

Michigan State University Autism Lab



Winter 2021 Newsletter

Welcoming Our New Lab Members, Updates on New Projects, And More!



Meet The Lab:

Back Row (Left to Right): Mya Howard (RISE Study Caregiver Liaison), Sanchia Fernandes (RISE Study Provider Liaison), Julia Nauman (RISE Project Coordinator/MSU Autism Lab Manager), Kyle Frost (Graduate Student)

Front Row (Left to Right): Ellie Harrington (RISE Study Postdoctoral Research Fellow), Dr. Brooke Ingersoll (PI), Ana Pomales Ramos (Graduate Student), and Diondra Straiton (Graduate Student)

About the Autism Research Lab:

The MSU Autism Research Lab, directed by Brooke Ingersoll, PhD, studies the development of social communication in young children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and the development of interventions to improve these skills. We are also interested in the dissemination of evidence-based interventions and the impact of ASD on the family.

In This Issue:

About the Autism Research Lab.....	1
Reciprocal Imitation and Social Engagement (RISE) Study	2-3
Our New Lab Members	4
Research Highlights	5
Interested in Joining the Lab?	5
Visit Our Website.....	6
Contact Us.....	6
Follow Our Social Media	6

Reciprocal Imitation and Social Engagement (RISE) Study

Written by Undergraduate Research Assistant Logan Holmes

The prevalence rate of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnoses in the US as of 2020 is estimated at a ratio of one in 54 births, and approximately 1.8% of all children in the US have an autism diagnosis (Autism Speaks, 2020). Further, children with ASD exhibit significant deficits in social communication, including delayed language and imitation skills, which may appear to play a salient role in the development of later social–communicative skills (Ingersoll, 2010). Therefore, the need for applied research and intervention for children with ASD is necessary to harness brighter futures for their communicative development.

In April 2021, Michigan State University’s Autism Research Lab was awarded \$3.2 million as part of a \$12 million total grant from the National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH), given to participating organizations in a multi-site clinical trial examining effective early intervention methods for toddlers with or at-risk for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This multi-site study investigates the effectiveness of Reciprocal Imitation Training (RIT) in publicly funded early intervention programs in four states including Michigan, Massachusetts, Illinois, and Washington. More precisely, the research project will provide information on the effectiveness of parent-mediated RIT when delivered in community settings and may find moderators of outcomes and other factors that influence the quality of intervention.

The research will be a part of the RISE (Reciprocal Imitation and Social Engagement) project, comprised of a national network of researchers investigating parent coaching strategies in intervention practices for those with ASD. MSU’s Autism Research Lab Director Brooke Ingersoll specifically indicated that, “this project will train early intervention providers to use an evidence-based, inexpensive, parent-implemented intervention that can improve child and family outcomes”, in speaking moreover about RIT with RISE. Further, Dr. Ingersoll remarks that, “RIT is ideally suited for early intervention settings because it is low intensity, play-based, easy to learn and implement and can be taught to family members for their independent use.” Therefore, since RIT is a naturalistic behavioral intervention that teaches imitation within a social–communicative context, it has been shown to be an effective tool at teaching communicative acts such as spontaneous, generalized object and gesture imitation (Ingersoll, 2010). As noted above, the rise in ASD prevalence may pose a challenge for publicly funded organizations that are potentially ill-equipped to offer high-quality, evidence-based interventions. More precisely, this challenge the research team intends to address is unintended amounts of intervention variance between practices, with the goal of improving the consistency in quality of services for those showing early signs of ASD. Specifically, analyzing the effectiveness of Reciprocal Imitation Teaching, or RIT, is the focus of the study, Ingersoll said. Dr. Ingersoll and the team at the MSU Autism Research Lab look forward with excitement to their continued participation and potential findings in such pertinent research on ASD.

References

Ingersoll, B., & Lalonde, K. (2010). The impact of object and gesture imitation training on language use in children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 53(4), 1040–1051. [https://doi.org/10.1044/1092-4388\(2009/09-0043\)](https://doi.org/10.1044/1092-4388(2009/09-0043))

Autism Speaks Inc. (2020, March 26). CDC estimate on autism prevalence increases by nearly 10 percent, to 1 in 54 children in the U.S. Retrieved March 28, 2021, from <https://www.autismspeaks.org/press-release/cdc-estimate-autism-prevalence-increases-nearly-10-percent-1-54-children-us>



www.riseresearchnetwork.com

Additional Information on the RISE Research Study:

Q. How will using Mirror Me Online help with my child's developmental delays?

A: Social communication skills emerge in a predictable pattern, with nonverbal skills coming before verbal skills. Research has shown that imitation, an early emerging nonverbal social communication skill, plays a key role in the development of social interaction, pretend play, language learning, and emotional exchange. For this reason, even though Mirror Me Online is primarily focused on teaching imitation skills, we expect that this program will have “downstream” effects on social communication development more broadly.

Q: How do I sign up for the RISE Study?

A: Participation in the RISE Study is available only to families working with an Early Intervention Provider that is already enrolled in the study. If applicable, your Early Intervention provider will discuss your potential participation and will connect you with your local research site.

Q: How long is the study?

A: Participation lasts about 9 months from the first assessment to the third and final assessment.

Q: Where can I find more information on the RISE Study in Michigan?

