



WELCOME BACK TO

THE SCTL SCOOP

WINTER 2022 | VOLUME 1



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Happy Winter from the Social Competence & Treatment Lab!

We are so excited to share our latest newsletter with you to keep you updated on all of the amazing work our team has been doing! We hope you always enjoy your time with us.

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lernerlab.com
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Letter from Dr. Matthew Lerner, Director



Hello Families, Friends, and Colleagues:

Welcome to our biannual newsletter, the SCTL Scoop! Our research centers around better understanding the social functioning of kids and teens on the autism spectrum and creating interventions that help them better connect to peers and make friends.

The Social Competence and Treatment Lab (SCTL) has been wonderfully busy with ongoing and brand new studies. We are slowly transitioning from virtual activity and have been welcoming more of the smiling and masked faces of our beloved families into the lab. Thrillingly, our four year SENSE Theatre study has finished and our findings will be shared with you in the near future. Our newest study underway, PEDAL, is among the first in the field to examine awake and asleep EEG patterns of children with autism and linking them to clinical presentation in the ASD community. PEDAL is our broadest study yet in terms of age range - welcoming those from toddlers to teenagers to participate! In another active study, I-SPY:VI, we are exploring the role of factors most related to social outcomes in online interactions. We are also very excited to announce Stony Brook University's new LEND program. LEND aims to improve the lives and care of people with autism and other neurodevelopmental disabilities through better training for those involved in their care. Parents, clinicians, and self-advocates can all participate for *free*! Learn more [here](#).

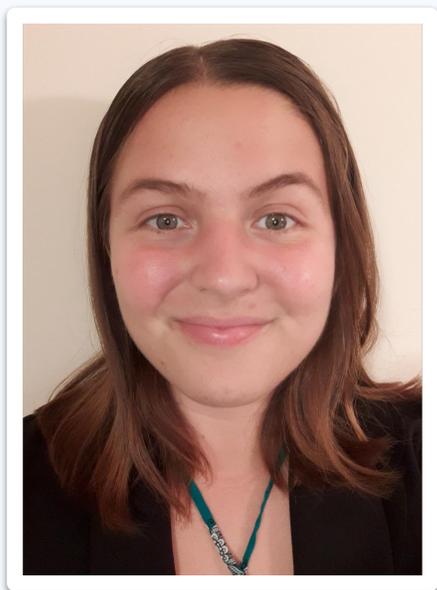
In addition to our studies, our partner organization, The Autism Initiative, has designed many interactive programs and resources that are available to the community. We are eager to share with you all that our lab has been working on and hope you find The SCTL Scoop to be a fun way to learn about our studies, findings, accomplishments, and offerings. All members of the SCTL would like to extend our deepest appreciation to our amazing families for the continued love and support, particularly throughout the ongoing challenges and complexities of the COVID-19 pandemic. None of this would be possible without the time and effort you put into our lab! We are tremendously grateful to have you in our SCTL family, and wish you all good health and well-being!

As always, please feel free to reach out to us at lernerlab@stonybrook.edu, (631) 632-7857, or [Facebook.com/Lernerlab](https://www.facebook.com/Lernerlab/)!

Sincerely,

Dr. Lerner and all of your friends at the Social Competence & Treatment Lab (SCTL)

The SCTL Spotlight



Jenna Stadheim, B.A., B.S. **Lab Coordinator**

Jenna is the newest Lab Coordinator to the SCTL who oversaw the final cohort of the SENSE Theater study during June-October of 2021. Jenna currently oversees the PEDAL study and supervises the Recruitment Team, facilitating new family participation across studies within the SCTL. She also contributes to the Data Management, Initial Visit, and EEG Processing Teams. She earned her B.A. in Psychology and B.S. in Family & Human Development from Arizona State University in May 2019. After graduating, Jenna spent 2 years as a Behavior Therapist at the Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center, where she provided in-home ABA treatment to teens and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder. She arrived to Long Island in May of 2021, and enjoyed the opportunity to be a part of the SCTL Team thus far. Jenna hopes to pursue her PhD in Clinical or School Psychology beginning in the Fall of 2022!



Kristin Walker, B.A. **Ph.D. Student**

Kristin Walker is an incoming graduate student in Clinical Psychology. She earned her B.A. in Psychology, with minors in Deaf Studies/American Sign Language and Neuroscience at College of the Holy Cross in 2018. She is eager to help SCTL expand the current understanding of factors that influence children's social competency. Kristin is primarily interested in the intersection of autism and deafness and exploring how language, audition, and cognition affect social functioning and the well-being of autistic and deaf people. She hopes to develop reliable autism assessments and appropriate, individualized interventions for deaf individuals.

The SCTL Spotlight



Jack McCarron
Lab Coordinator

Jack is a senior completing his B.S. in Biology. He began working in SCTL on the EEG proctoring team as a freshman. Some of his duties include setting up the EEG, giving out surveys, and supervising EEG tasks. He is also the EEG processing team leader and is responsible for training new members, transferring new data files, and helping with team tasks. His newest role, IRB coordinator, involves coordinating IRB protocols and submitting continuing reviews and other modifications. He loves hiking and working out, and his favorite part of SCTL is working with incredibly friendly, smart, and helpful individuals. Jack plans to pursue a career in the medical field soon after graduating.



Alyssa Buttigieg
Outreach Coordinator

Alyssa is the undergraduate leader of the SCTL outreach team and has been working with the lab since the Spring 2021 semester. She is responsible for recruiting study participants, managing the lab's social media and website, producing regular newsletters, and sharing recent autism research in ways that are easy to understand for the community. Her favorite part about SCTL is interacting with the community and working to share scientific findings from our lab with those who need it most. When Alyssa graduates, she hopes to attend medical school and pursue a career in psychiatry.

