

Hoaxers Slip Breastaurants and Dog-Park Sex Into Journals

By **Jennifer Schuessler**

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One paper, published in a journal called *Sex Roles*, said that the author had conducted a two-year study involving “thematic analysis of table dialogue” to uncover the mystery of why heterosexual men like to eat at Hooters.

Another, from a journal of feminist geography, parsed “human reactions to rape culture and queer performativity” at dog parks in Portland, Ore., while a third paper, published in a journal of feminist social work and titled “Our Struggle Is My Struggle,” simply scattered some up-to-date jargon into passages lifted from Hitler’s “Mein Kampf.”

Such offerings may or may not have raised eyebrows among the journals’ limited readerships. But this week, they unleashed a cascade of mockery — along with a torrent of debate about ethics of hoaxes, the state of peer review and the excesses of academia — when they were revealed to be part of an elaborate prank aimed squarely at what the authors labeled “grievance studies.”

“Something has gone wrong in the university — especially in certain fields within the humanities,” the three authors of the fake papers wrote in an article in the online journal Areo explaining what they had done. “Scholarship based less upon finding truth and more upon attending to social grievances has become firmly established, if not fully dominant, within these fields.”

Their project quickly drew comparisons to a famous 1996 hoax in which the physicist Alan Sokal got a paper mixing postmodern philosophy with the theory of quantum gravity into a prestigious cultural studies journal.

But while that hoax involved a single article, the new one involved 20 papers, produced every two weeks or so, submitted to various journals over nearly a year.

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The authors — Helen Pluckrose, James A. Lindsay and Peter Boghossian — said that four papers had been published; three had been accepted but not yet published; seven were under review and six had been rejected.

Embarrassed journal editors quickly stamped the word “Retracted” across published papers this week, while the hoax drew appreciation from scholars who tend to be skeptical of work focusing on race, gender, sexuality and other forms of identity.

“Is there any idea so outlandish that it won’t be published in a Critical/PoMo/Identity/‘Theory’ journal?” the psychologist and author Steven Pinker tweeted.

Yascha Mounk, a political scientist at Harvard, called the hoax “hilarious and delightful” on Twitter. In an interview, he said of the authors, “What they have shown is that certain journals, and perhaps to an extent certain fields, can’t distinguish between serious scholarship and a ridiculous intellectual hoax.”

RETRACTED ARTICLE: Who are they to judge? Overcoming anthropometry through fat bodybuilding

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ABSTRACT

While fat activism has disrupted many dominant discourses that causally contribute to negative judgments about fat bodies, it has not yet penetrated the realm of competitive bodybuilding. The author introduces fat bodybuilding as a means of challenging the prevailing assumptions of maximally fat-exclusionary (sports) cultures while raising fundamental ontological questions about what it means to "build a body." Specifically, he advocates for imagining a new classification within bodybuilding, termed *fat bodybuilding*, as a fat-inclusive politicized performance and a new culture to be embedded within bodybuilding.

KEYWORDS

Fat activism; fat bodybuilding; Sport; anthropometry

People who inhabit fat bodies are constantly judged—morally, aesthetically, physically, emotionally, economically, and in other ways that undermine their dignity. Most of all, people inhabiting fat bodies are judged for visual and superficial reasons: for the bodies they inhabit. Fat activism stands in opposition to the social stigma associated with fat, and, more generally, fatphobic attitudes throughout culture, and it has had considerable successes even though these attitudes are hegemonic and entrenched.

Particularly, anthropometric (body measuring) and ever more refined judgments of bodies and forms of physicality are commonplace in sports, reaching their zenith in the cultural space of competitive bodybuilding. Within the bodybuilding arena, bodies defy the "thin" ideals of anthropometry, yet they are respected because of their association with strength, fitness, and health. A paradox of anthropometry thus arises: bodybuilders' bodies exist outside anthropometric expectations yet are still afforded social

One of the now-retracted journal articles submitted by the hoaxers.

But where some saw a healthy unmasking of pernicious nonsense, others—including a number who work far from the more outré realms of the humanities—saw a sour, nasty rerun of a culture-wars chestnut that proved little more than that you can always fool some of the people some of the time.

"What strikes me about stunts like this is their fundamental meanness," Sean Carroll, a physicist at the California Institute of Technology, wrote on Twitter. "No attempt to intellectually engage with ideas you disagree with; just trolling for lulz."

Jacob T. Levy, a political theorist at McGill University in Montreal, said in an interview that even some colleagues who are not fans of identity-oriented scholarship are looking at the hoax and saying “this is potentially unethical and doesn’t show what they think it is showing.”

Besides, he added, “We all recognize that this kind of thing could also be done in our disciplines if people were willing to dedicate a year to it.”

The hoaxers, for their part, disputed that they were motivated by political animus.

In a joint telephone interview, Mr. Boghossian, an assistant professor of philosophy at Portland State University, and Mr. Lindsay, a writer with a doctorate in math, described themselves as “on the left,” and supportive of social justice “in the common parlance.”

As for accusations of trolling, they said the scholars engaged in “grievance studies” were the ones fanning the flames of the culture wars. Their only goal, they said, was to protect the integrity of scholarship, which they suggested was lower in the fields they targeted.

“Is it possible that people with no Ph.D. in any field could write a paper in that field every two weeks and get it published?” Mr. Boghossian said. “That’s the question I’d ask.”

The origins of their experiment date to last summer, when Mr. Boghossian and Mr. Lindsay published a bogus paper called “The Conceptual Penis as a Social Construct” in a journal called Cogent Social Sciences.

