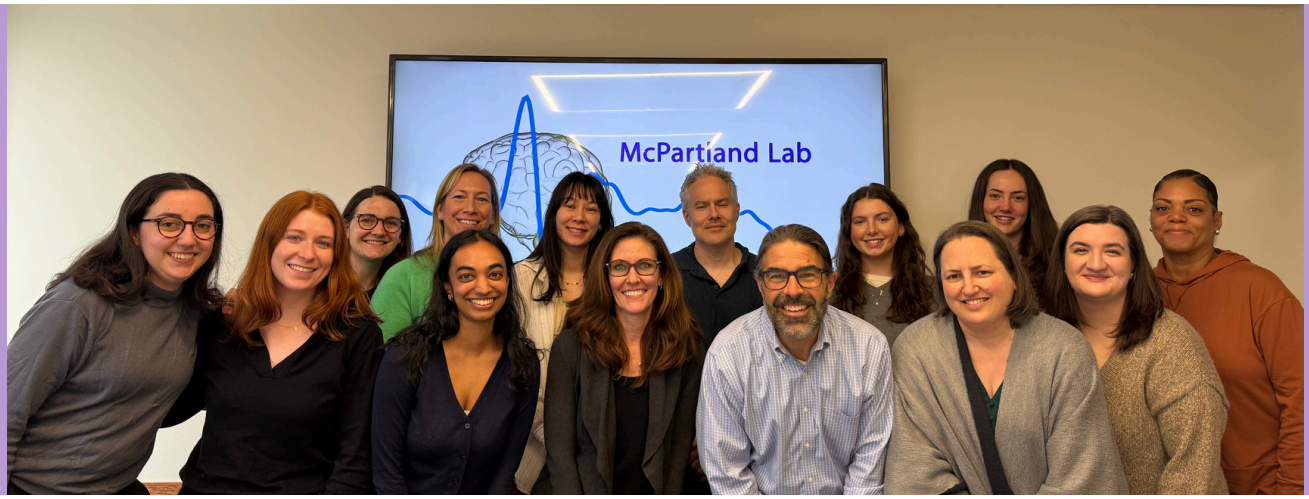
McPartland Lab

SUMMER NEWSLETTER



DIRECTOR'S WELCOME

Dear McPartland Lab community,

We hope you are all well and managing to stay cool in this summer heat! We are excited to report out to you about activities over the past few months. As you will see, we traveled across the country to present our latest scientific discoveries at the International Meeting for Autism Research in Seattle, Washington. This is one of our favorite annual events because the international autism community comes together to learn from one another for several days. For those of us who have spent our lives studying this topic, it is both an important scientific event and a family reunion of sorts. In this issue, we will also provide some information about the commonalities and distinctions between autism and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. We'll introduce you to Casey and Bela and highlight one of our most important and exciting studies that is focused on profound and severe autism. As always, we appreciate your help in spreading the word about research opportunities in our lab.

We love to hear from you! Please be in touch with any questions, comments, or ideas for future content!

Warm summer regards,
Jamie McPartland

IN THIS ISSUE:

MEET THE LAB!

CASEY CARROW

Introduce yourself! What is your role at Yale?
Hi everyone! My name is Casey, and I am a Sparrow Fellow. I grew up in Morrisville, North Carolina and graduated from Vanderbilt University with a B.S. in Child Development and Cognitive Studies and a minor in Quantitative Methods. One of my favorite parts of my job is innovating the ways in which we support our participants and their families in the research setting! Outside of work, I enjoy reading, attending concerts, and traveling.

What did you do before you joined the McPartland Lab?
During college, I conducted research in a developmental psychology lab centered around the effects of infants' early environment and brain development in the first years of life. I completed an honors thesis under Dr. Kathryn Humphreys on the intersections between maternal mental health, caregiving, and children's early emotional development. Outside of school, I worked as a research assistant in the Bergelson Lab at Duke University studying infant language development and spent a summer in the Developmental Personality Neuroscience Lab at UNC-Chapel Hill examining decision-making processes in young adults with social anxiety disorder and borderline personality disorder.