SCTL Alumni



Cynthia Brown, Ph.D.
Former Post-Doctoral Scholar & Psych Intern

Dr. Cynthia Brown is a former post-doctoral scholar and psychology intern with SCTL. Dr. Brown has been involved in logistical efforts for the SENSE Theatre Program, along with program development for the Sidekicks Program. She has also been involved in dissemination efforts for the Usual Care for Autism Study, which have included projects examining providers' familiarity with treatments for ASD, as well as how providers treat youths with ASD who also have behavior problems. Dr. Brown has recently started a position at Pacific University near Portland, Oregon, as a tenure-track Assistant Professor and Director of Clinical Training in the Applied Psychological Sciences Program.



Peter Felsman, Ph.D.
Former Post-Doctoral Scholar

Peter was a SCTL postdoc and contributed in some way to several lab projects in the role of writer, designer, statistician, clinician, editor, and/or supervisor. His primary interests are in methods and mechanisms of mental health interventions for depression and anxiety, and he is now working as an assistant professor in the Social Work Department at Northern Michigan University.



Malia Lundahl, B.S.N., R.N., B.A.
Former Coordinator

Malia was previously the coordinator and team leader for outreach for SCTL and the Autism Initiative at Stony Brook. Upon graduating with her second degree from Stony Brook, she is now working as a Registered Nurse in general medicine at NYU Tisch Hospital in Manhattan. In the future, she plans to work in emergency medicine, and someday eventually return to the world of public health.

SCTL Alumni



Nathaniel Iskhakov, B.A.
Former Coordinator

During his four years at SCTL, Nate served on the Initials Team, Reports Team, as SENSE coordinator, and as Recruitment Team leader. He started by hosting initial visits where he read consents and administered various cognitive assessments. He later contributed to writing comprehensive reports for families once they completed their participation. In his last year, he worked with clinicians and families to put together an online iteration of our Tackling Teenage intervention as well as plan our SENSE theater intervention. He also recruited families and answered any questions they had. He likes basketball and going to the beach. Nate is now attending medical school.



Kevin J. Carroll, B.S.
Former Research Assistant

Kevin Carroll was a member of the lab's EEG Processing and Community Outreach teams. He joined the lab in his sophomore year and liked it so much that he stayed on as a volunteer a year after graduating (over 4 years in total!). As an autistic self-advocate, he is particularly interested in supporting adults on the spectrum and in creating systems and policies at institutions that support accessibility. Kevin is currently working as a Direct Support Professional (DSP) in Dutchess County, NY



Darsiya Krishnathasan, B.S.
Former Coordinator

Darsiya was an undergraduate research assistant in EEG Proctoring and Processing for the past 3 years. She was also the IRB Coordinator during her senior year and assisted in protocol amendments, submissions, and anything IRB-related. Outside of the lab, she enjoys watching movies, teaching, and dancing. During her time at SCTL, she learned so much about children on the spectrum and ways that can potentially aid their world in the future. She recently graduated from Stony Brook University and hopes to apply to graduate school. She will greatly miss all the friends and people she has met through SCTL.

Recent Events



EJ Autism Foundation's AutisMile



Port Jefferson Color Run



Back to School Blast

Our research assistants have been out in the community! Be sure to follow us on [Facebook.com/Lernerlab](https://www.facebook.com/Lernerlab) to find out where we will be next!

May 5, 2021

2021 URECA Celebration: Virtual Poster Exhibition



Darsiya Krishnathasan, presented her poster, “Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) in Relation to Theory of Mind (ToM) Reasoning in Adolescents with and without Autism Spectrum Disorder” with Dr. Lerner and Erin Libsack as her faculty sponsors. ToM is the ability to understand the mental states, and thoughts of others, and this is critical for the social-perspective taking. Adolescents with ASD often have deficits in ToM ability. In a study of 179 adolescents both on and off the autism spectrum, she found poorer ToM ability was associated with increased Fear of Negative Evaluation (more impairment) in ASD participants. This negative correlation suggests that some youth with ASD with poorer ToM may struggle to effectively understand others’ perspectives in social situations, leading to increased FNE.

May 3-7, 2021

20th Anniversary INSAR Meeting



This year marked the 20th Anniversary of the Annual International Society for Autism Research (INSAR) Meeting. In celebration, Dr. Matthew Lerner was invited to interview and discuss how autism research has evolved over the past 20 years, the ways INSAR has impacted his career, future directions for autism research, and more. Watch the full video on INSAR’s website [here](#).

SCTL in the Media



Dr. Lerner was recently a guest on The Reading and Language Learning Center's Podcast, More Than Words: Treating the whole child. Listen to this episode, Facilitating Social Connections For & Among Those with ASDs w/ Dr. Lerner, [here!](#)



Ph. D student Erin Libsack and Dr. Lerner were invited to the Autism Science Foundation's Weekly Science Podcast to discuss the SCTL's recent systematic review on the phenomenon behaving in ways that appear inconsistent with the presence of autism (or passing as non-autistic; PAN). Listen to the podcast [here](#).



Dr. Lerner won the 2021 LIFE Outstanding Alumni Award from International Max Planck Research School on the Life Course (LIFE) at the University of Virginia. Read more [here!](#)



SCTL received the latest COVID-19 Grant from the Autism Science Foundation and will study the effects of a single-session intervention (SSI), during the COVID-19 pandemic, to see its success in supporting autistic adolescents. Read more [here!](#)

Some Current Studies

I-SPY:VI

(Investigating Social Patterns in Youth - Virtual Interactions)



- ✓ Kids and teens 11-17 with and without ASD
- ✓ 2 in-lab visits, 3 virtual visits including a virtual game night!
- ✓ Gift-card compensation
- ✓ Clinical report

The goal of I-SPY:VI is to learn more about the role that different biological and psychological factors play in youths' "real world" social functioning. This study will help us to better understand social competence, and to create more effective treatments for youth with ASD.

