



January 28th, 2021

To The Office of the Human Research Protection Program,

In early December 2020, researchers at Vanderbilt University and UCLA reached out to transgender people across Southern California who are active in the community, work in advocacy, or work for organizations that provide care, resources, or safety for folks who do not identify as Cisgender. According to their email, the purpose of this meeting was to request feedback on a brain imaging study including set up, appropriate and inclusive materials, and ways in which the study team can respectfully connect with community organizers and partners. During the meeting, we learned that this study is already underway with approval by the UCLA Internal Review Board ("IRB") (#11-000459).

We are strongly recommending that transgender community members and LGBTQ organizations do not advertise or participate in this study. We have grave concerns about the unethical research design.

The research design purposefully causes mental health distress in order to trigger "dysphoria." This includes having participants wear tight leotards and taking photographs of their body. We were asked for input about low retention of trans participants and found the researchers unable to comprehend why this study is harmful. The researchers are falsely advertising this study without clarity about the expectations of participants and without consideration of the need for direct access to mental health after care.

We object to the purpose of the study and its potential consequences on access to care for transgender people. The researchers claim that their study could help transgender people, but their own research materials suggests they are developing tools that may curtail access to gender-affirming treatment. Further, Principal Investigator, Dr. Jamie Feusner, is also currently funded to study Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) and anorexia nervosa. He describes his broader research as seeking to understand phenotypes of **aberrant** perceptual and emotional processing that cross diagnostic boundaries of conditions involving body image such as BDD, eating disorders, and gender dysphoria. We object to the view that transgender people have an aberrant body image condition or that brain imaging of traumatic response could ultimately "help" trans people. It is suggestive of a search for medical "cure," which can open the door for more gatekeeping and restrictive policies and practices in relation to access to gender-affirming care. At a time in which trans lives are under attack, we find this kind of research to be misguided and dangerous.



**CALIFORNIA
LGBTQ**
HEALTH AND HUMAN
SERVICES **NETWORK**

We question the larger issue, that UCLA has a "Transgender Research Program" that this researcher heads, and it does not appear to have many connections to the trans community. We call on UCLA to shut down this research project immediately.

Furthermore, we call on UCLA:

- Researchers immediately cease the recruitment of participants and the use of the misleading title "The UCLA Transgender Research Program"
- Call on the Vice Chancellor for Research, Dr. Roger Wakimoto, to appoint an ad hoc committee to investigate the community expressed concerns pursuant to [Policy and Guidance: Complaints, Concerns and Suggestions, and Reports of Undue Influence Regarding the Conduct of Human Participants Research](#). The ad-hoc committee should include representation of transgender people. The findings and outcomes of the investigation should be made available to the public. We are requesting that an investigation is completed with results published publicly no later than April 1, 2021.
- Conduct a thorough assessment of the Interview Review Board focused on aligning IRB decision-making with UCLA's commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- Include transgender researchers and policy advocates to participate in their IRB review for any trans related research
- Include experienced transgender researchers and policy advocates to participate on scientific advisory boards **and** community advisory boards for any trans related research
- Thoroughly vet any professors-in-residence and tenured professors who wish to engage in transgender-related research and ensure their research and curriculum does not cause harm to the transgender community

As members of the TGI community, we realize that we are in need of research to fill the gaps in our access to care. However, we must remain vigilant that any research that is conducted does not impact our community negatively in terms of opening the door for potential policies that excludes us from society.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ezak Perez".

Ezak Perez
Executive Director
Gender Justice LA

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dannie Cesena".

Dannie Cesena, MPH
LGBTQ Program Manager
CA LGBTQ Health and Human Services



**CALIFORNIA
LGBTQ**
HEALTH AND HUMAN
SERVICES NETWORK



API EQUALITY-LA
Asian and Pacific Islanders for LGBTQ Equality



**CALIFORNIA
LGBTQ**
HEALTH AND HUMAN
SERVICES NETWORK



Karla Papula, AMFT
Outlet Program Director
Adolescent Counseling Services



Theresa Stewart



Cyril Harris *Morial Leonard* *Alex Roca*