What made you interested in working in this field?
I originally became interested in this field in high school, where I spent two years volunteering in a classroom with kids with neurodevelopmental disorders. This experience gave me valuable insight into how these kids learn, interact, and experience the world around them, which motivated me to get involved in developmental research during college. Through my research and coursework, I discovered a genuine passion for this field which I hope to eventually translate into a career as a clinical child psychologist.

BELA PONJEVIC

Introduce yourself! What is your role at Yale?
My name is Bela Ponjevic, and I am the Outreach and Intake Manager in the McPartland lab. In this role, I oversee study recruitment and participant engagement across multiple ongoing studies, while serving as the primary liaison between research staff, community partners, and families. I help with recruitment efforts to support our current research protocols for children and adults, providing detailed information about study eligibility and procedures, addressing clinical and logistical inquiries, and coordinating appointments for research-based diagnostic evaluations.

What did you do before you joined the McPartland Lab?
Prior to joining the McPartland Lab, I was a school social worker in a local middle school, where I worked with children in various capacities, including individual counseling sessions, social skills groups, and implementing a social-emotional curriculum.

What made you interested in working in this field?
I'm passionate about providing individuals and their families access to care and resources. My role allows me to help provide them with research and clinical opportunities as well as share resources in the community.

UNDERSTANDING THE OVERLAP BETWEEN AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER AND ATTENTION DEFICIT/ HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER

BY DR. CARA KEIFER

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are two distinct conditions that both fall within the umbrella of neurodevelopmental disorders. Although these conditions have unique characteristics, they often co-occur, leading to complex diagnostic and treatment challenges.

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

ASD affects communication, behavior, and social interaction. Symptoms of ASD can vary widely, but common signs include differences in social interaction and social communication, repetitive behaviors, and focused interests. Individuals with ASD may also have sensory sensitivities and prefer routines.

What is Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)?

ADHD is characterized by persistent patterns of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. People with ADHD may struggle with maintaining focus, completing tasks, sitting still, and controlling impulses. This can significantly impact their daily functioning and academic performance.

The Overlap Between ASD and ADHD

Research has shown that there is notable overlap between ASD and ADHD. It's estimated that 50-70% of autistic individuals have co-occurring ADHD. This overlap can manifest in various ways:

1. Executive Functioning: Both ASD and ADHD often involve difficulties with executive functions - the mental processes that help us plan, focus, and manage tasks. Individuals with either or both conditions may struggle with organization, time management, and completing tasks.

2. Social Challenges: While social difficulties are a hallmark of ASD, they also appear in ADHD. Children with ADHD may struggle with picking up on social cues and maintaining friendships due to impulsive behavior and inattention.

3. Behavior: Repetitive motions and strict routines are typical in ASD, but children with ADHD may also exhibit these behaviors due to restlessness and the need for constant activity.

Diagnosing Both Conditions

Diagnosing ASD and ADHD together can be challenging because the symptoms can mask or mimic each other. A comprehensive evaluation by a specialist, such as a child psychologist, psychiatrist, or developmental pediatrician, is crucial. This evaluation typically includes:

- Detailed behavioral assessments
- Interviews with parents and teachers
- Standardized rating scales

Intervention Approaches

Given the complexity of co-occurring ASD and ADHD, intervention plans must be tailored to individual needs. Common approaches include:

- Educational Support: Specialized educational plans can support children in school settings, ensuring they receive the necessary accommodations.
- Behavioral Therapy: Naturalistic behavioral interventions can help manage challenging behaviors associated with both ASD and ADHD. These approaches are most effective when parents participate and can implement strategies at home.
- Medication: Stimulant medications are commonly used to treat ADHD symptoms. Parents are encouraged to speak to their child's pediatrician and/or psychiatric provider to explore the potential benefits and risks of starting stimulant medication.

Conclusion

Understanding the overlap between ASD and ADHD is essential for providing effective support to individuals with these diagnoses. If you suspect your child may have symptoms of ASD, ADHD, or both, seeking a comprehensive assessment by a specialist is an important first step. By increasing awareness and understanding of these conditions, we can create a more supportive and inclusive environment for everyone.

RECENT DISCOVERY

The relationship between gamma-band neural oscillations and language skills in youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their first-degree relatives.

Click here to read the full article!