PEDAL-ASD

(Patterns of EEG In Daily Life in ASD Youth)



- ✓ Youth 18 months-17 years old with ASD
- ✓ 1 virtual visit, 3 in-person visits
- ✓ The use of a 24 hour ambulatory EEG!
- ✓ Gift-card compensation

The goal of PEDAL is to learn more about brain wave activity and link these findings to autistic behaviors. This study will help us to guide treatment for those with undiagnosed seizure activity.

OPRITA

(Online Promoting Resilience in Teens with ASD)



- ✓ Teens 11-16 with ASD
- ✓ 2 virtual visits including an online activity!
- ✓ Gift-card compensation

The goal of PRITA is to better understand and support emotional resilience and stress coping skills among teens with ASD and will help us to guide online treatments for teens with ASD.

TO GET STARTED CALL OR EMAIL US AT (631) 632-7857 & Lernerlab@stonybrook.edu!

Accomplishments & Awards

2021 John Neal Endowed Graduate Student Excellence Fund in Clinical Psychology - Talena Day



SCTL PhD student Talena Day has received the John Neale Endowed Graduate Student Excellence Fund in Clinical Psychology from the Stony Brook University Psychology Department. This award provides funding to Stony Brook Psychology graduate students who demonstrate outstanding achievement in the areas of academic excellence, research, or leadership. She plans to study reward processing, measured by EEG and questionnaires, in autism spectrum disorder. Through this work, she aims to better understand the higher rates of co-occurring depression and anxiety in people on the autism spectrum.

2021 Outstanding Mentor Award - Dr. Matthew Lerner



Matthew Lerner, PhD, PI of the SCTL, has won the 2021 Outstanding Mentor Award from the Autism & Developmental Disabilities Special Interest Group of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies! This award seeks to acknowledge and appreciate individuals who have had a significant impact on mentees' careers, professional development, and personal growth.

Accomplishments & Awards

2021 URECA Biology Alumni Award - Maanasi Dudi



Maanasi Dudi is an undergraduate Biology major on the pre-med track who is interested in gaining a better understanding of the social functioning of children with ASD. This year, she presented a poster on “Social motivation in relation to vocal emotion recognition in youth with ASD” at the URECA Celebration: Virtual Poster Exhibition and was awarded the 2021 URECA Biology Alumni Research Award. The award funds 10 weeks of faculty-mentored research with Dr. Matthew Lerner. For her research, Maanasi will be looking at the social motivation of children with ASD in relation to vocal emotion processing and event related potentials (ERPs). This involves analysis of EEG data collected in lab, with the DANVA being used to assess vocal emotion recognition. She will specifically focus on N100 ERP, which is related to early encoding and analysis of sound. Over the summer, Maanasi examined the relationship between social motivation, N100 amplitude, and vocal emotion recognition.

Autism Science Foundation's COVID-19 Grant - Dr. Kathryn Hauschild



Kathryn Hauschild, PhD, our Associate Director, was recently awarded a COVID-19 Research Grant from the Autism Science Foundation (ASF)! This funding will support the continuation of a research project begun shortly after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to examine the effects of social isolation on social functioning, mental health, and stress for youth with and without ASD. Early findings from the project showed that while the social interactions of all youth were impacted by the pandemic, youth with ASD were particularly vulnerable. Moving forward, new information collected for this project will help us understand how returning to in-person learning (schooling) may influence changes in social interaction and the ability to access mental health services and supports for youth with and without ASD. This project reflects substantial contributions from Alan Gerber (Doctoral Candidate and Clinical Intern at Stony Brook University) and Allison Nahmias, Ph.D. (Assistant Professor in the Autism Clinic in the Division of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry at Stony Brook University).

Selected Works Recently Published & Presented

The SCTL believes it is important to share all that we've been learning from the information we collect - especially with the families who make our research possible. On the following pages you will find concise, easy-to-read summaries of our most recent published articles and presentations. We hope you enjoy reading about some of the latest findings in autism research and that they inspire you to stay connected to the SCTL, continue learning with us, and share these findings with those who may be interested!

Social and non-social reward anticipation in typical development and autism spectrum disorders: current status & future directions

The goal of this article is to better understand how the brain responds to rewards. Many parts of our day-to-day life are rewarding like enjoying a piece of candy or developing meaningful relationships. The way that the brain responds to rewards, also known as reward processing, may be different in individuals on the autism spectrum. Reward processing is made up of different stages including anticipating or "wanting" something. In our review of recently published papers, we found that the anticipatory reward processing stage in individuals on the autism spectrum compared to the general population differed in response to both nonsocial rewards (like money) and social rewards (like a smiling face). However, these findings change across age groups, sex assigned at birth, and by the reliability of the reward; for example, you can take money home after the experiment. We aim to take the information learned from this review to make new studies that address questions such as: do individuals on the spectrum show differences in only social reward processing or in both social and nonsocial reward processing?

If you participated in ECOSf or are participating in our SILO study, you are contributing to our growing knowledge of reward processing!

Keifer, C.M.,* Day, T.C.,* Hauschild, K.M.,* & Lerner, M.D. (in press). Social and Non-social Reward Anticipation in Typical Development and Autism Spectrum Disorders: Current Status & Future Directions. *Current Psychiatry Reports*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-021-01247-7>

A systematic review of passing as non-autistic in autism spectrum disorder

For decades, many autistic individuals have shared lived experiences that describe passing as non-autistic (PAN) – behaving in ways that appear inconsistent with the presence of autism. PAN has been variously labeled as *masking*, *camouflaging*, and *compensatory behavior*, and clinical anecdotes abound among clinicians trying to understand this behavioral subgroup of autistic folks. Over the past 10 years, scholarly interest in PAN has dramatically increased within the published scientific literature on autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Increased research attention has spurred a proliferation of methods, definitions, measurement tools, and assumptions about the population of individuals who engage in PAN.

Because ASD is currently defined and diagnosed using behavioral criteria, autistic individuals who intentionally or unintentionally (consciously or unconsciously), behave in ways that are inconsistent with the presence of autism are likely to be missed by standard diagnostic tools. We were therefore interested in examining outcomes associated with PAN. However, no study has sought to identify and synthesize the current literature on PAN, so we aimed to provide an initial framework to better understand and study PAN.

