Re: Query publication

From: helmy.m@protonmail.com <helmy.m@protonmail.com>

To: Editorial Office <editorial.office@frontiersin.org>

CC: Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience - Peer Review <behavioralneuroscience.editorial.office@frontier...
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njcsousa@med.uminho.pt <njcsousa@med.uminho.pt>
nuno.sousa@pathena.com <nuno.sousa@pathena.com>

BCC: Ivan Oransky <ivan-oransky@erols.com>
Retraction Watch <team@retractionwatch.com>
retractionwatchteam@gmail.com <retractionwatchteam@gmail.com>

Date: Monday, March 29th, 2021 at 12:57 PM

Regarding the article Bhaskar et al., 2018 published in *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience, Emotion Regulation and Processing* titled 'Enriched Environment Facilitates Anxiolytic Efficacy Driven by Deep-Brain Stimulation of Medial Prefrontal Cortex' by Yamini Bhaskar, Lee Wei Lim, and Rupshi Mitra, please see past correspondence below.

I believe it is unethical to publicly comment on an ongoing-investigation. However, if the investigation is closed or there is no response by the authors during a reasonable period of time and no expression of concern was made on the article, as well as review of the editorial practice handling the same, then it is my duty to the academic community to raise the issue in the public domain. Please let me know the status of the current investigation.

I look forward to your reply.

Kind regards,
Mohamed Helmy
MD, PhD

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------- Original Message -------
On Monday, February 15, 2021 3:34 AM, Helmy, M. <helmy.m@protonmail.com> wrote:

> Dear William,
>
> I was wondering if you had time to consider my message below?
>
> Kind regards,
> Mohamed Helmy
> MD, PhD
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> Singapore 648131

------- Original Message -------
On Monday, January 25, 2021 2:24 PM, Helmy, M. <helmy.m@protonmail.com> wrote:

> Dear William,
>
> My apologies for the delay in replying.
>
> Please call me Helmy. Too many Mohameds.
>
> I do not think there is anything honest about the findings in Bhaskar et al. (2018). Please find attached *MOE2.pdf*, a report I sent to Singapore Ministry of Education collating evidence of putative systemic misconduct in Singapore institutions of research and higher education, perpetrated by Rupshi Mitra and others. As the details of misconduct are discussed under several titles in Part II of the *MOE2.pdf*, please search for 'Bhaskar' in the document and have a look, for example, at what Lee Wei Lim has produced, duplication methods used by Rupshi Mitra and Ajai Vyas, plagiarized doctoral theses, and so on.
>
> Sorry there is no more succinct way to communicate the honesty in Bhaskar et al. 2018 and I spend an inordinate amount of time fighting off daily harassment and attempts to evict me, among other procedural absurdities. Please note I did first *speak* with my superiors at Nanyang Technological University, and was told to make a report against Rupshi Mitra for her ordering me to butcher dozens of genetically modified (producing tau protein, which she would not tell me about) and aged animals for no reason, or have my employment contract terminated. I was then told by the Research Integrity Officer, Prof Roderick Wayland Bates, to make a report of Rupshi's misconduct *in publications*. Then my employment contract was terminated anyways. And off-campus it has been....Kafkaesque.
>
> Kind regards,
> Mohamed Helmy
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> ------- Original Message -------
> On Wednesday, January 20, 2021 7:42 PM, Editorial Office <editorial.office@frontiersin.org> wrote:
>
> > Dear Mohamed,
> >
> > Many thanks for your patience regarding this matter. We have experienced some delays after returning from our winter break but please be assured we are working to address this as swiftly as possible.
> >
> > Whilst I can confirm that I will pass on the comments regarding the peer review process to our Review Operations team for investigation, please can I clarify the nature of the preceding five comments? Specifically, please clarify whether you feel that the findings described in Bhaskar et al. 2018 are unreliable through misconduct or honest error, or whether the paper reports unethical research, and provide your reasoning. If you are able to pass on any specific concerns, we would be happy to investigate this further.
> >
> > If you do not have specific concerns to the effects described above, we would invite you to get in touch with the authors themselves if you have any general questions regarding the paper. The contact information for the corresponding author, Rusphi Mitra, is available at the foot of the article itself, available at https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnbeh.2018.00204/full.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries,

Best regards,

William Coleman
Research Integrity Manager

Head of Research Integrity: Elena Vicario, PhD

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On Tue, Dec 29, 2020 at 4:51 PM Editorial Office <editorial.office@frontiersin.org> wrote:

> Dear Mohamed,
>
> Thank you for your email.
>
> Please be assured that we are looking into this and we will get back to you with an update as soon as possible.
>
> Please be aware that this may take longer than usual due to the holiday period.
>
> Best regards,
>
> William Coleman
> Research Integrity Manager
> ---
>
> Senior Manager, Research Integrity: Elena Vicario, PhD
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On Thu, Dec 17, 2020 at 3:00 AM Helmy, M. <helmy.m@protonmail.com> wrote:

Dear Professor Sousa,

There are irregularities in the article Bhaskar et al., 2018 published in *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience, Emotion Regulation and Processing* titled 'Enriched Environment Facilitates Anxiolytic Efficacy Driven by Deep-Brain Stimulation of Medial Prefrontal Cortex' by Yamini Bhaskar, Lee Wei Lim, and Rupshi Mitra, namely:

1. Electrodes were not implanted into ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC) according to the coordinates stated. The deviation from published coordinates for vmPFC in animals of comparable age and weight is big (see for example Almeida-Santos et al., 2017; Chang et al., 2014; Coutureau et al., 2012; Hamani et al., 2014; Hamani et al., 2012; Hill et al., 2018; Papp et al., 2019; Torres-Sanchez et al., 2018). The same coordinates were used in the article produced at Nanyang Technological University and co-authored by Lee Wei Lim, Ajai Vyas and others (Liu et al., 2015). However, other articles by Lee Wei Lim not produced at Nanyang Technological University use the same or slightly different coordinates to target regions alternately referred to as vmPFC or prelimbic cortex (Huguet et al., 2017; Janssen et al., 2015; Lim et al., 2015a; Lim et al., 2015b; Tan et al., 2019; for comparison see for example Fucich et al., 2018; Luque-García et al., 2018; Reznikov et al., 2018; Scarlata et al., 2019; Sotres-Bayon et al., 2009; Tsutsui-Kimura et al., 2013). Literature stated as the source for coordinates in Bhaskar et al. 2018 (namely Lim et al., 2015b; Tan et al., 2010) is unrelated to vmPFC. **May the coordinates used to putatively target vmPFC in Bhaskar et al. 2018 be justified?**

2. The stimulation protocol for deep brain stimulation in Bhaskar et al. 2018 is vague, electronic parameters are lacking (see for example Schor and Nelson, 2019). The protocol cannot be replicated as described. Lee Wei Lim himself emphasizes the importance of these parameters, methodologically and physiologically, in other publications (Heng et al., 2016; Hescham et al., 2013a; Hescham et al., 2013b; Tan et al., 2020). What paradigm is reported in Bhaskar et al. 2018 is in physiological contradiction as part of an effective protocol and as recommended in reviews co-authored by Lee Wei Lim (*ibid*). Given that one of the reviews in which Lee Wei Lim is co-author was heavily criticized by others for many, huge, and indefensible errors (Páll et al., 2017), **may the stimulation protocol in Bhaskar et al. 2018 be specified?**

3. **How was exploration assessed in the object recognition task?** For example, was software used or were the analyses done manually? For any method, what were the cut-off or readout parameters for exploratory behavior?

4. Work in Bhaskar et al., 2018 was funded by "...Ministry of Education, Singapore (#RG 46/12) to RM...". However, in the similar work and article published by Lee Wei Lim elsewhere, Liu et al., 2015, only "...the Singapore Lee Kuan Yew Research Fellowship (M4080846.080) that awarded to LWL..." is acknowledged. **May Lee Wei Lim's funding be clarified?**

5. Due to the similarities between Bhaskar et al., 2018 and Liu et al., 2015, but differences in that, for example, BrdU was administered and Morris water maze was reportedly tested in the latter, and differences in stimulation protocol, **may the Animal Use Protocol for Bhaskar et al. 2018 be stated so as to differentiate putative differences in that dataset with the one in Liu et al., 2015?**

6. The article was reviewed by two reviewers who are co-authors from the same institute (Du and Hill, 2015, 2016, 2019; Du et al., 2019; Du et al., 2018; Du et al., 2014; Grech et al., 2019; Hill et al., 2020; McCarthny et al., 2018; Nakamura et al., 2019; Notaras et al., 2017; Schroeder et al., 2017; Schroeder et al., 2019; Schroeder et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2015). The editor of the article is a co-author of both reviewers (Du et al., 2012; Du et al., 2013; Hill et al., 2014; Howard et al., 2012; Kiriazis et al., 2012; Klug et al., 2012; Pang et al.,

2013a; Pang et al., 2013b; Pang et al., 2009; Renoir et al., 2012; Renoir et al., 2011). This may not be in line with *Frontiers Associate Editor Guidelines*, and is not in line with *Frontiers* recommendations to bring diversity and transparency to editorial practice and the peer-review process. **May the peer-review process for Bhaskar et. al. 2018 be reviewed?**

Kind regards,

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