their struggles with time. There was also a desire to connect and communicate with other autistic individuals through the webinar.

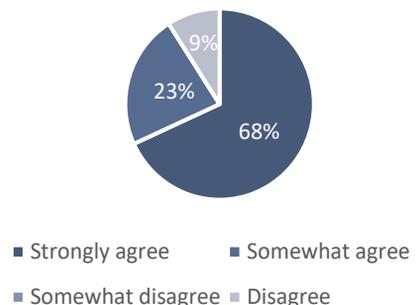
Post webinar questionnaire's highlight that the webinar was successful in both improving knowledge on the topic of time and autism (91% of viewers felt as though they had learnt something) and providing an engaging experience for the viewers (90% agreed the webinar was engaging). The webinar seemed to give viewers ideas for their own research, as well as a deeper understanding of their own experiences with time perception. Comments made during the webinar from viewers suggest that the next step is looking at how we can apply this research to practical situations, raising issues of how we can teach autistic children to tell the time, and how we can reduce time pressure in autistic people. There was also an emphasis on further research looking more explicitly at whether current research is asking the right questions. Overall, the Time and Autism webinar was successful in presenting an overview of current literature looking at time and autism, as well as promoting the collaboration of different perspectives, knowledge, and ideas on this topic

The figures below indicate geographical location of the viewers and a summary of some of the feedback provided about the webinar:

Geographical distribution of viewer's watching the webinar



'I learnt something from the webinar'



### Youngstown State University and University of Manchester international school psychology/educational psychology collaboration

Youngstown State University (YSU) and the University of Manchester (UoM) began an innovative collaboration in 2019. An initial visit to Manchester by YSU school psychology interns included the opportunity to see UK educational psychologists at work and exchange ideas about our respective professional practice and training. We subsequently published an article reflecting on student and faculty experiences of this initial collaboration in ISPA's 'World Go Round.'

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic our collaboration has continued to grow in exciting and innovative ways. On 25.3.22 YSU students and Y1 doctoral students at UoM will be participating in a remote event to look at the similarities and differences in our practice in the area of autism, particularly focusing on autistic girls. We anticipate that this will provide a catalyst for us to reflect critically on this common area of practice. As part of the remote event Katie Ayieribi (UoM Y2 student) will be presenting some of her research relating to autism and girls which has grown out of our ongoing collaboration and utilises data collected in Ohio and Manchester. This research was also presented at the 2022 NASP conference. We have plans to continue this innovative model of transatlantic practice reflection and research collaboration in the future.

Rich VanVoorhis (YSU SP Programme Director) and Abby Hollowell (YSU Y2 intern) presenting at NASP with George Thomas (UoM EP Programme Tutor) and Katie Ayirebi (UoM, Y2 trainee) joining remotely