Language difficulties are common in autistic children and can also occur in their siblings and other close family members. A specific brainwave rhythm, called gamma, is linked to language difficulties. This study looked at gamma rhythms and language skills in relation to autism. Researchers measured brain responses to speech in autistic youth, non-autistic youth, and siblings of autistic youth. Results showed that autistic youth had more gamma rhythm activity compared to non-autistic youth. More gamma was linked to poorer language skills in all youth. Siblings of autistic youth who did not have autism had gamma and language skills that were between non-autistic youth and their autistic siblings. These results suggest that gamma might be a helpful way to measure the risk for language difficulties in autistic youth and their siblings.

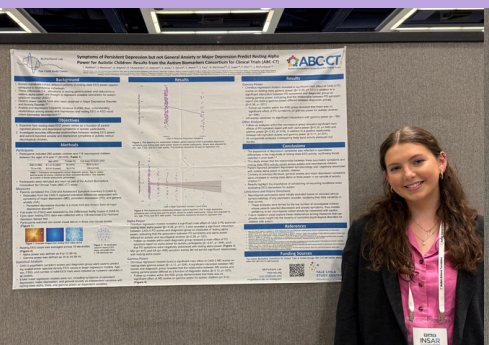
Read more summaries of recent discoveries on our website under Publications, Article Summaries!

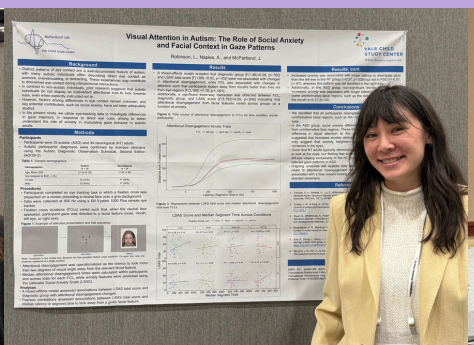
THE MCPARTLAND LAB AT INSAR 2025

The International Society for Autism Research (INSAR) is an annual scientific conference that brings together scientists, doctors, providers, students, and trainees, as well as autistic people, family members, and advocates. Participants gather to discuss the current state of autism research and consider future directions. The meeting includes three days of research talks, panel discussions, and poster presentations that allow researchers to share novel discoveries, learn from colleagues' research, and foster future collaborations. Members of the McPartland Lab traveled to Seattle, Washington in April to present posters and lead a special interest group about profound autism.

This year, Dr. McPartland was inducted as an INSAR fellow. Congratulations to Dr. McPartland on this prestigious award in recognition of his impressive contributions to autism science!

Check out some of our fellows presenting their research!





Scan the QR code or **click here** to see our posters!

STUDY SPOTLIGHT
PROFOUND AUTISM STUDY

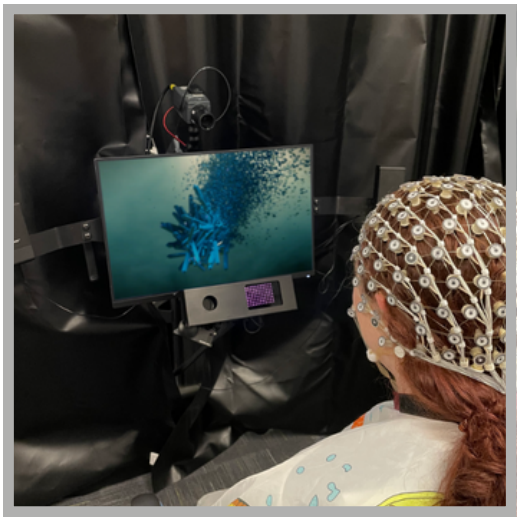
BY DR. BRIANNA CAIRNEY

What is the goal of the study?

In January 2022, an international panel of autism clinicians, researchers, and self-advocates published a call to reconceptualize the autism spectrum by increasing efforts to include autistic people with intellectual disability (ID). The panel proposed adoption of the term profound autism to refer to autistic people with significant ID and high support needs. Historically, individuals with profound autism have been excluded from brain research because the research protocols were not designed to be accessible to all ability levels. The McPartland Lab felt a responsibility to adjust our experimental procedures to be more accommodating and inclusive of the entire autism spectrum. We increased our efforts to include those with profound autism and launched a new study aimed at learning more about behavior and brain patterns within this group.

