

CANVAS Meeting Minutes, 4.7.22

Participants in Attendance

- Amy Tavares (Carnegie Mellon University)
- Ava Gurba (Stony Brook University)
- Ben Schwartzman
- Beth Felsen (Spectrum Transition Coaching LLC)
- Brad Cox (Florida State University | College Autism Network)
- Brett Ranon Nachman (University of Arkansas | College Autism Network)
- Carolyn O’Laughlin (Saint Louis University)
- Cecilia
- Christy Giambastiani (Sonoma State University)
- Dave Caudel (Vanderbilt University)
- Dawn-Marie Solais (Neuroawesome Life)
- Greta Heathcote (University of Calgary)
- Hannah Morton (Oregon Health & Science University)
- Jennifer Williamson (University of Calgary)
- John Caldora (University of Kentucky)
- John Szabo (University of Dayton)
- Kathy Szechy (Wayne State University)
- Katie McDermott
- Kimberly Johnson (Lesley University)
- Kristen Gillespie-Lynch (CUNY)
- Lauren Allen (Empire State University)
- Lauren Collier (Northeastern University)
- Laurie Ackles (Rochester Institute of Technology)
- Lars Veerhoff (Fontys University of Applied Science)
- Lee Williams (College Autism Network)
- Lindsay Blankenship (
- Lindsay Hill (Michigan State University)
- Lisa Pennisi (University of Nebraska-Lincoln)
- Mary Baker-Ericzen (San Diego State University)
- Mary Lenoir
- Michelle P
- Neal Rosenthal
- Sara Sanders Gardner (Bellevue College)
- Summer West (Universität Kassel)
- TELhlert
- Tom Beeson (Clemson University)

CANVAS Updates

- Join our CANVAS list-serv - Our primary means of connecting, sharing info
 1. Click [here to join](#)
 2. Send email to the list
<https://groups.google.com/a/collegeautismnetwork.org/forum/#!forum/can-canvas/join> by emailing can-canvas@collegeautismnetwork.org
 3. [CAN Membership Details](#) We appreciate the support your membership provides to help us offer CANVAS and other opportunities.
 4. College Autism Summit 2023: Oct 18-20 at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN
- **Share a Resource!** Are you conducting any research studies that you'd like the community to know about? Read an interesting article recently? Discovered a cool resource? This is your chance to briefly share that news with the CANVAS group! List your name and any relevant links below so others may access it at their convenience!
 1. College Autism Summit (Oct 18-20, Vanderbilt Univ, Nashville): Call for registrations and programs now open: <https://collegeautismnetwork.org/home/college-autism-summit/>
 2. CAN is sponsoring a 3-part webinar series in June with Laurie Ackles and Jane Thierfeld Brown based on starting a program.
 3. Brad Cox and Brett Ranon Nachman recently received a \$500K Spencer Foundation Large Research Grant to expand the PEACES study on autistic college student success.

Presentation

- **Presentation Title:** Autism, Adulthood and Employment Challenges: The Double Empathy Problem and Perceptions of an Autistic Employee in the Workplace.
- **Presenter:** Dr. Kathy Szechy (LMSW, PhD, Wayne State University School of Social Work)

Notes

- Kathy presented her dissertation data today on autistic social functioning in non-autistic workplaces and employment challenges for autistic adults.
- There are two competing theories of autistic social functioning, the longstanding theory of mind (ToM) deficits explanation and the newer theory of the double empathy problem.
- There are many critiques of ToM deficits including a lack of connection between ToM abilities and real world ways autistic people struggle in the non-autistic social world. For a comprehensive analysis see Gernsbacher and Yergeau, 2019.
- ToM research is often about assessing detection of pretense or lying, which are much less common in autistic social interactions. ToM tests also assess understanding of non-autistic rather than autistic behavior.
- Dr. Damian Milton has proposed that autistic adult social skills challenges are from the Double Empathy Problem (DEP). The DEP proposes that rather than the problem being in autistic impairments the problem lies in the interaction between two neurologically different ways of being and socializing in the world. The DEP shifts the responsibility for autistic social difficulties away from autistic deficits and onto mutual empathic

misunderstanding in autistic and non-autistic social interactions. There is emerging evidence for the DEP including good communication and social rapport between autistic persons and lack of understanding of autistic behavior and communication by non-autistic persons.

