
Editor's Note

On October 5, 2018, *The New York Times* published a front-page story by Jennifer Schuessler titled “Hoaxers Slip Breastaurants and Dog-Park Sex into Journals.” The article detailed the writing, submission, and publication of a number of bogus academic articles written by a trio¹ of authors whose goal was to expose the lack of rigor, consistency, and oversight (read: legitimacy) in many “dubious” disciplines and fields of study, including those that focused on feminism, race, culture, and sexuality. *The New York Times* article chronicled the peer-review process and offered readers evidence of the problematic and suspicious nature of the various disciplines and the journals that published the fake submissions.

While we all might do well to take pause and consider and reconsider issues of academic integrity, the peer-review process and the disciplines that acknowledge, confront, and address the dynamics and workings of power across race, class, gender, ability, and sexuality, I would like to note a particularly disturbing aspect of *The New York Times* story. Schuessler suggests that the hoax raises alarms that the disciplines themselves ought to be viewed with suspicion and caution, if not outright contempt. According to the story, the purpose of the fake journal articles was to expose the absence of seriousness and cohesion as well as the blatant fraudulent bias of what the perpetrators of the hoax identify as “grievance studies.”² This claim is what is most disturbing to me, and I think it should be to any and all engaged in and involved with Ethnic Studies.

According to *The New York Times* story, because the hoax was perpetrated on journals that are, in one way or another, connected, affiliated, or identified with feminism, race, and cultural theory, this all “proves” that not only are the journals and their peer-review processes called into question, but so too are the very disciplines and fields of study that the journals represent. Both the journals and the disciplines should be deemed “wanting” with respect to traditional standards and scientific methodology. In short, the argument of the trio who wrote and submitted the fake articles and that of *The New York Times* reporter is that the publication of the bogus articles discredits both the journals that published the articles and the very disciplines and fields of study that the journals publish.

Fortunately, *Ethnic Studies Review* was technically unscathed by this scam—*ESR* neither published nor accepted any bogus or fake articles. Unfortunately, however, *Ethnic Studies Review* and every other journal that publishes what the authors and *The New York*

1. The three authors of the bogus articles are: James A. Lindsay, Ph.D. (math); Helen Pluckrose, editor of *Areo*; and Peter Bohossian, Ph.D. (an assistant professor of philosophy at Portland State University).

2. Again, as previously noted, the history of violence and shame imposed on those who “resist” and/or challenge oppression manifests itself in many ways, including the labeling of such work as “grievance studies.”

Times label “grievance studies” did suffer an attack on our credibility as a legitimate venue for and exchange of ideas regarding genuine and salient issues about race, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, and gender by dint of the hoax. Given the actual history and evolution of Ethnic Studies and *Ethnic Studies Review*, any attack on “grievance studies” is an attack on the field and discipline of Ethnic Studies and our journal as well as all other disciplines and journals that focus on race, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, gender, class, and social justice.

So this issue of *Ethnic Studies Review* is, yet again, another assertion and expression of our commitment to the history and importance of Ethnic Studies and our solidarity with all other journals publishing and organizations promoting such work.³ *Ethnic Studies Review* and all the other publications and media outlets that publish criticism of and about the legacy of imperialist white patriarchal supremacy,⁴ and other modalities of bias and oppression, and highlight the contributions and achievements of those who have been historically devalued, ignored, or otherwise demeaned, must remain steadfast.⁵ We must not be shamed into intimidation, shamed into silence.⁶ The work and lives are too important, too valuable.

I believe that the “prank,” as it is also referred to in *The New York Times* story, should give us pause and sound an alarm for all involved with Ethnic Studies. But, *not* for the reasons “the hoaxers” and their supporters might think or want. I think that we do need to stop (again) and acknowledge (again) the full force of those for whom Ethnic Studies is *only* and *merely* another manifestation of “grievance studies.” And, of course, we need to respond (again) with excellent work and renewed determination. As many readers of *Ethnic Studies Review* know all too well, the assault on Ethnic Studies (and the very people this discipline explores, analyzes, and supports) has a very long history, dating back to its founding. Whether it takes the form of people or institutions, as was the case in Arizona,⁷ attacking the very legitimacy of Ethnic Studies, or the hoax noted here attempting to undermine the foundations of such work, Ethnic Studies has been under assault since its inception.

It is also the case that such “pranks” have occurred before, perhaps most notably “The Sokal Affair.” In this hoax a noted professor of physics, Alan Sokal, submitted an article in

3. In particular, the historically important work done by the Association For Ethnic Studies (formerly, the National Association For Ethnic Studies) and its current efforts and initiatives along with that of the recent important emergence of the organization Critical Ethnic Studies need to be acknowledged as part of the solidarity of those committed to sustaining and advancing Ethnic Studies today.

4. The phrase bell hooks put into use some years back and, sadly, remains “useful” today.

5. As Toni Morrison succinctly and powerfully notes in the introduction to the anthology she edited, *Race-ing, Justice, En-gendering Power*, “As in virtually all of this nation’s great debates, nonwhites and women figure powerfully, although their presence maybe disguised, denied or obliterated.” (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992; p. XIX).