We conducted a systematic review of the PAN literature as of May 2020. We found that PAN does exist and is being widely reported in the scientific literature. Internalizing symptoms, such as anxiety and depression, and which are often thought to be linked to PAN, were reported in only 17.4% of studies. Results suggest there is an association between PAN and internalizing problems. However, due to the limited data, we don't yet know the direction of this association. Fewer than half of all studies compared rates of PAN across genders. While a difference in PAN across genders was found to suggest higher rates of PAN among autistic females, many factors including differences in measurement methods and overlapping study samples, preclude our ability to draw firm conclusions about gender differences in PAN at the current time. We also found a dramatic underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities, with only a quarter of all studies reporting race or ethnicity data. Finally, nearly all studies formally or informally excluded individuals with intellectual disability.

Future research should further examine the hypothesized relationship between PAN and internalizing problems as it has important clinical implications in terms of identifying individuals at higher risk of developing internalizing problems and providing appropriate services and preventative care. Other imperative future directions are discussed, as increasing understanding of PAN in ASD has important implications for advancing the science of social communication and for significantly improving quality of life for autistic individuals and families.

Libsack, E.J.,* Keenan, E.G.,* Freden, C.E.,* Mirmina, J.,* Iskhakov, N.,* Krishnathasan, D.,* Lerner, M.D. (in press). A systematic review of passing as non-autistic in autism spectrum disorder. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-021-00365-1>

Don't forget to check out the podcast about this article featuring our team! Listen [here](#).

An electrocortical measure associated with metarepresentation mediates the relationship between autism symptoms and theory of mind

Autistic people report a wide range of difficulty in understanding the thoughts, perspectives, and feelings of others; often called “Theory of Mind”. Differences in the amount autistic individuals struggle with Theory of Mind abilities is thought to be due to the way their brains represent or process social information, but this is not yet well understood. A recent study published by the SCTL team found that even when autistic participants performed as well as non-autistic participants on a Theory of Mind computer game, their brains responded differently. These differences in their brain activity were related to both how well they were able to understand social information during the computer game and their unique autism symptoms. These results reveal a brain response that may help explain why some, but not all, autistic people struggle with Theory of Mind, and help identify who those people might be so that we can best support them..

Libsack, E.J.*, Trimmer, E.*, Hauschild, K.M.*, Hajcak, G., McPartland, J.C., & Lerner, M.D. (in press). An electrocortical measure associated with metarepresentation mediates the relationship between autism symptoms and theory of mind. *Clinical Psychological Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21677026211021975>

Low intensity interventions for autistic children and young people

In this book chapter, we outline the existing evidence-based (i.e., research-supported), low-intensity interventions (LIIs) for core and co-occurring symptoms experienced by autistic individuals. Standard and long-term autism spectrum disorder (ASD) interventions are longer than treatments for other populations, which can range from 12 to 16+ weeks in length and sometimes include several intervention hours per week (Perihan et al., 2019). LIIs for youth with ASD, are much more brief, ranging from single-session interventions (SSIs) to courses of 1-2 weekly sessions administered over 2-24 weeks. Therefore, LIIs reduce the burden on, or eliminate the need for, highly trained clinicians to deliver treatments, thus reducing the cost of treatment delivery, promoting community dissemination of evidence-based treatments, and increasing treatment accessibility for a wide range of patients.

We discuss the different methods of LII interventions for autistic youth, such as the use of technology (e.g., virtual reality and computer-based interventions), alternate treatment providers and settings (e.g., peers or teachers; classrooms or summer camps), and brief interventions (e.g., growth mindset interventions and romantic relationship workshops). Lastly, the chapter discusses challenges to existing LIIs for autistic youth, as well as potential solutions. Although interest in low-intensity interventions for autistic youth has increased recently, most published research remains limited to small sample sizes and small-scale studies. Future research should examine LIIs in large-scale randomized control trials (RCTs), replication studies, and include active control groups.

Libsack, E.J.*, McNair, M.L.*, Giacomantonio, J.*, Felsman, P.*, & Lerner, M.D. (in press). Low intensity interventions for autistic children and young people. In Bennett, S., Myles-Hooton, P., & Schleider, J. (Eds). *Oxford Guide to Low-Intensity Evidence-Based Interventions for Children and Young People*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Social interaction and psychosocial wellbeing in youth with and without ASD during mandated quarantine.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is defined by difficulties in social communication and interaction such as making eye contact or reciprocal conversation. As a result of these social difficulties, youth with ASD often experience a reduction in the quantity and quality of their friendships compared to their peers without ASD, as well as higher rates of loneliness and internalizing symptoms. Additionally, parents of youth with ASD commonly report elevated stress levels. These challenges make youth with ASD uniquely vulnerable to the impact of social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, early research is beginning to show existing vulnerabilities have been exacerbated during the pandemic. The current study examines how quarantine and social distancing impacts the psychosocial wellbeing of youth with ASD and their families.

In a sample of 76 youth with and without ASD, we found both groups increased their time spent interacting with friends through key social outlets (talking on the phone, interactive videogames, videochatting, and messaging). Still, youth with ASD lagged behind their peers, with the widest gap seen in one key outlet, talking on the phone. Higher current symptoms of ASD were associated with greater risk for internalizing symptoms, loneliness, and parenting stress.

Given the massive social disruptions and decreases in availability of services for youth with ASD during the pandemic, our results suggest the need to develop and proliferate targeted tele-therapeutic interventions for youth with ASD and their families. Higher parental stress has been linked to higher internalizing symptoms in their children with ASD, therefore it is especially important to consider the needs and mental health of parents of youth with ASD. Future research should investigate how the virtual interaction gap unfolds longitudinally over the course of the pandemic and whether gaps in adaptive social behavior lead to increases in loneliness and internalizing symptoms over time in youth with ASD.