- The main purpose of this dissertation was to compare the two competing theories of autistic social functioning, ToM, and the DEP, within the context of autistic workplace challenges.
- 81 autistic and 173 non-autistic participants (online anonymous survey) read a story about a hypothetical autistic employee having a difficult workday and answered open ended questions asking them to interpret the autistic employee's behavior.
- Participants also completed a measure of autistic traits, a measure of autism knowledge and two scales measuring perceptions of the autistic employee's social acceptability and competency/suitability at work.
- Main hypothesis: If the participant is autistic and accurately interprets the behavior of the autistic employee, then that is evidence for the DEP as the DEP would say that autistic people understand each other. If they do not then that is contributing evidence for ToM deficits. If the participant is non-autistic and accurately interprets the behavior, this would be consistent with autistic ToM deficits as non-autistic people are supposed to have superior ToM. If they do not that is consistent with the DEP.
- Results demonstrated support for the DEP as a significantly greater number of autistic participants accurately interpreted the behavior of the autistic employee, compared to non-autistic participants.
- In addition, for the autistic group, those that self-reported more autistic traits also scored higher on accurate interpretation of the behavior. Results further support the DEP and a clash of neurologically different social cultures (Milton, 2014).
- Accurate behavior interpretation was also associated with more positive attitudes towards the hypothetical autistic employee's competency and social acceptability at work. Being perceived as less competent and suitable for the job can have impacts on opportunities to progress and jeopardize employment. Poorer attitudes towards social acceptability increases the risks of being isolated and excluded, impacting quality of work life.
- Autism knowledge was significantly associated with more accurate behavior interpretation of the autistic employee and was also an influential predictor of more positive attitudes towards competency and social acceptability. This was especially the case if the behavior was poorly understood.
- Finding support shifting the paradigm of autistic social difficulties in non-autistic workplaces away from a deficit model and onto addressing mutual autistic/non-autistic misunderstandings. Results also support autism education in the workplace as a promising environmental support for autistic employees at work.

Q&A

- Mary: "I was wondering if you could explain further what is involved as "autism knowledge" and what types of items did the measure ask?"
 - Kathy: The PAK-M was developed by autistic people, so it shows what matters to them. Some items relate to autistic traits.
- Summer: How can people access the vignette?
 - Kathy: That will be included in the slides sent out on the list-serv

- Lee: Can you share more about the vignette?
 - Kathy: With the vignette, many participants didn't understand the character was overwhelmed and when, fully so, they cannot process information. Some non-autistic participants struggled to recognize that their inactions represented an involuntary situation. Other participants failed to appreciate how stressful the workplace is for autistic people. The vignette entailed aiming to replicate a common work setting.
- Ben: His group was contacted, wanting to help enhance their workplace's social skills. They learned that the HR processes are very unfriendly. Other struggles exist, not just for autistic people (meetings without agendas, people speaking over their allotted time). Ben is wondering how to work with workplaces when they think one problem exists, but in fact there are other issues.
 - Kathy: There are some parallels to practicing Universal Design. It's important to further implement autism education programs in the workplace.
- Lauren: "Did you also assess the participant's level of empathy and emotional intelligence? I'm wondering how much that could contribute to their response even when they do not have autism knowledge?"
 - Kathy: Those would have been interesting variables to explore, though.
- Brad: He seemed to recall a slide that mentioned participants who had autism as a focus of their work were less likely to score well on the interpretation of the scenario. Why is that?
 - Kathy: It's hard to know for sure. Kathy suspects there's a higher percentage of people in her sample who have a higher exposure to autism people. Yet many in these spaces still need more autism education themselves. Responses to open-ended questions suggested that these participants may have been overthinking the situation.

Upcoming CANVAS Meetings

Fri, May 5 at 11am EST

- **Presentation Title:** "Looking at the Whole Student:" Identities and the Higher Education Accommodation Process
- **Presenters:** Dr. Morgan Strimel (Doctoral Candidate, George Mason University), Dr. Grace Francis (Associate Professor, George Mason University), Dr. Jodi Duke (Associate Professor & Academic Program Coordinator, George Mason University)