

STIRLING AUTISM RESEARCH

STAR Newsletter



HELLO!

Welcome to the first STAR newsletter!

We hope that this will be the first of many newsletters where we share news and updates. Our small team has had quite a year, as we're sure many of you have had.

We are hugely thankful to everyone who has supported our research - whether that's through taking part in our studies, reading our papers or following us on social media - we truly appreciate it and value all your support. We have lots planned for the coming months - read on to find out more!

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WHO AND WHAT IS STAR? FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR TEAM, OUR AIM AND OUR VALUES

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Our values focus on humility, compassion and inclusion.

Who are we?

First let us introduce ourselves! At the moment we have a small group who make up the Stirling Autism Research (STAR) core team: Amanda Roestorf, Catherine Grainger, Eilidh Cage, Marisa McKinlay and Monique Botha. From September 2021, George Watts will be joining us as a PhD student. We are also regularly supported by undergraduate and Masters students who complete placements or dissertations with us.

What is the overall aim of our research?

We aim to do ethical, rigorous and inclusive autism research, that will ultimately make a meaningful difference in autistic people's lives.

What are our values?

The STAR values underpin our research and ethos, and are:

- **Humility**

We learn from each other and the wider autistic community, accepting that we might sometimes get things wrong, or have done so in the past, but we are always prepared to develop, listen, and respect.

- **Compassion**

We promote positive wellbeing both within our team and through the research we do.

- **Inclusion**

We are welcoming and are inclusive of all intersections of identity. We also work together to achieve our aims and create an environment where everyone's contributions are valued.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LAST YEAR - WHAT HAVE WE BEEN UP TO?

Since this is our first newsletter, we've got a lot to cover! It's difficult not to mention the pandemic, as this significantly affected our ability to do research. It meant that some STAR team members had to shift focus onto online teaching and supporting students more, and some of us were on furlough. Also, some STAR members started their jobs or PhDs during this pandemic so we've never met in person! But thanks to technology, we managed to stay connected and find alternative ways of doing our research. We're also feeling cautiously optimistic about the future for STAR - but more on that later!

Publications

The best way to find and read our publications is by visiting our University of Stirling profile pages (links below) - click on the 'full text' button for the paper you're interested in. If you're struggling to access any, email us at autismresearch@stir.ac.uk.

So what have we published recently? Dr [Amanda Roestorf](#) published a discussion of the potential benefits of healthcare professionals using social prescribing for autistic people (i.e. things like social support), and plans to publish more data from her PhD on autistic ageing soon. Dr [Catherine Grainger](#) published papers about meta-cognition (the process of thinking about thinking) in autistic adults. Additionally, Dr [Eilidh Cage](#) published studies looking at identity after an autism diagnosis, the relationships between camouflaging and stigma, and healthcare professional's attitudes and knowledge of autism. Finally, Dr [Monique Botha](#) published research on how autistic people make sense of their identity and stigma, and a commentary piece about the language used to talk about autism.

Conferences

This year, all autism research conferences went online! In May, we had posters and talks at the International Society for Autism Research (INSAR)

conference. A particular highlight was the panel Eilidh and Monique organised on [understanding and reducing autism stigma](#). Also in May, Monique presented at the Interdisciplinary Autism Research Festival (IARF), talking about [experiences as an autistic autism researcher](#). In July, Amanda presented research on autistic experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic at the [IASSIDD](#) conference, and Eilidh shared her work on [identity and autism training](#) at Autistica's Research Festival. In August, Eilidh and Monique talked about research on stigma and autism researcher research at the Scottish Autism Research Group conference. It's been a jam-packed conference season!

PhD studentships

In November 2020, Marisa McKinlay joined us as a PhD student, supervised by Dr Eilidh Cage, Dr Catherine Grainger and Dr Mary Stewart (Heriot-Watt University). Marisa's PhD will look at how we can create positive, supportive environments for autistic teenagers in mainstream schools. Dr Eilidh Cage, alongside Dr Catherine Crompton (University of Edinburgh) and Dr Joe Long (Scottish Autism) secured funding from the Scottish Graduate School of Social Sciences for a PhD studentship about autistic community. This studentship was awarded to George Watts, who will be starting in September 2021.

