

STIRLING AUTISM RESEARCH

STAR Newsletter



2022 - NEW YEAR, NEW OPPORTUNITIES!

Welcome to the second STAR newsletter

Happy New Year from the STAR team!

After a busy autumn term, the Christmas holidays were a welcome opportunity to recharge.

Now is a good time to reflect back on the things we have achieved and plan our next ventures. We are looking forward to a year of advancing autism research - striving to create connections, develop new projects and share knowledge and experience.

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THE STAR TEAM - UPDATES

Farewell & Good Luck

We were sad to say goodbye to **Dr Amanda Roestorf** at the end of 2021. A very big thank you to Amanda for all her hard work and support in challenging times!

New Role

In January, **Dr Monique Botha** began a three year research project funded by the Leverhulme Trust, called "Fragile Knowledge: Dehumanisation & Interpretation Bias in Autism Research". Monique will investigate the critical role autism researchers play in creating what we know about autistic people. We're looking forward to this important and timely project getting started!

Welcome

A huge welcome to **Rhys Swainston** who is supporting Dr Cath Grainger with research looking at memory for autistic people. **Khiah Strachan** also joins us, supporting the STARTS network (more on that below!). Our new MSc placement students, **Emily Greenan**, **Jen Dow**, **Lynsey McDevitt** and **Sarah Dantas** will be supporting the STAR team with various research projects over the coming months. **Sanna Rehman**, who has just completed her MSc in Psychological Therapy at Stirling, is currently working with Dr Eilidh Cage & Dr Monique Botha on a systematic review of the literature on autistic people's experiences of autism research itself.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM AUTUMN 2021 - WHAT HAVE WE BEEN UP TO?

Over the past few months we have been busy! Ongoing challenges posed by the pandemic meant teaching and research work stayed largely online. Easing of restrictions allowed glimpses of normality, with some STAR team members finally meeting in person for the first time!



Our Recent Publications

Dr Eilidh Cage published research looking at university experiences for autistic and non-autistic students during the COVID-19 pandemic. This project was part of Ellie McManemy's undergraduate dissertation, supervised by Eilidh ([available here](#)). In another study with collaborators around the world, Eilidh also published research looking at careers for autistic university students ([available here](#)). Dr Cage & Dr Monique Botha contributed to a commentary on tackling stigma towards autistic young people ([available here](#)). Monique's powerful autoethnography on knowledge production in autism research examined complex positionality, asking "academic, activist or advocate?" is [available here](#) and has already been viewed over 15,000 times since publication!

Monique also published a theoretical paper on social justice in autism research ([available here](#)), and a response to Frith & Mottron, with a call for radical change in the field ([available here](#)).

Reflections on a Fellowship year

Dr Botha's Post-Doctoral Fellowship came to an end in November. The one year Fellowship, funded by the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science and Economic and Social Research Council, enabled Monique to write-up publications from their PhD, establish collaborations, and conduct new research. We had hoped to share Monique's Fellowship experiences in a public talk late last year, but due to personal reasons, the talk had to be cancelled. We will be rescheduling the talk for later in 2022. And fear not - Monique stays at STAR, with a new three year Fellowship from January 2022!

PHD AND MSc STUDENT UPDATE

Find out what our PhD and MSc students have been up to! At the moment, we have two PhD students associated with STAR. If you're interested in doing a PhD at STAR, we recommend that you get in touch directly with the academic you are interested in being supervised by. You can also keep an eye on our Twitter as we may post about opportunities there!

Marisa McKinlay is embarking on Year 2 of a part-time PhD looking at supportive environments for autistic teenagers. A Systematic Review of the literature is currently underway, assessing factors which may affect positive mental health in school. Marisa is also starting to plan her first PhD research study!

George Watts is currently undertaking some MSc modules before her PhD research will officially start later on in 2022. Her PhD will be looking at understanding how autistic adults experience the autistic community. Her research aims to identify barriers and facilitators to the autistic community, including for those with co-occurring learning difficulties. Participatory research will be a central principle of the project. Funded by the ESRC, George is supervised by Dr Eilidh Cage, Dr Catherine Crompton (Edinburgh) and Dr Joe Long (Scottish Autism).



George Watts (left) and Marisa McKinlay (right)

Conference news

George Watts presented at the Participatory Autism Research Collective. She talked about her MSc study, which examined the relationship between autistic identity and quality of life.