The paper drew an incredulous response in the press, and critics pointed out that the journal was a marginal pay-to-publish operation that was hardly representative of the scholarly mainstream.

So they tried again, teaming up with Ms. Pluckrose, a self-described “exile from the humanities” and the editor in chief of Areo. They set out to write 20 papers that started with “politically fashionable conclusions,” which they worked backward to support by aping the relevant fields’ methods and arguments, and sometimes inventing data.

The Hooters paper identified themes of “sexual objectification, sexual conquest, male control of women, masculine toughness, and (as a minor theme) rationalizations for why men frequent breastaurants.”

Retracted article: Human reactions to rape culture and queer performativity at urban dog parks in Portland, Oregon

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses questions in human geography and the geographies of sexuality by drawing upon one year of embedded *in situ* observations of dogs and their human companions at three public dog parks in Portland, Oregon. The purpose of this research is to uncover emerging themes in human and canine interactive behavioral patterns in urban dog parks to better understand human a-/moral decision-making in public spaces and uncover bias and emergent assumptions around gender, race, and sexuality. Specifically, and in order of priority, I examine the following questions: (1) How do human companions manage, contribute, and respond to violence in dogs? (2) What issues surround queer performativity and human reaction to homosexual sex between and among dogs? and (3) Do dogs suffer oppression based upon (perceived) gender? It concludes by applying Black feminist criminology categories through which my observations can be understood and by inferring from lessons relevant to human and dog interactions to suggest practical applications that disrupt hegemonic masculinities and improves access to emancipatory spaces.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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KEY WORDS

Animaling; Black feminist criminology; dog park; feminist geography; queer geography; rape culture

Introduction

In order to better understand themes within human geography and the spaces to which it applies, this article seeks to uncover emergent themes in human and canine interactive behavioral patterns represented within urban dog parks by examining the spaces through feminist, queer, and animaling lenses. By doing so, it thus aims to (re)consider moral decision-making in both human and animal spaces and to better understand how it is influenced by assumptions around gender and sexuality. Already, there has been much work done on unconscious bias in relation

This paper, now retracted, purported to study human reactions to watching canine sex.

The purpose of that particular paper, the three architects of the hoax wrote in Areo, was “to see if journals will publish papers that seek to problematize heterosexual men’s attraction to women and will accept very shoddy qualitative methodology and ideologically-motivated interpretations which support this.”

In “Human Reactions to Rape Culture and Queer Performativity at Urban Dog Parks in Portland, Ore.,” by “Helen Wilson,” one of their made-up researcher names, the study purported to observe dogs having sex, and how their owners reacted, to draw conclusions about humans’ sexual attitudes.

Humans intervened 97 percent of the time when male dogs were “raping/humping” other male dogs, the paper said. But when a male dog was mating with a female, humans intervened only 32 percent of the time and actually laughed out loud 18 percent of the time.

The paper’s author cautioned: “Because of my own situatedness as a human, rather than as a dog, I recognize my limitations in being able to determine when an incidence of dog humping qualifies as rape.”

That paper, published in *Gender, Place & Culture*, might have succeeded too well. In July, after it was publicized by New Real Peer Review, a Twitter account dedicated to mocking absurd-seeming research, journalists began sniffing around. The project was suspended while several papers were still under review or in the process of being published. The hoax was first reported this week on the Op-Ed page of *The Wall Street Journal* under the headline “Fake News Comes to Academia.”

Several of the duped journals have issued statements decrying the hoax. Ann Garry, an interim co-editor of *Hypatia*, a leading feminist philosophy journal that had accepted but not yet published the paper “When the Joke’s on You” (a feminist critique of “unethical” hoaxes, as it happens), said she was “deeply disappointed.”

“Referees put in a great deal of time and effort to write meaningful reviews, and the idea that individuals would submit fraudulent academic material violates many ethical and academic norms,” said Ms. Garry, a professor emerita of philosophy at California State University, Los Angeles.

Nicholas Mazza, a professor emeritus of social work at Florida State University and editor of the issue of *The Journal of Poetry Therapy* that accepted the article “Moon Meetings and the Meaning of Sisterhood: A Poetic Portrayal of Lived Feminist Spirituality” (described by the hoaxers as “a rambling poetic monologue of a bitter divorced feminist, much of which was produced by a teenage angst poetry generator”), noted that the article was based on the supposed author’s personal experience.

“Although a valuable point was learned regarding the authenticity of articles/authors, it should be noted that the authors of the ‘study’ clearly engaged in flawed and unethical research,” Mr. Mazza said.

Some critics of the exercise noted that of the journals successfully fooled by the articles, only a few, including *Hypatia*, have significant standing. Most were interdisciplinary journals in highly niche fields, where there is less agreement about acceptable methodologies and the standards of peer review.

The hoaxers, however, noted that even scholarship that is barely read has consequences, and that seven accepted papers in a single year makes for an impressive resume.

“Seven papers published over seven years,” they wrote in *Areo*, “is frequently claimed to be the number sufficient to earn tenure.”

Correction: October 5, 2018

An earlier version of this article misidentified the Twitter account that publicized a fraudulent academic article about dog parks. The account is called New Real Peer Review, not Real Peer Review, which was the name of an account that was closed. An earlier version also mischaracterized the status of one of the hoax papers. The paper, “When the Joke’s on You,” had been accepted by the journal Hypatia, but it had not yet been published.

Sopan Deb contributed reporting

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