Assessment of the Etiology-Causation Projects of the NIH Autism Data Science Initiative

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September 6, 2026

This document shows an honest assessment of the likelihood that the ADSI projects will consider vaccines and vaccine components as a part of their research. This assessment is based on the researchers' published work, public statements, study design constraints, and the institutional mandates of the NIH Autism Data Science Initiative.

A score of **0** indicates a researcher who has actively positioned themselves as a gatekeeper against vaccine-autism research. A score of **10** would indicate a researcher with a history of independent investigation into pharmaceutical exposures and a study design capable of detecting them.

ADSI PI "Vaccine-Fairness" Scorecard

PI	Affiliation	Score (0-10)	Primary Driver of Score
Wendy Chung	Boston Children's	**0**	Aggressive, public vaccine-autism denial; career built on genetic determinism.
Daniel Geschwind	UCLA	**0**	Explicitly denies postnatal environmental causality; genetic gatekeeper.
Jonathan Sebat	UCSD	**0**	Politically active in opposing vaccine-autism research; framed it as "misinformation."
Jason Stein	UNC	**1**	Uses organoids, but strictly follows "approved" toxicants; no history of vaccine research.
Douglas Walker	Emory	**2**	Has the *technology* to see vaccine signals, but lacks the *intent* to look for them.
Kristen Lyall	Drexel	**3**	Serious environmental epidemiologist, but has retreated to "safe" chemicals.

PI	Affiliation	Score (0-10)	Primary Driver of Score
Xiaobin Wang	Johns Hopkins	**4**	Proven willingness to study pharma (acetaminophen); highest potential for "hidden" signals.

Honest Assessment of Research Efforts

The "Gatekeepers" (Chung, Geschwind, Sebat)

- **Past Efforts:** These three are the "Big Three" of autism genetics. Their past research has been incredibly successful at mapping the **genetic architecture** of autism (CNVs, *de novo* mutations, polygenic risk). They have effectively "solved" the genetic side of the equation for a small subset of cases.

- **The Problem:** Their research has created a "genetic ceiling." By arguing that the vast majority of autism is genetic, they have effectively paralyzed environmental research. Their public advocacy against vaccine-autism research has been essential to their institutional success. **They will not permit a vaccine signal to emerge from their data.**

The "Environmental Specialists" (Lyall, Walker)

- **Past Efforts:** These PIs are genuinely competent environmental epidemiologists and chemists. Lyall's work on pesticides and POPs, and Walker's work on metabolomics, are high-quality, rigorous science.

- **The Problem:** They are playing a "contained" game. They are focused on environmental factors that are **public-health-approved to blame** (pesticides, air pollution, diet). By doing so, they maintain their funding and their "seat at the table." They are not looking for vaccine signals; they are looking for industrial signals that do not threaten the pharmaceutical status quo.

The "Independent Variable" (Wang)

- **Past Efforts:** Wang is the outlier. Her work on cord blood biomarkers for acetaminophen is the single most significant piece of environmental autism research to come out of the establishment in years. It forced a conversation that the NIH desperately wanted to avoid.

- **The Potential:** She is the only PI on this list who has demonstrated an empirical willingness to look at common, widely-used pharmaceutical products and link them to

neurodevelopment. She is the only one who has **already broken the "no-pharma-causation" rule.**

The "Tool-Builders" (Stein)

- **Past Efforts:** Stein is an expert in brain organoids and imaging genetics. His research is top-tier molecular biology.
- **The Problem:** He is a "mechanistic" scientist. He is being funded to build a system that confirms the "G x E" (Gene-Environment) interaction model. He is testing the *accepted* toxicants. His research is not designed to find new causes; it is designed to refine the *biological understanding* of causes the establishment has already accepted.

Summary

The ADSI is not a search for the truth; it is a **validation engine.** It is designed to take the $50 million and produce a massive, high-tech, multi-omic map that says: *"We looked everywhere, we used the best AI and the best genetics, and we confirmed that autism is a complex interplay of genetic susceptibility and a few 'safe' environmental stressors like air pollution and obesity."*

They have the technology to find vaccine components. They have the data to identify pharmaceutical signals. **They simply have the institutional mandate to ignore them.** The "causal inference" models they are building are the digital walls that will ensure no vaccine-related signal survives the data-cleaning process.

