Dr. Charlotte DiStefano is a clinical psychologist with expertise in minimally verbal children with ASD and related neurodevelopmental disorders. She is a Clinical Instructor in the department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences at University of California Los Angeles. After receiving a B.S. in Special Education from New York University and an Ed.M. in Mind Brain and Education from Harvard University, Dr. Charlotte Distefano received her Ph.D. in Psychological Studies in Education from UCLA. She completed her postdoctoral training at the UCLA Center for Autism Research and Treatment, under the mentorship of Dr. Shafali Jeste. Before earning her Ph.D., Dr. DiStefano worked as a special education teacher in both New York City and Los Angeles.

Dr. DiStefano's primary research interests are language development and intervention for minimally verbal children. She was awarded a Meixner Postdoctoral Fellowship in Translational Research from Autism Speaks to identify electrophysiological biomarkers related to language and literacy abilities in minimally verbal children with ASD. Her current work includes identifying biomarkers of social communication impairment in children with ASD (National Institutes of Health Autism Biomarkers Consortium for Clinical Trials), evaluating resting state electrophysiology as a predictor of intervention progress in minimally verbal children with ASD, and understanding the unique clinical profiles of neurogenetic syndromes associated with ASD.

Understanding Abilities in Minimally Verbal Children with ASD: Evidence from Brain and Behavior

Monday, December 10, 2018

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

AJ Drexel Autism Institute
3020 Market Street
Suite 501
Idea Lab

Approximately 25% of individuals with ASD remain minimally verbal despite access to intervention. Although unified by the lack of spoken language, the minimally verbal ASD population exhibits considerable heterogeneity with regard to cognitive, social and receptive language abilities. This variability likely results in part from the fact that many different pathways can lead to expressive language impairment. Improving outcomes for this subgroup of the autism spectrum requires better characterization and understanding of their abilities, in order to understand the underlying deficits. This talk will present research from multiple levels of investigation within the minimally verbal population, including behavioral and clinical characterization, resting state electrophysiology, and electrophysiological investigation of auditory and lexical processing profiles of children with ASD across language levels. Ultimately, the goal of this work is to improve our understanding of the mechanisms of language impairment in the ASD population, in order to predict developmental trajectories and discover individualized avenues for intervention.

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