

McPartland Lab

FALL NEWSLETTER



DIRECTORS' WELCOME

BY DR. JAMES MCPARTLAND

As the leaves change this autumn, canopies of green morph into a beautiful range of yellows, oranges, reds, and browns. This transformation from uniformity to diversity parallels some of the goals we have set within our lab. We recognize that many aspects of the experience of participating in research come with constraints, inconveniences, and uncertainties that are not comfortable for everyone. We have been working hard to change the way we communicate on our website and on materials we send out and to make it easier than ever to visit us and participate in our research. Our hope is that these improvements will be evident and will enable a wider range of people to become involved in our work. Please let us know what you think; we appreciate your ideas.

In this Fall 2022 edition of the McPartland Lab Newsletter, we highlight ongoing research in our lab and a member of our team. We also describe an important treatment program developed by our colleagues in the Sukhodolsky lab. As always, we have included practical information designed to be useful to families. The recipients of this newsletter represent some of the most important contributors to our science. Please be sure to visit our website to see brief summaries of this science under the "Article Summaries" tab.

Stay warm!

Best wishes,
Jamie McPartland

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MEET THE LAB

DR. CARA KEIFER

INTRODUCE YOURSELF! WHAT'S YOUR ROLE AT YALE?

My name is Cara Keifer, and I am an Assistant Professor of Clinical Child Psychology at the Yale Child Study Center. I spend most of my time in the McPartland Lab doing assessments with children and families and contributing to research studies. I also work in the outpatient Developmental Disabilities Clinic doing multidisciplinary evaluations.

WHAT DID YOU DO BEFORE YOU JOINED THE MCPARTLAND LAB?

My interests in working with autistic individuals and contributing to clinical research first came together when I worked as a research assistant at the Child Study Center after undergrad. Since then, I completed my graduate training at Stony Brook University and returned to the Child Study Center for clinical internship and postdoctoral training. My research has focused on using EEG to better understand social information processing in autistic and non-autistic individuals. Clinically, I have enjoyed working with children, teens, adults, and families with a range of presenting concerns including neurodevelopmental disorders, internalizing problems (anxiety, depression), behavioral difficulties, and serious mental illness. The Child Study Center has played a huge role in my development as a clinician and researcher and I feel lucky to be a part of the community here. I am especially excited to be working in the McPartland Lab where I can learn from colleagues with different areas of expertise and also provide mentorship to trainees.

WHAT MADE YOU INTERESTED IN WORKING IN THIS FIELD?

I became interested in working with autistic individuals while volunteering at an after-school program for kids on the spectrum as an undergraduate student. I had a lot of fun designing activities for the program and playing with the kids. Over time it became clear that the students I worked with had really unique strengths and perspectives as well as a unique set of needs. I found myself wanting to learn about better ways to maximize their strengths and support their areas of need.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT LIVING IN CONNECTICUT?

My favorite thing about living in Connecticut is the beautiful and easily accessible state parks. I grew up in Illinois surrounded by flat farmland, so being able to drive a few miles away and go hiking still feels pretty special to me.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE FALL ACTIVITY?

My favorite fall activities are leaf peeping and baking apple-themed desserts.

SIBLINGS' CORNER

ALL ABOUT SIB GROUPS

BY DR. JULIE WOLF

Have you ever met another person who has an autistic brother or sister? It can be really helpful to talk to other kids who understand what it's like to have an autistic sibling. Even though no two experiences are exactly the same, connecting with other siblings can help you to realize you're not alone. There are lots of ways you can meet other siblings. For example, you can get involved with local autism organizations – like Autism Services & Resources Connecticut (<https://ct-asrc.org/>) here in Connecticut. In the Spring, these organizations often hold an annual autism walk, which is a great way to meet other siblings. You can also look for a sibling support group or “Sibshop” – these groups give you a chance to learn more about autism, meet other siblings, and learn strategies that have been helpful for other kids. Research has shown that Sibshops help kids manage stress and have a positive effect on how kids feel about relationship with their sibling. In our work with siblings at Yale, we have found that kids in our support groups “click” really well and often become instant friends because of their shared experience.

To get involved in a sibling support group, you could reach out to your local autism organization to see if they know of any groups in your area. You can also visit the Sibling Support Project (<https://siblingssupport.org/>) to find a Sibshop near you. This website also hosts “Sibteen” – an online support group for teenagers who have siblings with disabilities. Finally, if you would like to be notified when we are offering a sibling support group at the Yale Child Study Center, your parents can sign up using the QR code below:



STUDY SPOTLIGHT

STIMULATING THE BRAIN

BY DR. SHERAB TSHERINGLA

What is TMS ?

Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation is a non-invasive brain stimulation intervention that has been found to be effective in treating conditions like depression. Trained personnel operate a device which administers a brief magnetic pulse through a coil placed over the scalp. This transcranial magnetic stimulation leads to changes in brain function in parts of the brain like the cortex. The procedure last only a few minutes but, in conditions like depression, can encourage lasting improvements in brain function. TMS has thus been recognized as being a safe method for brain modulation with minimal side-effects.

What is the role of TMS in autism ?

TMS is being explored for both therapeutic purposes in autism. For example, many people with autism also experience depression, and TMS might be helpful for them. At this time, there is not enough data to recommend clinical use of TMS for autism, but we are carrying our research to understand whether it can be helpful.

