



January 20th, 2021

Dear Trans, Gender Non-Conforming and Intersex (TGI) Community Members,

In early December 2020, researchers at Vanderbilt University and UCLA Semel Institute Neuroscience and Human Behavior reached out to TGI 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 (#11-000459).

We strongly recommend that TGI community members and LGBTQ organizations do not advertise or participate in this study. We have grave concerns about the unethical research design, which purposefully causes mental health distress in order to trigger “dysphoria.” This includes having participants wear tight body suits, taking photographs of their bodies, and reproducing these images in public forums including academic papers and presentations. We were asked for input about low retention of TGI participants and found the researchers unable to comprehend why this study is harmful. There appeared to be no consideration of the mental health consequences and no direct access to mental health services for participants. The researchers are advertising this study without clarity about the expectations of participants, including transgender and nonbinary youth 10-17 years old.

We object to the purpose of the study and it’s potential consequences on access to care for TGI people. The researchers claim that their study could help TGI people, but their own research materials and publications suggest that they are developing tools that may curtail access to gender-affirming treatment. The Principal Investigator, [Dr. Jamie Feusner](#), describes his research as focused on “**aberrant**” perceptual and emotional processing disorders, including “Body Dysmorphic Disorder” (BDD) and anorexia nervosa. We object to the view that TGI people have an aberrant body image condition or that brain imaging of traumatic response could ultimately “help” TGI people access health care. 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 TGI lives are under attack, we find this kind of research to be misguided and dangerous.



**CALIFORNIA
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SERVICES **NETWORK**

If you have participated in this study, and have stopped participation due to experiencing mental health stress that was triggered by gender dysphoria within the study, please contact Ezak Perez at ezak@gjla.org. To sign on to this letter and stand with the TGI community in solidarity, please submit your organizations' logo to Ezak Perez (ezak@gjla.org) or Dannie Cesena (dcesena@health-access.org) by COB Friday January 31, 2021 or fill out the [google form](#). A community forum is being planned February 6, 2021 and you may RSVP at <https://forms.gle/p1QUiKQ5d5YxG7Tx7>.

Thank you for standing in solidarity with the TGI community.

Ezak Perez

Ezak Perez
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Dannie Cesena

Dannie Cesena, MPH
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Additional Sources:

<https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/researchers-explore-science-gender-identity-n789246>

<https://reporter.nih.gov/project-details/10006729>

<https://reporter.nih.gov/project-details/10051358>