

Author Simon Baron-Cohen on how autism has driven human innovation

In [cognitive neuroscientist Simon] Baron-Cohen's new book [[The Pattern Seekers: How Autism Drives Human Invention](#)], he argues that humans became "the scientific and technological masters of our planet" because of our brain's "systemizing mechanism."

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[Baron-Cohen: The] earliest musical instrument that's been found is a flute made from a bone, a hollow bone from a bird. And it's dated to about 40,000 years ago.

But we can imagine the person who made it was thinking, if I blow down this hollow bone and I cover one hole, then I get a particular note. But if I blow down the hollow bone and uncover the hole, then I get a different note... And it led to what I call generative invention.

...

[We] worked with the company 23andMe, so we could look at the genes that are associated with how much you like to be systemized, how interested you are in systems.

And what we found was that the genes that are associated with scoring high on systemizing overlap with the genes for autism.

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The fact that we can now see a link between those strengths in autism and human invention may change the way we look at autistic people. We might want to see them for who they are, people who think differently and have contributed to human progress.

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