



Three Scholars Hoaxed Academic Journals to Expose Absurd “Grievance Studies”

Three scholars, who say they are liberals, hoaxed academic publications with twenty papers, including a ridiculous study of canine ‘rape culture’ in dog parks in Portland, Oregon, that was published in the monthly journal, *Gender, Place & Culture*, which focuses on something called “feminist geography.” The study was written to expose the takeover of academia by “grievance studies” that include gender studies, critical race theory, postcolonial theory, and other ‘theory’-based fields in the humanities and social sciences. The authors, James Lindsay, a math doctorate, Peter Boghossian, an assistant professor of philosophy at Portland State University, and Helen Pluckrose, a London-based scholar of English literature and history, say that reasoned criticism from the outside is often ignored by academics, so they exposed it from the inside. Out of the twenty hoax papers they penned, seven were accepted, and four were published. Each of the hoaxers expect their careers to suffer as a result of their experiment, but Mr. Lindsay said the project was worth it: “For us, the risk of letting biased research continue to influence education, media, policy and culture is far greater than anything that will happen to us for having done this.” - GEG

Reactions to an elaborate academic-journal hoax, dubbed “Sokal Squared” by one observer, came fast and furious on Wednesday. Some scholars applauded the hoax for unmasking what they

called academe's leftist, victim-obsessed ideological slant and low publishing standards. Others said it had proved nothing beyond the bad faith and dishonesty of its authors.

Three scholars – Helen Pluckrose, a self-described “exile from the humanities” who studies medieval religious writings about women; James A. Lindsay, an author and mathematician; and Peter Boghossian, an assistant professor of philosophy at Portland State University – spent 10 months writing [20 hoax papers](#) that illustrate and parody what they call “grievance studies,” and submitted them to “the best journals in the relevant fields.” Of the 20, seven papers were accepted, four were published online, and three were in process when the authors “had to take the project public prematurely and thus stop the study, before it could be properly concluded.” A skeptical *Wall Street Journal* editorial writer, Jillian Kay Melchior, began raising [questions](#) about some of the papers over the summer.

Beyond the acceptances, the authors said, they also received four requests to peer-review other papers “as a result of our own exemplary scholarship.” And one paper – about canine rape culture in dog parks in Portland, Ore. – “gained special recognition for excellence from its journal, *Gender, Place, and Culture* ... as one of 12 leading pieces in feminist geography as a part of the journal's 25th anniversary celebration.”

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Not all readers accepted the work as laudable scholarship. *National Review* took “Helen Wilson,” the fictional author of the dog-park study, to task in June for her approach. “The whole reasoning behind Wilson's study,” [wrote](#) a staff writer,

Katherine Timpf, “is the belief that researching rape culture and sexuality among dogs in parks is a brilliant way to understand more about rape culture and sexuality among humans. This is, of course, idiotic. Why? Because humans are not dogs.”

Another [published](#) paper, “Going In Through the Back Door: Challenging Straight Male Homophobia, Transphobia, and Transphobia Through Receptive Penetrative Sex Toy Use,” appeared in *Sexuality and Culture*. It recommends that men anally self-penetrate “to become less transphobic, more feminist, and more concerned about the horrors of rape culture.”

The trolling trio wondered, they write, if a journal might even “publish a feminist rewrite of a chapter from Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*.” Yup. “Our Struggle Is My Struggle: Solidarity Feminism as an Intersectional Reply to Neoliberal and Choice Feminism” was accepted by the feminist social-work journal *Affilia*.

Darts and Laurels

Some scholars applauded the hoax.

“Is there any idea so outlandish that it won’t be published in a Critical/PoMo/Identity/‘Theory’ journal?” [tweeted](#) the Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker.

“Three intrepid academics,” [wrote](#) Yascha Mounk, an author and lecturer on government at Harvard, “just perpetrated a giant version of the Sokal Hoax, placing ... fake papers in major academic journals. Call it Sokal Squared. The result is hilarious and delightful. It also showcases a serious problem with big parts of academia.”

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