Gerber, A.H.,* Keluskar, J., Lerner, M.D. (2021). Social Interaction and Psychosocial Wellbeing in Youth with and without ASD During Mandated Quarantine. In J. Goldblum (Chair). Masks, Mandates, and Mourning: Individuals with Neurodevelopmental and Genetic Disorders and Their Families During the Time of the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. Virtual Symposium at the Gatlinburg Conference, April 6-8.

<https://gatlinburg.lsi.ku.edu/54th-annual-gatlinburg-conference-sessions/#1618429610366-ba9b981c-ede9>

Social skills challenges, hurt feelings, and social problem-solving goals in children with ASD

Previous research has shown that autistic children demonstrate difficulty with social problem solving (SPS), including understanding what the social problem is as well as generating effective solutions to the social problem.

Autistic individuals often make negatively-valenced choices, such as aggression, in response to social transgressions and focus more on the outcome of a transgression than the intent in determining their willingness to forgive a person. These findings suggest that, in this population, responses to social problems may be influenced by one's subjective experience of the problem. Research examining how the subjective experience of a social problem (i.e., one's feelings getting hurt) may influence SPS goal selection (i.e., how one wants the social problem to turn out) remains sparse; thus, we evaluated the relationship between social problem subjective experience and goal selection. We also investigated how the type of SPS goal selected (positively-valenced = prosocial/problem-focus; negatively-valenced = passive-aggressive/retributive) related to parent-reported social skills.

In a sample of 46 autistic youth, 50% never identified that the social problems presented hurt their feelings, while 8.7% of the sample indicated that every social problem presented hurt their feelings. Analyses revealed that autistic youth who always identified the social problem hurt their feelings, were more likely to select a negatively-valenced (passive aggressive or retributive) SPS goal. Further, autistic children who had more parent-reported social skill difficulties generally made more negatively-valence SPS goal selections, and this relationship seemed to be driven by specific social difficulties in fulfilling social responsibilities.

The present study's findings highlight how subjective emotional experience of a social problem may interact with not only SPS goals but also challenges in social skills, and research should continue to explore the relationships among these three factors. Additionally, this work underscores the importance of autistic individuals' lived experiences and the impact subjective experience of situations can have on subsequent behavior.

McNair, M.L.,* Mondejar, V.,* Mordekai, N.,* Russo-Ponsaran, N.,* Lerner, M.D. (2021, April). *Social Skills Challenges, Hurt Feelings, and Social Problem-Solving Goals in Children with ASD*. Flash Talk at the Society for Research in Child Development 2021 Biennial Meeting - Virtual.

Comparison of social skills deficits and strengths profiles in youth with autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) commonly experience social skills struggles. However, these challenges may present differently across these two populations. Research from recent years suggests that ASD youth may have more acquisition deficits (i.e., difficulties in not *knowing* what to do) and fewer performance deficits (i.e., difficulties in not *doing* what they already know) than ADHD youth, while both populations appear to have fewer social skill strengths (i.e., social skills they *always* do) than typically developing (TD) peers. This study aimed to better investigate these *specific* social skill components and how they may vary in ASD, ADHD, and TD youth, by analyzing results on a social skills questionnaire.

We found that ASD youth showed significantly more acquisition deficits than ADHD youth, and significantly more deficits and fewer strengths than TD youth. However, ASD and ADHD youth did not differ on performance deficits or social skill strengths. This suggests that ASD and ADHD youth share a profile of learned social skills that are not being enacted. Further, ADHD youth had similar acquisition deficits and skills strengths, but significantly more performance deficits than TD youth.

These findings highlight that difficulties in knowing what to do in social situations does not fully define social challenges in ASD, and that performance deficits, or kids not *doing* behaviors that they already know, appear to reflect a large portion of social struggles in this population. This has implications for the way social skills are taught and suggests that more performance-based interventions may better improve social competence.

Gates, J.A.,* Gerber, A.H.,* Miller, C.E.,* Lerner, M.D. (2021, May 3-2). Comparison of Social Skills Deficits and Strengths Profiles in Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [Poster presentation]. *International Society for Autism Research (INSAR) 2021 Annual Convention, Virtual.*

Vocal emotion recognition: behavior and brain response in adolescents with and without ASD

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is characterized by impairments in social communication with some individuals demonstrating difficulty with emotion recognition. Considerable research has examined facial emotion recognition abilities in children with ASD, yet less has focused on vocal emotion recognition (VER). Previous behavioral VER findings have been mixed. The few studies examining the time course of brain response to VER, using event-related potentials (ERPs; N100, P200), suggest differences in brain response to vocal emotions. The N100 (a brain marker of orientation toward auditory information) differs in ASD and is related to more errors while identifying vocal emotions. The P200 amplitude indexes emotional voices compared to neutral voices, and some evidence suggests the P200 is modulated by specific emotions. However, it is not clear whether VER ERPs differ by emotional intensity level in individuals with ASD. Using data from our ISPY study, we examined differences in emotion recognition errors, as well as N100 and P200 ERPs, during VER, and whether differences may be driven by low versus high intensity emotional prosody (rhythm and stress patterns in speech) in adolescents with and without ASD.

Adolescents with ASD made more errors in identifying emotional prosodic cues and had a slower N100 latency (N100 response) in response to vocal emotion. This builds upon prior work showing youth with ASD have more difficulty identifying emotions expressed by voices. This suggests differences in early brain processing are present in auditory (voice) and visual (face) domains. Unexpectedly, the N100, not the P200, differed by intensity, specifically during high intensity vocal emotion expression. The N100 is conceptualized as a pre-emotion, sensory ERP that changes with attention, so youth with ASD may allocate reduced attentional resources to high intensity social stimuli. Future research should examine whether this may be due to reduced attention to high intensity voices throughout development shaping N100 latency.