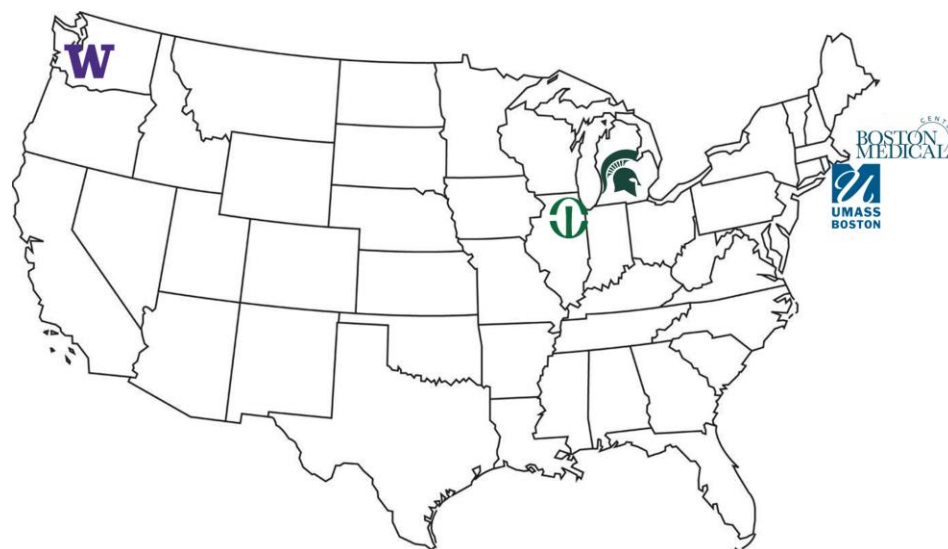
A: If you would like more information on the RISE Study within the state of Michigan, please contact the following individuals:

- General Information on RISE in Michigan: Contact Julia Nauman at naumanj@msu.edu
- Michigan EI Providers: Contact Sanchia Fernandes at ferna325@msu.edu
- Michigan Families and Parents: Contact Mya Howard at howardmy@msu.edu or call (313)-437-3099

Q: What if I would like to learn more about RISE at another research site or would like other information about the project?

A: Visit our website at riseresearchnetwork.com for more information and go to riseresearchnetwork.com/Contact to learn more about the RISE study at our other research sites.

The RISE Project involves researchers from around the country. The MSU Autism Lab collaborates with researchers from the University of Washington, Rush University Medical Center, the University of Massachusetts Boston, and Boston University.



Our New Lab Members:



Julia Nauman

Julia Nauman joined the MSU Autism Lab in June 2020. She has been working as the Project Coordinator for the RISE study and as the MSU Autism Lab's new Lab Manager. She has been involved in database management, overseeing the IRB for the RISE Study, coordination between research sites, hiring and managing the lab's undergraduate researchers, and editing video and visual media. She also had the opportunity to present data at the 2021 Virtual International Society for Autism Research Conference. Currently, Julia is being trained as a RISE assessor and is developing papers that focus on restrictive and repetitive behaviors in Autism.

Ellie Harrington

Dr. Ellie Harrington joined the MSU Autism lab as a post-doctoral research fellow in August. As part of her work on the RISE study, she trains early intervention providers to help caregivers develop their child's social communication skills through Reciprocal Imitation Teaching (RIT). She has delivered virtual workshops on RIT to early intervention providers across four states and provides ongoing consultation and support to early intervention agencies. She is developing papers describing best practices in remote training procedures and investigating how different early intervention service structures impact providers' abilities to learn new evidence-based practices.



Mya Howard

Mya Howard joined the MSU Autism Lab this past August. She has been working on the RISE Study as a caregiver liaison. She helped coordinate the first study events with our families. She is also working on developing a survey with Ana, a graduate student in our lab, that looks at the experiences of caregivers whose children participated in telehealth services.

Sanchia Fernandes

Sanchia Fernandes joined the MSU Autism Lab this past July. She has been working on the RISE Study as a provider liaison. She has assisted with training EI providers in RIT and coordinating study events with providers. She also worked on editing RIT coach and caregiver manuals.



Research Highlights



Diondra Straiton presented at the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies annual convention in November 2021. She presented a talk titled "Gatekeeping decisions for offering parent training interventions to Medicaid-enrolled autistic children" based on work with Kyle and Dr. Ingersoll. She also recently published a paper with a colleague, Aksheya Sridhar, on anti-Black racism in the autism field and how clinicians can work towards addressing anti-Black racism in their organizations. Check out the website with training resources and the link to the paper

here: <https://autismlab.psy.msu.edu/resources/anti-racism-resources/>

Kyle Frost is currently focusing on her dissertation and applying for her clinical internship year. She has published two papers in academic journals this year in collaboration with lab alumnae. With lead author Katherine Pickard, Kyle helped write a paper focusing on how providers in the early intervention system use naturalistic developmental behavioral interventions, which can be accessed here:

<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s10803-021-04882-4.pdf>.

With the help of Kaylin Russell, Kyle published a qualitative study about the different components of Project ImPACT and how they work, which can be accessed here: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/13623613211003747>



Julia Nauman presented at the International Society for Autism Research (INSAR) Virtual annual meeting in May 2021. Her presentation was entitled "Examining the Relationship between Stereotypy and Attentional Problems and Diagnoses in Individuals with ASD".

Check out her abstract, as well as the other abstracts from the INSAR 2021 Virtual Annual Meeting here: <https://www.autism-insar.org/general/custom.asp?page=2021AnnMtg>

Interested in Joining the Lab?

We offer undergraduate research assistant positions to Michigan State University students for course credit and for volunteers. Learn more about working in the MSU Autism Research Lab and download our application here: <https://autismlab.psy.msu.edu/about/prospective-undergrad/>

Dr. Ingersoll mentors graduate students in the Clinical Science doctoral program in the Department of Psychology. Learn more about the application process here:

<https://autismlab.psy.msu.edu/about/prospective-grad/>

Visit Our Website:



For more information on upcoming projects, research, workshops, and more, visit our website: <https://autismlab.psy.msu.edu/>

Contact Us:



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