Two papers. One question.

Crompton and colleagues (2020, 2025) studied how information passes along chains of autistic, non-autistic, and mixed groups.

Open both original articles
2020: doi.org/10.1177/1362361320919286
2025: doi.org/10.1038/s41562-025-02163-z

Make a prediction before you read

Eight people pass one story along a chain, without checking back. Which chain would retain the most details? What do you expect to happen in a mixed chain?

Prediction (and why I expect it)

What do I think the researchers were actually measuring?

The reading route

- Read the 2020 abstract, then its Methods section.
- Look at the Results before you read the Discussion.
- Make a new prediction for the larger 2025 Registered Report.
- Compare the findings and ask what a college might reasonably learn.

Important boundary
These studies do not measure every kind of communication or tell anyone whether they should disclose a diagnosis. Their task was much narrower.

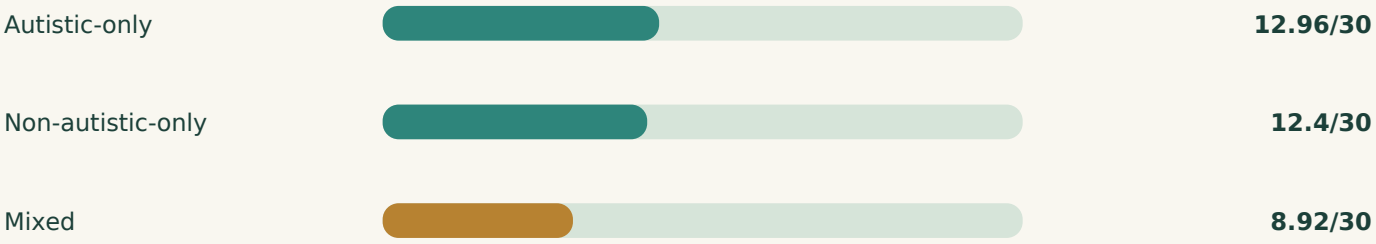
The 2020 experiment

72 adults in nine chains of eight. Three autistic-only chains, three non-autistic-only chains, and three mixed chains.

What the researchers counted

A story contained 30 details. Each person retold it to the next person in the chain. Researchers counted remembered details and asked about rapport (comfort in the interaction).

Average remembered details, pooled across chain positions



These are reported group averages across people and chain positions, not the scores of the last person and not a general communication score.

What does the graph show? What does it NOT show?

Why do nine chains matter more than just saying 72 participants?

Research caution

One early retelling may lose details everybody later needs. The authors conducted an additional proportional analysis, but the small number of independent chains remains relevant.

A larger study in 2025

A Registered Report conducted across three sites; 311 adults attended (154 autistic, 157 non-autistic).

Before looking: what would I expect a larger study to find?

What the 2025 authors reported

They found no difference in information transfer between mixed and single-neurotype chains. Non-autistic chains reported higher rapport, and informing participants about diagnosis improved rapport in this experiment.

Which 2020 finding did not repeat? Which questions remain?

Why might these studies differ? Name at least two plausible explanations.

What can we say without going too far?

- Autistic adults can share information effectively with one another in this task.
- The mixed-chain disadvantage from 2020 is not a settled general rule.
- Neither experiment proves or disproves the entire double empathy framework.
- Study conditions about diagnostic information are not advice to disclose.

A good discussion question

Did the follow-up make the science weaker or stronger? Explain why a finding that changes can still be useful.

Try the method yourself

Learning activity only. Do not sort participants by diagnosis or treat the results as a replication.

Story for the first participant (12 details): On Tuesday, Maya took the 8:15 bus to the campus library. She wore a green jacket and carried a blue notebook. At the entrance she met her friend Leo, who had a yellow umbrella. They found a lost silver key beside the bike rack. Maya gave the key to the librarian, then bought tea before her 10:00 class.

Mark the twelve details

- ☐ Tuesday
- ☐ 8:15 bus
- ☐ campus library
- ☐ green jacket
- ☐ blue notebook
- ☐ friend Leo
- ☐ yellow umbrella
- ☐ silver key
- ☐ bike rack
- ☐ gave key to librarian
- ☐ bought tea
- ☐ 10:00 class

Count the details that survive each handoff

Handoff	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Round A								
Round B								

Change one rule in Round B

For example, allow written notes or clarifying questions. Try to keep other conditions similar. If both change, it may be difficult to know which helped.

What changed? What explanation would you test next?

Everyone gets a choice
Use volunteers. Anyone may observe, write, or opt out. You are studying the process, not rating the people in it.

A discussion, not a diagnosis

Suggested use: two class sessions of roughly 45–60 minutes, or one longer workshop. Adjust the pacing to the group.

Session 1: learn the methods and read 2020

- 10 min: make predictions, introduce hypothesis and diffusion chain.
- 15 min: read the abstract and Methods section together.
- 15 min: interpret the simplified graph and compare it with the paper.
- 10 min: distinguish observations from interpretation and list limitations.

Session 2: read 2025 and compare

- 10 min: predict what a larger study might show.
- 15 min: read the 2025 abstract and results in pairs.
- 15 min: compare what held up, what did not, and why it matters.
- 10 min: discuss responsible applications to college or work.

Optional activity: 15–25 minutes

If you run the telephone game, use the twelve-detail story on page 4. Use a fresh story of comparable complexity for a second round to reduce simple memory of the first story. Label it an illustration of the procedure, not a replication of either research paper.

Questions worth lingering on

- What did the researchers actually observe, and what did they infer?
- How does a larger preregistered study change our confidence?
- Can a study support one aspect of a theory without proving the whole theory?
- What would an ethical, student-designed campus study measure?

Original sources and further reading
2020: pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7545656/
2025: nature.com/articles/s41562-025-02163-z
Guided online reading: ttwnest.org/research/read-together/crompton/