Day, T.C., Boateng, S., & Lerner, M.D. (2021, April). *Vocal emotion recognition (VER) indexed by behavior and neural response in adolescents with and without ASD*. Poster at the Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Virtual Conference.

Perspectives of key stakeholders on employment of autistic adults across the United States, Australia, and Sweden

The goal of this article is to understand the perspectives of individuals that are diagnosed with or express interest in autism spectrum disorder autistic on ways to help adults with autism find and maintain employment. Key participants we talked with included family members, service providers, autism researchers, and advocacy group representatives. Employment rates for individuals with autism spectrum disorder around the world remain low. Therefore, we conducted interviews in the United States, Australia, and Sweden to get a global perspective on the topic. Our findings indicated that the most important factor for workplace success was the workplace environment. This environment includes things such as employer support, attitudes, and relationships with employees. Our results found that the best way to improve employment outcomes for adults with autism spectrum disorder may be to remove barriers in the workplace environments and increase relevant accommodations.

Black, M., Mahdi, S., Milbourn, B., Thompson, C., D'Angelo, A., Strom, E., Falkmer, M., Falkmer, T., Lerner, M.D., Halladay, A., Gerber, A.H.,* Esposito, C.M.,* Girdler, S., Bolte, S. (2019). Perspectives of key stakeholders on employment of autistic adults across the USA, Australia and Sweden. *Autism Research*, 12(11), 1648–1662. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2167>

Friendship in school-age boys with autism spectrum disorders: a meta-analytic summary and developmental, process-based model

Many children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) tend to have difficulties making friends and therefore have fewer friendships than youth without autism. Despite the incorrect assumption that children with autism do not want friendships, ASD youth self-report having current friendships and desiring to make new friends. Researchers reviewed previous studies to better understand friendship development in youth boys with ASD and how it compared to non-ASD youth friendship making. They found that according to both peer and parent reports, autistic youth do make friends, but the self-reported quality and quantity of friendships are lower than non-ASD youth. These lower self-reports were found to be influenced by communication and information processing issues among ASD youth. This study suggests that ASD youth have delayed processing of social information which may have implications for the active performance of social skills, regardless of a person's motivation to engage in social interaction or their knowledge of social skills, which impacts the quality and development of friendships.

Mendelson, J.L.*, Gates, J.A.* & Lerner, M.D. (2016). Friendship in school-age boys with autism spectrum disorders: a meta-analytic summary and developmental, process-based model. *Psychological Bulletin*, 142(6), 601–622. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000041>

Publication Stats



Most Recent Published and Presented Papers, Talks, and Abstracts

* = Student author; ‡ = Joint first-authorship

Published Articles

- Lawlor, J., Thomas, C., Guhin, A.T., Kebyon, K. Lerner, M.D., UCAS Consortium, & Drahota, A. (*in press*). Suspicious and fraudulent online survey participation: A tutorial and case study utilizing the REAL Framework. *Methodological Innovations*.
- Libsack, E.J.,* Keenan, E.G.,* Freden, C.E.,* Mirmina, J.,* Iskhakov, N.,* Krishnathasan, D.,* Lerner, M.D. (*in press*). A systematic review of passing as non-autistic in autism spectrum disorder. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-021-00365-1>
- McPartland, J.C., Lerner, M.D., Bhat, A., Clarkson, T.,* Jack, A., Koohsari, S., Matuskey, D., McQuaid, G.A., Su, W-C, & Trevisan, D.A. (*in press*). Looking Back at the Next 40 Years of ASD Neuroscience Research. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-021-05095-5>
- Libsack, E.J.,* Trimber, E.,* Hauschild, K.M.,* Hajcak, G., McPartland, J.C., & Lerner, M.D. (*in press*). An electrocortical measure associated with metarepresentation mediates the relationship between autism symptoms and theory of mind. *Clinical Psychological Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21677026211021975>
- Mayor Torres, J.M. ‡*, Clarkson, T.‡*,^ Hauschild, K.M.*, Luhmann, C.C., Lerner, M.D., Riccardi, G. (*in press*). Facial emotions are accurately encoded in the brains of those with autism: A deep learning approach. *Biological Psychiatry: Cognitive Neuroscience and Neuroimaging*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bpsc.2021.03.015>
- Keifer, C.M.,* Day, T.C.,* Hauschild, K.M.,* & Lerner, M.D. (2021). Social and Non-social Reward Anticipation in Typical Development and Autism Spectrum Disorders: Current Status & Future Directions. *Current Psychiatry Reports*, 23(6), 32. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-021-01247-7>
- Corbett, B.A., Schwartzman, J.M., Libsack, E.J.,* Muscatello, R.A., Lerner, M.D., Simmons, G.L., White, S.W. (2021). Camouflaging in autism: examining sex-based and compensatory models in social cognition and communication. *Autism Research*, 14, 127-142. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2440>
- Simmons, G.L., Ioannou, S., Smith, J.V., Corbett, B.A., Lerner, M.D., & White, S.W. (2021). Utility of an observational social skill assessment as a measure of social cognition in Autism. *Autism Research*, 14, 709-719. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2404>

Editorials, Commentaries, & Replies in Peer-Reviewed Journals

- Amaral, D.G. and de Vries, P.J., et al. (2020), COVID- 19 and Autism Research: Perspectives from Around the Globe. *Autism Research*, 13: 844-869. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2329>

Book Chapters, Abstracts & Other Published Work

- Mayor-Torres, J. M.,* Ravanelli, M., Medina DeVilliers, S. E.,* Lerner, M. D., and Riccardi, G. (2021). Interpretable sincnet-based deep learning for emotion recognition from eeg brain activity. In Proceedings of the 43rd Annual International Conference of the IEEE Engineering in Medicine and Biology Society. October 31 – November 4, 2021 (Virtual). <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2107.10790.pdf>

Book Chapters, Abstracts & Other Published Work (cont.)