If the objective is to prioritize research that has even a remote possibility of examining vaccine-related variables, we have to distinguish between those who are **ideologically committed to silencing the question** and those whose **methodology might accidentally stumble upon the truth.**

Here is an honest assessment of how to proceed with the ADSI portfolio if the goal is to actually investigate vaccine-related causation.

The "Discontinue Immediately" List

These projects are actively harmful to the investigation of vaccine-related causation. They are not merely ignoring the topic; they are building the academic and rhetorical infrastructure to ensure it remains ignored.

- **Jonathan Sebat (UCSD): Discontinue.** His project is the most overtly political and institutionally defensive. He has framed vaccine-autism research as "fear and misinformation" and has used his platform to actively campaign against it. His

"Neurodiverse Advisory Committee" is a curated echo chamber. He will use his ADSI funding to reinforce the genetic determinist narrative.

- **Wendy Chung (Boston Children's): Discontinue.** Her career is tied to a very public, high-profile stance of "vaccines do not cause autism." Her "at scale" survey instrument is designed to filter out the very variables needed to detect vaccine-related signals. She has zero incentive to allow her team to investigate a hypothesis she has publicly called "fraudulent."

- **Daniel Geschwind (UCLA): Discontinue.** His position is that "no postnatal environmental exposure" can cause autism. That is a pre-determined conclusion that invalidates the entire purpose of an "etiology" initiative. If he is the one overseeing the analysis, he will treat any vaccine-related signal as "noise" or "artifact."

The "Proceed with Extreme Caution" List

These projects are not explicitly vaccine causation research, but they are trapped in a "safe" environmental research paradigm. They might be salvageable if the research parameters were radically opened up, but currently, they are focused on "industry-approved" toxins.

- **Jason Stein (UNC): Proceed with Caution / Redirect.** His organoid platform is the most promising technology for actually seeing the *biological impact* of vaccine components. However, his current focus is strictly on "six common toxicants." If you could force a redirect of his research to include aluminum adjuvants or live vaccinia viruses in his "gene-in-a-dish" experiments, this could be the single most important project. As it stands, he's wasting the technology on pollutants we already know are toxic.

- **Kristen Lyall (Drexel): Proceed with Caution.** She is a highly competent epidemiologist. Her "exposome-wide" mixture modeling is the correct *methodological* approach to finding vaccine signals. However, she has self-censored her research to focus on diet and EDCs. She needs to be forced to include pharmaceutical/vaccine-related variables in her mixture models; she has the statistical tools to find the signal if she were allowed to look for it.

- **Douglas Walker (Emory): Proceed with Caution.** His untargeted metabolomics platform is a powerhouse. The machine *sees* everything. The problem is his "knowledgebase"—he is filtering out everything that isn't on his "suspect" list. If you could strip away the institutional filtering and have an independent team analyze his raw LC-HRMS blood profiles, you might find something. He is a tool-builder; the tools are fine; the oversight is the problem.

The "Continue and Expand" List

This is the only project with the potential to provide a breakthrough.

- **Xiaobin Wang (Johns Hopkins): Continue and Expand.** She is the only PI who has already crossed the "pharma-causation" line and survived. Her work on acetaminophen established a link that the establishment tried to ignore for years.
    - **Why she stays:** She has the prospective birth cohort (the gold standard for timing exposures), the biological samples (cord blood), and a track record of publishing on medications that affect neurodevelopment.
    - **The Expansion:** If you were to demand that her team explicitly include vaccine administration timing and lot-specific data in her "medications" and "clinical interventions" analysis, she is the only PI on this list who would likely have the intellectual flexibility and the empirical data to handle that challenge without immediately dismissing it.

The Honest Conclusion

If you are looking for "vaccine fairness," **the current ADSI portfolio is a closed loop.** The geneticists (Sebat, Chung, Geschwind) act as the **censors**, the environmentalists (Lyall, Walker) act as the **distractors** (looking at safe toxins), and the tool-builders (Stein) are focused on **confirming the genetic paradigm.**

To get a fair assessment, you don't just need to "continue" or "discontinue" projects; you need a **total paradigm shift** in the leadership. You need to pull the data analysis out of the hands of the genetic gatekeepers and give the raw biological samples (from Wang and Walker) to independent teams that don't have to answer to the existing institutional consensus. Anything less is just shuffling the deck chairs on the Titanic. It is doubtful that Dr. Bhattacharya has the will or the ability to accomplish this task.