6. It is noteworthy that, in addition to the actual physical violence endured by millions in the name of “difference,” the assault on those struggling for justice includes various forms of shame and shaming. The hoaxers are participating in the very history and practice of such shaming, here in the name of “academic rigor” and “scientific methodology.” Such shaming ought to be identified and denounced for what it is, namely the continuation of the devaluation and demeaning of “other” people, their work, their legacy, and their futures.

7. I am here referring to the debacle of the 2010 Arizona House Bill 2281 that “banned” Ethnic Studies from being taught within the Tucson Unified School District and throughout the state, as well as banning specific books. Again, solidarity between and among desperate groups (academic, community based, independent scholars and advocates, and local students and teachers, as well as a diverse “ethnic” intersectionality) proved powerful and positive enough to eventually overturn a “legislative” assault on Ethnic Studies and the very people it supports and promotes.

1996 with the title “Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity.” The article was submitted to and accepted by the editors of the prestigious cultural theory journal, *Social Text*. In the article, Sokal argues for the rethinking of the physical universe (including gravity) within the context of our understanding of the world and beyond as ultimately being another example of a “linguistic and social construct.” On the very day that *Social Text* published Sokal’s article, Sokal announced in an interview in the now defunct academic trade magazine *Lingua Franca*⁸ that his article was “bogus” and without scientific merit.

Professor Sokal became quickly well known as the individual who debunked postmodernism in a single blow. Interestingly enough, Ethnic Studies for many of its detractors and critics is viewed simultaneously as both an example and consequence of postmodernism.⁹ And, to this extent, the “Sokal Affair” and the more recent hoax mentioned here are, to my mind, very much related. They each express a profound distrust and dismissal of narratives that run counter (that is to say “other”) to the “givens” being challenged and called into question (whether they are political, scientific, or cultural “givens”).

Of course, this is not to deny or ignore instances of outrageous claims, flawed argumentation, fudged data, and outright fraud occurring throughout the world, in and out of academia. (Right now we are witnessing, on a daily basis, examples of such behavior and acts of deception, and from one of the most prestigious positions on the world stage, the United States presidency.) But, what is worth noting about the assault on postmodernism and the entirety of “grievance studies” is that it is not an attack on an individual or collaborators guilty of some indiscretion or malpractice as such. The intent and purpose of the hoaxes and attacks are to zero in on the very discipline or perspective being subject to the attack or hoax. Thus what is being discredited is not a particular instance of research, or some claim, but rather the entire field of study (postmodernism in the one case, and “grievance studies” in the other).

If we take even a cursory look at another example of such fraud, I think we can readily see the difference between calling into question an individual’s or group’s claim or work and discarding an entire field of study. I am thinking here of the now discredited research and work of former Dr. Andrew Wakefield.¹⁰ A group of researchers led by Wakefield published their findings in one of the world’s oldest and most prestigious medical journals, *The Lancet*, in 1998. The Wakefield-led group claimed to have discovered links between vaccines for measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR vaccines) and colitis and autism. Almost from the moment of publication, there were queries and concerns regarding the claims of the paper. But it took the hard work of journalist Brian Deer to ultimately prove the fraud that Wakefield and his collaborators perpetrated. To this day, thousands upon thousands

8. *Lingua Franca* was a “trade” magazine, which in itself should be some cause of concern, in that it “traded” on gossip and “scandal” as well as the vanities of a certain “class” of academics. The fact that Sokal orchestrated the publication of his article with the *Lingua Franca* interview suggests that publicity and showmanship were perhaps the motivation for the stunt rather than a genuine call for “academic” integrity and rigor.

9. Many conservatives, and even some “liberals,” lump multiculturalism; feminism; Women’s Studies; Queer, Gender, and Trans Studies; Abilities Studies; and Ethnic Studies all under the same rubric: postmodernism.

10. He was stripped of his medical credentials and licenses in Britain due to “unethical” practices and methods.

of children are prevented from getting the MMR vaccines due to their parents still believing in the false claims of the Wakefield study. *The Lancet* finally fully retracted the paper in 2010. A lot was and is at stake, the careers and lives of many people were ruined and put at risk due to the fraud committed by Wakefield. But at no time did anyone suggest that “medicine” or “science” should be questioned or viewed with suspicion, or that all doctors and researchers are frauds. The status of these fields was never questioned, just the particular claim. We have seen this time and again (with tobacco, cancer, and HIV research). Yet, the hoax that made the front page of *The New York Times* speaks to the ferocity and focus to immediately and directly dismiss and discredit any and all disciplines and research labeled “grievance studies.” The very nature of the hoax and the manner in which it was executed belie the claims for academic rigor and integrity, and display the continuation to undermine all such counter narratives, including Ethnic Studies.

What I hope this issue of *Ethnic Studies Review* offers long-time readers and skeptics alike is a collection of articles and reviews that supports the case that Ethnic Studies is a significant and dynamic field of study, platform for advocacy, and powerful *contrapuntal* narrative to the history and legacy of oppression. Fifty years ago what began as a student protest (a *grievance*, if you will) of the status quo at San Francisco State University and the manner in which too many people in the United States were being treated continues to develop and shape our thinking and actions in so many ways. The hoaxes, lies, and distortions that used to pass uncritically and unchallenged into everyday life now get identified, named, and corrected. Ethnic Studies has and does play a crucial role in giving voice and acknowledgement to all who have and continue to struggle, work, and live for justice. *Ethnic Studies Review* is proud to be part of that history and ongoing effort.

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