Professor Sigan Hartley and her students employ a family systems approach to study the mechanisms and supports that foster optimal outcomes in families of children with autism. This presentation will focus on recent findings from an NIMH-funded R01 study investigating the ways in which child challenges associated with autism shape and are shaped by parents’ couple relationship in naturalistic contexts and across time. Data were collected using multiple methodologies—daily diaries; mother, father, and teacher report; observation of couple interactions; and physiological measures. Elucidating the pathways by which family challenges associated with autism impact couple interactions, and understanding why some couples are able to adapt successfully whereas others are not has significant implications for identifying potential avenues for improving the psychological and physical health of both parents and children with autism.

The VKC welcomes participants with disabilities. Contact kc@vanderbilt.edu for disability access information.