What is the goal of the TMS study at the McPartland laboratory ?

We are studying the effects of TMS on social cognition in autistic individuals compared to typically developing individuals. This could potentially be applied to reduce the discomfort that some autistic individuals describe during social interactions.



Photo: Lab fellow, Reeda Iqbal, administering iTBS to Dr. Sherab Tsheringla

Who is eligible to participate in this study?

We are actively recruiting participants age 18-40 years with and without autism for our study. Our research coordinator is available to provide further information and discuss regarding potential eligibility.

What does a typical study visit look like?

Participants come in for two or three visits where we will complete developmental and behavioral assessments, measurements of brain activity, and watching brief videos. A single session of TMS will be administered compared to a session where no actual TMS pulse is administered.



ABOUT DR. SHERAB TSHERINGLA

Dr. Sherab Tsheringla is a clinical fellow in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the Yale Child Study Center and a Hilibrand Autism Research Fellow at the McPartland Lab. He completed his adult psychiatry residency at Yale, where he also trained in Interventional Neuropsychiatry and Neuromodulation. Dr. Tsheringla has worked extensively in Neurodevelopmental Psychiatry in settings ranging from autism clinics to short term residential care in the Indian sub-continent and been involved in training, advocacy, systems and capacity building. His research interests lie at the cross-section of neurodevelopmental conditions, trauma, and co-occurring conditions. He seeks to explore the potential of novel neuromodulatory interventions, such as transcranial magnetic stimulation, to study neuroplasticity in humans and design effective mental health treatments and neurodevelopmental interventions.

**Interested participants can contact Bela
203-785-6108 or autism@yale.edu.**

IN THE COMMUNITY TOTAL JOY ARE YOU

Total Joy Are You (TJAY) Autism Foundation is a nonprofit organization established in 2015 in New Haven, CT. TJAY aims to raise public awareness about Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), empowering families and providing resources to assist families raising children/youth on the spectrum.

TJAY's leaders are determined to meet the needs of individuals with autism and their families by promoting solutions across the spectrum and throughout the life span.

They seek to achieve this through advocacy and support, increasing understanding and acceptance of individuals with autism, and advancing research into the causes of and better interventions for autism spectrum disorders and related conditions.

TJAY is committed to increasing global understanding and acceptance of individuals with an autism diagnosis.

TJAY provides easy-to-understand practical information related to Autism Spectrum Disorder for parents, caregivers, and individuals on the spectrum.

They work to educate individuals with autism, their loved ones, professionals from multiple disciplines, and the public at large about autism and issues within the autism community in order to foster acceptance and appreciation of individuals on the spectrum as the valued members of our community that they are.

For more information on TJAY Autism Foundation, please email tjayautismfoundation@icloud.com or call 203.589.5673



COMPREHENSIVE THERAPY FOR IRRITABILITY IN TEENAGERS WITH AUTISM

Our collaborators, the Sukhodolsky Lab at the Child Study Center, are offering a valuable clinical opportunity for families experiencing irritability in teenaged children. If you have a child who is 12 to 19 years old, has been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, and has significant levels of irritability and disruptive behavior, they may be eligible to participate in a free and confidential treatment study. The study includes free assessment of autism and 15 weekly sessions of therapy at the Yale Child Study Center in New Haven, CT. Compensation of up to \$250 for completion of the study. To learn more or to see if your child is eligible to participate, please contact Bela Ponjevic at 203-785-6108 or autism@yale.edu.

FUN FALL ACTIVITIES IN CONNECTICUT

Explore the **Ben Franklin Corn Maze at Lyman Orchards** in Middlefield, CT:

While you're there, pick your own apples, pears, or pumpkins or visit their Apple Barrel Farm Market grocery store!
<https://lymanorchards.com/events/corn-maze/>

Embark on a **Foliage Drive**:

<https://www.ctvisit.com/articles/top-fall-foliage-drives-in-connecticut>

Visit **Pumpkintown, USA** in East Hampton, CT:

<https://www.pumpkintown.com/>

Check out one of the **many fall events** at the **New Canaan Nature Center**: <https://newcanaannature.org/>

Learn about the **oldest steam-powered cider mill in the country**:
<https://www.clydescidermill.com/>

Fall Family Fun at **Bishop's Orchards Little Red Barn** in Guilford, CT: There is a pumpkin patch, food and beverages! You can also pick your own apples, raspberries, and pumpkins and get ice cream from the creamery!

<https://bishopsorchards.com/>

Terror at Quassy Amusement Park (ages 10+):

Amusement rides, haunted houses, and live entertainment on the stage.
<https://www.quassy.com/special-events>

Pumpkin Patch Trains at the **Danbury Railway Museum** in Danbury, CT:

The event includes a 20 minute round trip train ride, picking out your own pumpkin, trying local apple cider and cookies and many photo ops.
<https://www.danburyrail.org/pumpkin>

Visit a **Fall County Fair or Festival** near you in Connecticut:
<https://connecticutlifestyles.com/fall-fairs-festivals-connecticut/>

Visit a **Corn Maze** near you in Connecticut:
<https://connecticutlifestyles.com/connecticut-corn-maze-adventures/>



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