- Mayor-Torres, J. M.,* Ravanelli, M., Medina DeVilliers, S. E.,* Lerner, M. D., and Riccardi, G. (2021). Interpretable sincnet-based deep learning for emotion recognition from eeg brain activity. In Proceedings of the 43rd Annual International Conference of the IEEE Engineering in Medicine and Biology Society. October 31 – November 4, 2021 (Virtual). <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2107.10790.pdf>
- Libsack, E.J.,* McNair, M.L.,* Giacomantonio, J.,* Felsman, P.,* & Lerner, M.D. (in press). Low-intensity interventions for autistic children and young people. In Bennett, S., Myles-Hooton, P., & Schleider, J. (Eds). *Oxford Guide to Low-Intensity Evidence-Based Interventions for Children and Young People*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Presentations

- McNair, M.L.,* Mondejar, V.,* Mordekai, N.,* Russo-Ponsaran, N.,* Lerner, M.D. (2021, April). *Social Skills Challenges, Hurt Feelings, and Social Problem-Solving Goals in Children with ASD*. Flash Talk at the Society for Research in Child Development 2021 Biennial Meeting - Virtual.
- Gates, J.A.,* Gerber, A.H.,* Miller, C., Lerner, M.D., Quantifying Acquisition and Performance Deficits and Strengths as Social Skills Profiles in Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder. In M.D. Lerner (Chair). *Innovations in Measurement of Social Competence in Child Clinical Populations*. Symposium at the Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting. Online. April 7 - 9.
- Gerber, A.H.,* Keluskar, J., Lerner, M.D. (2021). Social Interaction and Psychosocial Wellbeing in Youth with and without ASD During Mandated Quarantine. In J. Goldblum (Chair). *Masks, Mandates, and Mourning: Individuals with Neurodevelopmental and Genetic Disorders and Their Families During the Time of the COVID-19 Global Pandemic*. Virtual Symposium at the Gatlinburg Conference, April 6-8. <https://gatlinburg.lsi.ku.edu/54th-annual-gatlinburg-conference-sessions/#1618429610366-ba9b981c-ede9>
- Sachs, R., Albano, A., Kerns, C.M., Lerner, M.D., Moskowitz, L., Pimentel, S., and Rosen, T.(2020). "Not an ASD Expert? Not a Problem! Watch and Learn How You Can Use the Fundamentals of CBT to Treat Patients with Autism and Increase Access to Care" Clinical Roundtable presented at the 54th Annual Convention of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, virtual.
- Pugliese, C.E., , Kenworthy, L., Keefer, A., Gotham, K., Lerner, M.D., Kerns, C., & Bascom, J. (2020, November). Stuck on a feeling: How cognitive inflexibility impacts treatment of psychiatric symptoms in autism spectrum disorders [Clinical Round Table]. The 54th Annual Convention of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, Philadelphia, PA.

Poster Presentations

- Schiavo, K. R.,* McDonald, R. G.,* Lerner, M. D., & Kang, E.* (2021, May). Relations of Theory of Mind and Anxiety in Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Poster accepted to the 2021 *Association for Psychological Science Virtual Convention*.
- Boateng, S.,* Day, T.C.,* & Lerner, M.D. (2021, May). Vocal Emotion Recognition in Adolescents with and without ASD in Response to Child Versus Adult Voices. Poster at the *International Society for Autism Research Virtual Meeting*.
- Rosen, T.E.,* Rodriguez-Seijas, C.,* Gadow, K.D., & Lerner, M.D. (2021, May). *Incorporating ASD symptoms into a transdiagnostic model of internalizing symptoms results in an improved model for youth with ASD*. Poster accepted for the annual meeting of the International Society for Autism Research, Virtual.
- Keifer, C.M.,* Day, T.C.,* Nelson, B.M., Jarcho, J., Clarkson, T.,* & Lerner, M.D. (May, 2021). Anticipation of Social and Non-Social Rewards in Youth With and Without ASD. Poster at the 2021 *International Society for Autism Research Annual Meeting*.

Poster Presentations (cont.)

- Kang, E.* & Lerner, M. D. (2021, May). Predicting Electrophysiological Indices of Change in a RCT of a Group-Based Social Skills Intervention for Youth with ASD. Poster accepted at the *International Society for Autism Research 2021 Virtual Annual Meeting*.
- McDonald, R.G., Yacoub, N., Khawar, S., Lerner, M.D., & Kang, E.* (2021, May). Discrete electrocortical predictors of anxiety during follow-up period after social skills intervention for youth with autism spectrum disorder. Poster accepted at the *International Society for Autism Research 2021, Virtual Annual Meeting*.
- McNair, M.L., Libsack, E.,* Mondejar, V.,* Mordekai, N.,* Russo-Ponsaran, N.,* McKown, C.,* Lerner, M.D. (2021, May). To be Good or to be Right: Effects of Social Problem Solving Competence and Congruency on Social Functioning in ASD. Poster at the *International Society for Autism Research 2021 Annual Meeting, Virtual*.
- Gates, J.A.,* Gerber, A.H.,* Miller, C.E.,* Lerner, M.D. (2021, May 3-2). Comparison of Social Skills Deficits and Strengths Profiles in Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [Poster presentation]. *International Society for Autism Research (INSAR) 2021 Annual Convention, Virtual*.
- Day, T.C.,* Boateng, S.,* & Lerner, M.D. (2021, April). Vocal emotion recognition (VER) indexed by behavior and neural response in adolescents with and without ASD. Poster at the *Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Virtual Meeting*.
- Medina-DeVilliers, S.E.,* Day, T.C.,* Hauschild, K.M.,* & Lerner, M.D. (2021, April) Autism Spectrum Disorder Moderate the Effect of Age on N170 Latency to Faces in Middle Childhood. Poster at the *Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Conference*. Online.
- Simmons, G.L.,* Laird, R.D., Lerner, M.D. Corbett, B.A., & White, S.W (2020, November). In Pursuit of the Golden Egg: Utility of Difference Scores in an Observational Social Skill Assessment. Poster Presentation at the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT) Annual Convention, Philadelphia, PA
- Narvekar, K.S.,* Granieri, J.E.,* Gerber, A.H.,* McNair, M.L.,* Lerner, M.D. (2020, November). The Relationship Between Parent-reported Symptomatology and Observed Peer Interaction among Autism Spectrum Disorder. Poster at the Autism Spectrum/Developmental Disabilities Pre-Conference (ASDD Special Interest Group) for the *Convention of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies*, Philadelphia, PA
- Day, T.C.,* McNair, M.L.,* & Lerner, M.D. (2020). *The relationship between vocal emotion recognition and autism symptoms: moderation by cognitive abilities*. Poster at the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies Annual Convention in Philadelphia, PA.
- Gerber, A.H.,* Giacomantonio, J.,* Uriarte, V.N., Schleider, J., & Lerner, M.D. (2020). Single-Session Growth-Mindset Intervention Improves Perceived Control and Depression in Youth with ASD: A Pilot RCT. Poster at the *Autism Spectrum/Developmental Disorders Special Interest Group Exposition at the Annual Convention of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies*, Philadelphia, PA, November 19-22.
- Malik, I.,* Day, T.C.,* Keifer, C.M.,* & Lerner, M.D. (2020). *An EEG metric of face processing indexes informant discrepancy of autism symptoms in adolescents with ASD*. Poster at the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies Annual Convention in Philadelphia, PA.
- Iskhakov, N.,* Day, T.C.,* Giacomantonio, J.,* Libsack, E.,* & Lerner, M.D. (2020, November). Restricted and repetitive behaviors and social impairments in relation to separation anxiety in youth with and without autism spectrum disorder. Poster at the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies Annual Convention in Philadelphia, PA.
- Granieri, J.E.,* Gerber, A.H.,* McNair, M.L.,* Lerner, M.D. (2020, November). The relationship between parent-report of atypical social behavior and first impressions ratings by peers with ASD. Poster at *Convention of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies*, Philadelphia, PA.