How do we accomplish that goal?

We are conducting a study that focuses specifically on people with profound autism. We developed a specialized set of procedures and designed a customized room to ensure this study is flexible and comfortable for our participants. These new approaches have made it much easier for individuals with limited verbal language or comprehension to participate. The changes we made are working: the majority of our participants successfully complete experimental tasks, including eye tracking and measuring brain waves! We are excited that our scientific discoveries will be relevant to all autistic people.



Here's what it looks like to participate!

Who can participate?

As we continue this study, we ask for your help. If you have a child between the ages of 3 and 17 with global developmental delay or ID, please consider partnering with us in this important research. We will work together to understand how we can adjust the research experience to maximize your child's comfort and enjoyment. We hope that our efforts encourage a new era of improved inclusivity in autism research.

Interested in participating?

Contact us at 203-737-3439 or autism@yale.edu

IN THE COMMUNITY
THE TALCOTT CENTER

The Talcott Center for Child Development is a privately owned behavioral and developmental therapy center for special needs children and families living with autism and other developmental conditions. The Talcott Center's interdisciplinary therapy offerings include Applied Behavior Analysis, Occupational Therapy, Speech-Language Pathology and Physical Therapy services, made available through outpatient appointments or integrated within its comprehensive Autism programs. Founded in 2004, for over two decades, The Talcott Center has been serving the special needs community in Central Connecticut from its location in Farmington, CT.

The Talcott Center's approach to holistic individualized care involves coordinated support across its interdisciplinary team while emphasizing family-centered programming, helping children develop essential life skills through interventions unique to their needs while keeping parents central to the plan of care.

COMPREHENSIVE AUTISM DAY PROGRAM

The Comprehensive Autism Day Program provides an immersive experience that blends evidence-based ABA with speech, occupational and physical therapy. Designed specifically for autistic children aged 2-6, this unique program runs Monday through Friday, from 8:30am to 3:30pm. It's a school-day rhythm built for therapeutic growth, offering children consistent structure, caring support and opportunities to learn through play, exploration and connection.

EVENING AUTISM PROGRAM

The Evening Autism Program is an after-school program which blends small-group ABA with speech, occupational and physical therapy, giving school-aged children cohesive support in one convenient, evening schedule.

THERAPEUTIC SUMMER PROGRAM

Talcott's therapeutic summer program is a fun and naturalistic way to keep children progressing towards their goals during school break. With themed sessions full of hands-on learning and joyful peer connection, children build social, sensory, and emotional skills while making lasting summer memories. Each day blends structured activities and natural play to promote real-world development in a way that feels like fun, not therapy.

For over 20 years, families have trusted The Talcott Center for its exceptional services in meeting the evolving needs of children and their families, and its commitment to being a strong resource within the community. The Talcott Center's mission is to enhance and empower the lives of special needs families by fostering independence, strengthening knowledge and building confidence.

THE TALCOTT CENTER FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT

304 Main Street, Suite A
Farmington, CT 06032

Phone: 860.674.1824
Website: thetalcottcenter.com

FUN SUMMER ACTIVITIES IN CONNECTICUT

Visit Lake Compounce Amusement and Water Park

Lake Compounce has a range of rides, games, and entertainment that make it a fun time for everyone in the family.

Watch a Movie at a Nearby Drive-in Movie Theater

Enjoy the warm weather while catching an outdoor movie at the Southington Drive-in.

Pick Some Fresh Fruit at Bishop's Orchard

Strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, peaches, and pears are all available for "pick-your-own" during the summer at Bishop's.

Stop by Buttonwood Farm

Enjoy some delicious ice cream made on the farm and check out the beautiful sunflower field. You can even pick your own sunflowers in the designated cutting field!

Visit Mystic Aquarium

Explore interactive exhibits, watch marine animal shows, and encounter creatures like beluga whales, sea lions, penguins, and sharks up close.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR LAB!

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE

INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING? FILL OUT THIS FORM!

READ OUR LAB'S DIVERSITY STATEMENT

KEEP IN TOUCH!

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