MSc Autism Research students

Last semester we covered a range of topics including ethics in autism research, mental health, intersectionality, ageing, sensory experiences and social care. In other modules, learning focussed on statistical analysis, key skills for researchers and a range of different methodologies in research. This semester qualitative research approaches will be addressed, as well as starting placements and dissertations.

You can find out more about the MSc course in our video [here](#). Applications are open for starting the course in September 2022. If you have any questions about the course, you can contact the course director Eilidh via email (eilidh.cage@stir.ac.uk)

OUR PLANS FOR THE COMING MONTHS



A new 'START' for autism research in Scotland

Starting in February 2022, Eilidh and Monique, along with Dr Catherine Crompton (University of Edinburgh), will be establishing a new participatory network called STARTS (Striving to Transform Autism Research Together - Scotland). The project is funded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh for two years. The aim is to create a collaborative research network between autistic people and autism researchers in Scotland. We will be identifying research priorities for autistic people in Scotland, conducting research projects on these priorities, and exchanging knowledge and experiences (including running several free events). We'll soon be looking for a few autistic people in Scotland to work with us as a team of co-researchers - so keep an eye on the STARTS Twitter ([@STARTSnetwork](https://twitter.com/STARTSnetwork)) for updates, or email eilidh.cage@stir.ac.uk to register your interest!

Fellowship underway for Dr Grainger

Cath is continuing her research with a year-long research Fellowship, funded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh. This project is looking at anxiety in autistic adults, and whether certain cognitive (thinking) styles are associated with good or poor mental health. Data collection for this project will begin in March, in our new STAR research room. If you are aged 18+ and interested in participating in the study, please contact cg46@stir.ac.uk, for more information.

Funding news for Dr Botha

Monique is part of a team who will work to understand barriers and facilitators for autistic people in accessing support after experiencing interpersonal victimisation. The team consists of Monique, Amy Pearson, Felicity Sedgewick, Kieran Rose and Sarah Douglas, and the grant has been awarded by the Violence and Mental Health Network (VAHMN).



Participatory approaches – involving the people who are being researched in the research process as equal partners.

SUBSCRIBE TO THE STAR YOUTUBE CHANNEL

Learn about our papers in under five minutes!

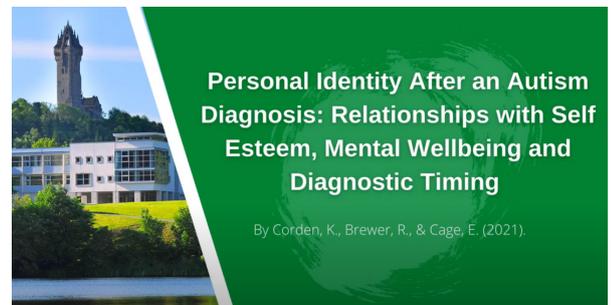
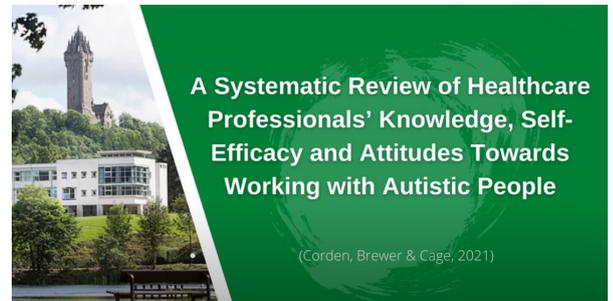
Further to the great success of the new STAR YouTube channel, more videos have now been added. These aim to explain our papers in a short, accessible way. Our most recent videos are about:

- A study into healthcare attitudes towards autistic people: click [here](#)
- Identity after an autism diagnosis: click [here](#)
- We also have a video about the MSc in Autism Research at Stirling. Applications are open for an autumn 2022 start! Click [here](#)

Previous videos:

Eilidh discusses her research on [masking and stigma](#)

Find out more about Monique's project on [autistic identity](#)



STAYING CONNECTED

Sign up to join our mailing list by filling out the [contact form on our website](#) - this is how we will share event news and our newsletters, and may occasionally reach out about research studies. Follow us on Twitter [@StirAutism](#) & subscribe to our [YouTube channel](#). Contact us via email at autismresearch@stir.ac.uk. Visit our [website](#) where we occasionally post blogs and you can find out more general information about STAR.

