



## **Additional Information Regarding Retraction of Travers, Ayres, Trump & Cagliani Manuscript**

United for Communication Choice has received several inquiries concerning ethical violations associated with the now-retracted study co-authored by Jason Travers, Kevin Ayres, Cary Trump, and Rachel Cagliani. That study was mentioned in UCC's September 6, 2018 [letter](#) to ASHA. The following additional information is shared with the permission of the two individuals whose ethical complaint led to the retraction. The complaint was filed with the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board (IRB), the [body](#) "charged with ensuring that human subjects research is conducted in compliance with the applicable federal, state, and institutional policies and procedures." Ayres, Trump, and Cagliani are employed by the University of Georgia, where the study took place; Travers is employed by the University of Kansas.

The ethical issues with the study include the following:

- **No Informed Consent:** The authors did not obtain signed consent from one of the study's two participants to be a participant in the study.
- **No Informed Consent:** The other participant did not provide consent to the authors to use video footage of the participant for any purpose, including for the data collection and analysis that was necessary to prepare the manuscript.
- **No IRB Approval:** Two of the four authors (Jason Travers and Rachel Cagliani) did not receive IRB approval to participate in the study at all, including to receive or access confidential identifiable participant information.
- **Unauthorized Collection and Public Sharing of HIPAA-Protected Confidential Information:** None of the authors obtained IRB approval to collect HIPAA-protected medical and educational records from study participants, nor did they obtain consent from either participant for this information to be collected or publicly disseminated in the now-retracted study.
- **Questionable Recruitment Tactics:** During the recruitment process, one of the researchers led the participants to believe that the purpose of the study was "to get schools to accept" RPM, even though the researcher informed the IRB the same week that the purpose of the study was to "to shed some light on this problem" of RPM by using "tests similar to those used in studies that debunked FC."



- **Violation of Participant Confidentiality; Questionable Recruitment Tactics:** The authors encouraged the participants to recruit additional participants for the study, knowing that by doing so, the participants would be revealing their identities as participants in the study. Even with the knowledge that their community would know the identity of the participants, the authors decided to publish their confidential information as a case study when no additional participants could be found. The participants were never informed of the risk that their involvement might be published as a case study.

Several of these acts or omissions violate ASHA's own ethical standards. Among them, ASHA's *Guidance on the Ethical Treatment of Research Participants* (2018) provides that, "The ethical treatment of research participants (human and animal) requires informed consent ... and confidentiality.... Failure to obtain written consent ... represents an ethical violation." ASHA Guidance also provides that, "Sharing information that can be used to identify a research participant is a violation of the [ASHA Code of Ethics]."

The ASHA *Guidance* indicates that any noncompliance with local, institutional, state, and federal regulations or guidelines for clinical practice and the responsible conduct of research violates the ASHA Code of Ethics, specifically Principle of Ethics I, Rule J; Principle of Ethics II, Rule C; and Principle of Ethics IV, Rule R. ASHA's *Guidance* also provides that it is a violation of its Code of Ethics for an individual to fail to report ethical violations he or she is aware of, even if the research is conducted in another professional area and is governed by a separate code of ethics.

## Timeline

- **July 30, 2018** - The pre-print of the article was posted on the <http://Psyaxriv.com> website on Monday, July 30, and was shared widely over the next few days by the authors and others, including on ASHA's social media sites.
- **August 1, 2018** - The participants filed their initial ethics complaint with the University of Georgia IRB on Wednesday, August 1 and supplemented it on August 16.
- **August 1, 2018** - The editors of the *Journal of Autism and Related Disorders* (JADD), the publication that had accepted the manuscript for publication, were notified of the ethical complaint late on August 1. JADD notified the authors that their manuscript was being placed on hold pending the outcome of the investigation.



- **August 3, 2018** - The pre-print was removed from <http://Psyaxriv.com> on August 3, and most of the Facebook and Twitter posts advertising the manuscript were deleted the same day.
- **August 8, 2018** - ASHA finalized its RPM position statement on August 8.
- **August 21, 2018** - On August 21, the University of Georgia IRB notified Kevin Ayres that it was terminating approval for the study due to “noncompliance with the regulations or the requirements or determinations of the IRB and UGA Human Research Protection Program policies.”
- **August 22, 2018** - On August 22, the University of Georgia IRB notified the participants that it had terminated approval for the study; that two of the manuscript’s four authors had not received the requisite approval to participate in the study; that video footage, transcriptions, and other confidential, identifiable participant data had been improperly shared and was in the process of being collected and destroyed; and that both the University of Georgia and the University of Kansas were in contact with JADD to prevent the manuscript’s publication.
- **August 23, 2018** - On August 23, the University of Georgia Chief Research Integrity and Safety Officer notified ASHA that the study would not be published, and informed ASHA that it would need to revise its RPM position statement accordingly.
- **August 28, 2018** - On August 28, the University of Georgia Research Integrity and Safety Officer followed up with ASHA when the ASHA position statement remained unchanged.
- **August 31, 2018** - On August 31, ASHA revised the RPM position statement to remove four of the five references to the Travers et al. study, and inserted a note at the bottom of the page suggesting that the authors voluntarily withdrew their study from publication (“was subsequently withdrawn by the authors”). The revised position statement retains the unsupported assertion that, “There is emerging scientific evidence that messages produced using RPM reflect the communication of the instructor and not of the person with disability.”