COVID-19 project

Dr Amanda Roestorf and Dr Anna Lambrechts (City, University of London) received funding from Research England's Higher Education Innovation Fund to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the wellbeing and lives of autistic adults. The project is happening in co-production with autistic people (the TRANSIT Project Team). The analysis is still ongoing and more information about the project and a summary of results (so far) is available on their [open access Wiki](#).

WHAT'S NEXT FOR STAR? OUR PLANS FOR THE COMING MONTHS

Research funding for Dr Botha

We are delighted that Dr Monique Botha has been awarded an Early Career Fellowship from the Leverhulme Trust. The Fellowship will enable Monique to work on a research project called "Fragile Knowledge: Dehumanisation & Interpretation Bias in Autism Research" for three years (starting in January 2022) at Stirling. Monique plans to investigate the critical role autism researchers play in the construction of what we know about autism.



Dr Botha (L) and Dr Grainger (R)

Fellowship starts for Dr Grainger

After a period of maternity leave, Cath is back to work and will be starting a new year-long Fellowship in October, funded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh. The project will look at anxiety in autistic adults, and whether certain cognitive (thinking) skills are associated with good or poor mental health.

New international collaborations

Dr Eilidh Cage will be working with Dr Hope Gerlach from Western Michigan University in the United States. Hope has been awarded funding to be mentored by Eilidh on a project looking at masking amongst people who stutter. Although this isn't an autism-specific project, Hope is planning to learn a lot from Eilidh and the autism research literature, and will get to visit Scotland as part of the funding she received!

A new academic year kicks off

In September, our MSc in Autism Research will be welcoming new students for the coming academic year, and welcoming back our part-time students from last year. The course is directed by Eilidh, and aims to give students strong research skills and the knowledge needed to conduct high quality, ethical autism research. We will miss our full-time students from the last year, who were all incredibly passionate about improving autism research and worked so hard throughout the year, in challenging circumstances. We wish them all the best for their future careers! You can find out more about the course in our [video here](#).

New STAR event plans

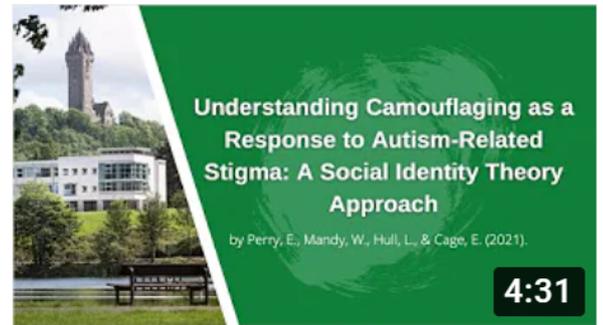
As well as all our research and teaching, we are currently planning to increase our public events, so that more people can hear about our research, and we're hoping to invite other autism researchers to speak too, from around the world. We'll share more details as soon as we can, but we have lots of exciting plans and hope that some of you will be able to join us at our events (which will all be online for the foreseeable future!)

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We have lots of plans for public events in the not too distant future - "watch this space"!

NEW YOUTUBE VIDEO SERIES LAUNCHED

Over the summer, we launched a new series of YouTube videos all about our research. The videos aim to explain our papers in less than five minutes, in a way we hope is accessible. The first video discusses Eilidh's research on [masking and stigma](#) and the second talks about Monique's project on [autistic identity](#). We've got more videos to come, and you can subscribe to our [YouTube channel](#) so you don't miss any!



JOIN THE STIGMA NETWORK

Are you interested in research about the topic of stigma towards autistic people? Are you keen to connect with other people who are passionate about reducing stigma and improving autism acceptance? Eilidh and Monique have launched a new network, called the Stigma and Autism Research Network (SARN), which brings together people from around the world, both researchers and non-researchers, who are committed to making a difference in this area. There are over 200 people signed up to the network! All are welcome to join - you can find out more and [sign up using this link](#).

STAYING CONNECTED

If you haven't done so already, sign up to join our mailing list by filling out our [contact form on our website](#) - this is how we will share event news and our newsletters, and may occasionally reach out about research studies. You can also follow us on Twitter [@StirAutism](#) and subscribe to our [YouTube channel](#). You can also contact us via email, at autismresearch@stir.ac.uk. Finally, we have our [website](#) where we occasionally post blogs and you can find out more general information about STAR.