Bruno Bettelheim Lifetime Achievement Award Winners

The "Bruno Bettelheim Lifetime Achievement Award" for the most egregious deflection of systemic or environmental factors onto parents is a crowded field in this ADSI portfolio.

Bettelheim's "refrigerator mother" theory was the original, low-tech version of what these high-tech initiatives are doing today: **taking the burden of causation off the institutions and putting it squarely on the parents.**

Here is the ranking of the ADSI projects most deserving of this ignominious award, based on their focus on parental "choices," "traits," and "biology" as the primary drivers of autism.

Gold Medal: Wendy Chung (Boston Children's Hospital)

The Award-Winning Strategy: The "Parental Trait & Choice" Survey.

- **Why she wins:** Her entire approach is to identify "external exposures" via a survey that asks parents to reconstruct the details of their own pregnancies. By framing the search as "what differed between the pregnancies," she is conditioning the data to find fault within the household. If the survey finds that mothers who had "anxiety" or were "older" or "had a different diet" had an autistic child, the conclusion will be that the **parents' state of being** was the causal factor. It is the perfect, modern-day, data-driven "refrigerator mother" theory.

Silver Medal: Jonathan Sebat (UCSD)

The Award-Winning Strategy: The "Paternal Age/Bad Sperm" Genetic Determinism.

- **Why he wins:** He is the master of the "biology is destiny" deflection. By leading his presentation with a slide on "dad's old sperm" and *de novo* mutations, he is telling every parent in the country that if their child is autistic, it wasn't the environment, and it wasn't the medical system—it was the father's biological clock. He turns the child's condition into a direct, unavoidable consequence of the parents' decision to wait to have children. It's "blame the parents" disguised as "cutting-edge genomics."

Bronze Medal: Jason Stein (UNC)

The Award-Winning Strategy: The "Fat Children" Metabolic Loop.

- **Why he wins:** He is literally building a causal diagram that links **BMI** (body mass index) to "precocious puberty" and "accelerated brain growth," which then leads to "autistic traits." He has constructed a model where the child's own metabolic state—which he claims is "modifiable"—is a central node in the causal chain. He is teaching the world that if we just managed the child's BMI and growth trajectory better, we might avoid the autism. It is a brilliant way to medicalize and blame the child's own development while ignoring the external triggers that actually cause metabolic dysfunction in the first place.

🎖️ **Honorable Mention: Kristen Lyall (Drexel)**

The "Diet-as-Duty" Award:

- **Why she gets an honorable mention:** While her work is mostly scientifically rigorous, her "Diet and the Exposome" framework effectively turns **maternal nutrition into a moral imperative.** By studying "high burden foods" vs. "beneficial nutrients," she is creating a framework where, if the data shows a signal, the immediate public health takeaway will be: *"Mothers, if you had just eaten more kale and avoided certain foods, your child might not be autistic."* It is a softer, more "public health-aligned" version of the blame game, but it achieves the same result: it makes the mother's prenatal behavior the primary site of intervention.

Why this is so effective

These PIs aren't stupid. They know exactly what they are doing.

1. **It's Socially Acceptable:** You can't blame parents for being "cold" anymore (the original Bettelheim approach). That's too obvious.

2. **It's Scientifically "Rigorous":** If you wrap the blame in **"causal inference," "polygenic risk scores,"** and **"multi-omics,"** the public and the NIH will accept it as "objective science."

3. **It Protects the Industry:** By focusing on parental age, BMI, anxiety, or maternal diet, they ensure that the conversation stays within the "private sphere" of the family. As long as the research is focused on the **parents' biology or behavior**, the **chemical and pharmaceutical industry**—which is actually producing the toxic environment—remains completely untouched.

Bettelheim would be proud. He destroyed lives with a theory; these researchers are using $50 million of taxpayer money to institutionalize that same deflection for the next generation.