A greater number of adults on the autism spectrum are attending college than ever before, due to increases in awareness and advances in diagnosis, services, and supports. The transition needs for students on the autism spectrum are complex, and in general, people with autism are at high risk for poor outcomes in terms of accessing higher education and stable work. Recently, several members of our lab conducted a project to better understand the experience of autistic college students. We wanted to learn more about questions such as:

* How students are supported in college, and what services they find helpful
* What their social experience and social support systems are like
* How autism fits into their social identity and community

We are still working on interpreting the results of the research, but we recently completed a paper on autism as a social identity, connection with an autism community, and disclosure practices.

IDENTITY, DISCLOSURE PRACTICES, & COMMUNITY

Overall, the various aspects of our findings point to the fact that college students with ASD want to be seen for who they are, and they want others to know and understand them in a way that is genuine and not stereotyped.

Our research found that there was variation between individuals in terms how autism fits into their social identity. Some students reported autism as being an important part of who they were, and others said it was not. Many students also said they had mixed feelings about it, with one calling his autism “a double-edged sword.” Most of the students we spoke with said they rarely told other people about their ASD diagnosis, and in general, they only told very close friends or school personnel. Several people said they worried that others would negatively judge them or feel they were making excuses. However, many students said that, when they did feel comfortable sharing this information, other people had positive or neutral reactions. Most students told us they did not feel part of a broader ASD community, although on an individual basis, they felt they had shared experiences with others on the spectrum, and often had friends who were on the spectrum too.
Meet the MSU Autism Lab

Brooke Ingersoll, PhD
Lab Director
I am an associate professor of Psychology at MSU. I joined MSU in 2007 and founded the MSU Autism Lab. I am interested in research on interventions that can improve the lives of children with ASD and their families.

Kaylin Russell, BA
Lab Manager
I am the lab manager who is a recent graduate of MSU. I am interested in how internalizing behaviors are related to ASD symptomatology and also how early intervention strategies can improve social communication skills. In my free time, I love to practice yoga and travel with my family.

Karís Casagrande, MA
Graduate Student
I am a 4th year graduate student in the MSU Clinical Psychology program. I am interested in understanding how parents advocate for services and how to address the gaps in service access for families and children with ASD. In my free time, I serve on the board of the Mich-Michigan Autism Association and enjoy playing board games and traveling.

Kyle Frost, MA
Graduate Student
I am a 2nd year graduate student in the Clinical Psychology program at MSU. My research interests include measuring and understanding the common elements of ASD interventions, and how intervention strategies lead to child learning. When I’m not in the lab, I spend a lot of time playing with my dog and taking her on hikes!

Diondra Straiton, BA
Graduate Student
I just joined the lab as a graduate student in the MSU Clinical Psychology program. I am interested in improving parent/caregiver engagement in autism-related services for traditionally underserved families. In my free time, I enjoy hiking and listening to live music. I'm excited to start learning more about ASD services in Michigan!

Full lab picture (left to right): Madison, Riley, Kaylin, Grace, Scott, Megan, Brooke, Diondra, Natalie, Kyle, & Karis (Not pictured: Katie)
Parent Involvement Project

WHAT IS IT?
Parent involvement in intervention is key to improving outcomes for children with ASD.

This project, funded by the US Health Resources and Service Administration Maternal and Child Health Bureau, is designed to measure the effectiveness of different components of an internet-based program designed to improve parent involvement in intervention for families of young children with ASD.

WHAT WILL YOU DO?
Families will complete the following over a 9 month period:
- An initial intake assessment
- Participation in one of three groups over 4 to 6 months: a web-based information and support group, a self-directed training group, or a therapist-assisted training group
- 3 month follow-up

TO PARTICIPATE, YOUR CHILD MUST
- Have a diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder
- Be between the ages of 18 and 96 months at intake
- Meet other inclusion criteria

FAMILIES WILL:  
- Receive $25 during each assessment period ($75 total)
- Receive an initial and follow-up assessment report
- Be provided all technology if needed at no cost

If you have questions about participation, please contact Kaylin Russell:
autlab@msu.edu
517-432-8031.

Project ImPACT Program

Project ImPACT is a parent-mediated intervention program developed by Brooke Ingersoll and Anna Dvortscak in 2010. The curriculum is designed to help community providers deliver high quality, evidence-based parent coaching to families of young children with ASD and related developmental delays. We have incorporated new research from MSU Autism Lab members and our collaborators into a second edition of the program and are excited to announce that the second edition will be available in June 2019.

This year, we have provided training in Project ImPACT to community providers in East Lansing, MI, Philadelphia, PA Iowa City, IA, and Albuquerque, NM, and Taipan, Taiwan.

Information on our 2019 Introductory Workshop in East Lansing, MI and Portland, OR will be available soon.

If you have questions about Project ImPACT training for your organization, please contact Brooke Ingersoll:
ingers19@msu.edu

Teaching Social Communication to Children with Autism & Other Developmental Delays

The second edition of the Project ImPACT curriculum will be available in June 2019!!
Nathan, 7 years old
Over the summer, Nathan was enrolled in an afternoon daycare run by the Midland Community Center. He had several one-on-one aides available who all fell in love with him. We don’t blame them- Nathan is a cutie! He just started kindergarten in an ASD classroom and is doing very well. Nathan spends much of his time in the ASD classroom with six other students, but is starting to generalize in a typical kindergarten classroom for a few hours per week. He loves going to gym class with his general education peers, and he has greatly improved in many functional areas, including developing a wider vocabulary, demonstrating a better understanding of one- and multi-step directions, and maintaining better fine and gross motor control. Nathan’s family is so incredibly proud of him.

*Awesome job Nathan! Keep working hard in school!

Jia, 4 years old
Jia recently started a program at Children’s Therapy Corner called Sandbox and her behavior has improved immensely since she has started that program. She never stops talking! She recently pointed to a bird in the sky and said "Look Mommy - a bird is flying in the sky!", sharing an experience and using original thought to express herself. This summer, Jia discovered that she loves speed and adventure, insisting on going to Mac Wood's Dune Ride in Silver Lake 4 times! She recently joined a band on stage at a festival to sing the ABC's and enjoyed a ride in a 4 seater airplane, yelling "Faster" the whole time. She also has been answering questions like "what did you do today", "what is your name", "what is your favorite color" and "how old are you" appropriately. Her favorite outdoor activity is sidewalk chalk, which she would do non-stop if she had the choice. She's also started doing basic addition and subtraction this summer, counting to 100 by 1's, 5's and 10's, and counting to 1000 by 100's.

*Jia loves feeding the giraffes at Boulder Ridge! Looks so fun Jia!

Family Tidbits
Below are stories about a few kiddos that have been involved in our lab! Take a look at what they’ve been up to:

Dominic, 14 years old
In a lot of ways, Dominic going through adolescence as a teen on the Autism Spectrum is very similar to a typically-developing teen not on the Autism Spectrum. He has sprouted a moustache (and a teeny beard) and his voice has gotten much deeper. Recently, one morning, while getting ready to go to school, he started using some profanity. Dominic was "testing" his boundaries. Mom said, "you might want to watch what you say....," and before mom could finish her sentence, Dominic said, "or you'll be in mommy's doghouse!" Yep, he was pretty close to paying a visit!!!!

*Wow Dominic! We can't believe how old you are!