Letter from..

THE AUTISM INITIATIVE



Hello Families, Friends, and Colleagues:

We are The Stony Brook Autism Initiative, an organization that is focused on advocating and providing opportunities for individuals on the Autism spectrum. The Initiative deals with outreach, program planning, and aims to support families and individuals on the Autism Spectrum throughout Long Island and beyond. Specifically, our team members work to make a huge impact on the autism community by helping families and individuals on the spectrum connect with information, activities, and services. Our main goal is to unify researchers, clinicians, staff and students to provide a more inclusive environment for children and adults alike. Furthermore, our current staff and student interns are highly dedicated to our goals and are excited to connect, learn, and work alongside the autism community. It is a great privilege to collaborate with the Social Competence and Treatment Lab and we hope many of you can attend our various social programs throughout the year. This year, we have various active programs featured in the SCTL Scoop, those being: craft club, virtual book club, a poetry slam, and a mentorship program for adolescents with ASD called the Sidekick Squad. We hope to see you at our next event!

Please feel free to contact The Initiative directly via email at autism_initiative@stonybrook.edu.

Sincerely,

All of your friends at the Autism Initiative

Check out [this](#) video of our team detailing the latest program developments & supports for the community!

THE AUTISM INITIATIVE



THE SIDEKICK SQUAD

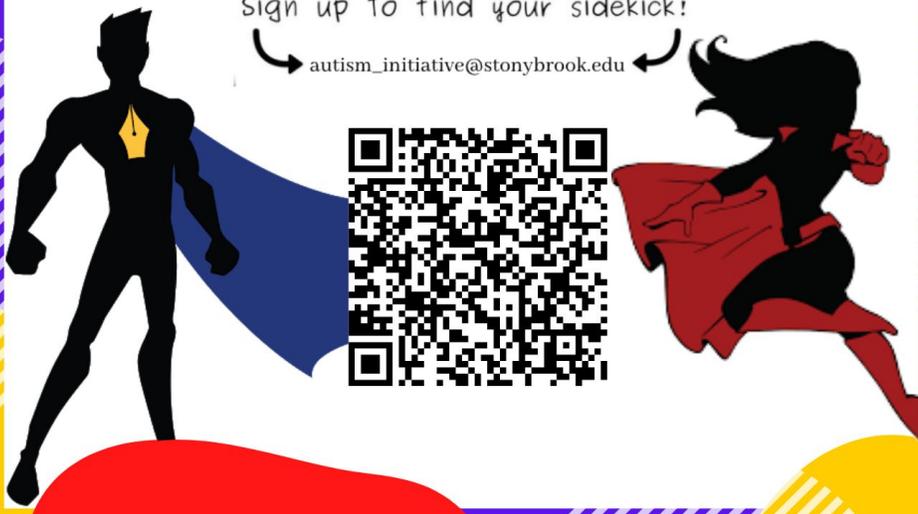
Calling all superheroes!

We have begun a new round of recruitment for our mentorship program, the Sidekick Squad! We pair undergraduate mentors "Sidekicks" with teenagers "Heroes" on the Autism Spectrum. We pair our Heroes and Sidekicks based on common interests and they get to meet one hour every week through Zoom or Facetime.

Age Range: 13-18

Sign up to find your sidekick!

→ autism_initiative@stonybrook.edu ←



Visit [this](#) link to register!

THE AUTISM INITIATIVE

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THE AUTISM INITIATIVE PRESENTS...

CRAFT CLUB

PAPER PLATE RAINBOW CRAFT

MARCH 25TH
4:30PM
ZOOM LINK:
HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/2P8T4XFJ




THE AUTISM INITIATIVE

THE AUTISM INITIATIVE PRESENTS:

CRAFT CLUB

PAPER PLATE UMBRELLA

APRIL 29TH
4:30PM
ZOOM LINK:
HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/2P8T4XFJ



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Contact us at autism_initiative@stonybrook.edu for more information!

Contact us!

There will be more studies and programs coming soon! Please contact us for more information!

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