

# The “Grievance studies” hoax exposes postmodernist charlatans

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On October 2, Helen Pluckrose, James A. Lindsay and Peter Boghossian published an article titled “Academic Grievance Studies and the Corruption of Scholarship,” incorporating the results of a year-long effort to publish hoax articles, deliberately comprised of bunk facts and irrational and reactionary conclusions, in academic journals associated with gender, racial and identity studies.

The results expose the intellectual bankruptcy of identity politics and postmodernist philosophy. Their proponents, who dominate university humanities departments worldwide, are charlatans who have published or given favorable “revise and resubmit” comments to the most absurd and vulgar pseudo-scientific arguments.

These include: a purported 1,000-hour study of dog “humping” patterns at dog parks that concludes by calling for human males to be “trained” like dogs to prevent rape culture; a long-form poem produced through a teenage angst poetry generator about women holding spiritual-sexual “moon meetings” in a secret “womb room” and praying to a “vulva shrine”; a proposal to develop feminist robots, trained to think irrationally, to control humanity and subjugate white men; and additional articles relating to male masturbation. Another proposal, which was praised by reviewers in a paper that was ultimately rejected, encouraged teachers to place white students in chains to be shamed for their “white privilege.”

There is an element of humor in the fact that such drivel could win accolades from academics and journals. The “dog park” article was even selected as one of the most influential contributions in the history of the *Gender, Place and Culture* journal!

But the implications of the study are deadly serious. Pluckrose, Lindsay and Boghossian have confirmed the right-wing political essence of identity politics and postmodern thought, based on anti-Marxism,

irrationalism and the rejection of the Enlightenment and objective truth.

Most chillingly, the authors also submitted a re-write of a chapter from Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, with language altered to reference female identity and feminism. The paper, titled “Our struggle is my struggle: solidarity feminism as an intersectional reply to neoliberal and choice feminism,” was accepted for publication and greeted with favorable reviews.

“I am extremely sympathetic to this article’s argument and its political positioning,” one academic wrote. Another said, “I am very sympathetic to the core arguments of the paper.”

In the wake of their public disclosure, Pluckrose, Lindsay and Boghossian have come under attack by the proponents of postmodernism and identity politics, who claim the hoax is a right wing attack on “social justice” disciplines.

Typical is the argument of Daniel Engber, who wrote in *Slate*: “How timely, too, that this secret project should be published in the midst of the Kavanaugh imbroglio—a time when the anger and the horror of male anxiety is so resplendent in the news. ‘It’s a very scary time for young men,’ Trump told reporters on the very day that Pluckrose, Lindsay, and Boghossian went public with their hoax. Both express a fear of false attacks on men, whether levied by regretful sluts, lefty liberals, radical academics, or whoever else.”

In reality, the hoax has exposed the fact that it is the proponents of identity politics who are advancing views parallel to the far right. While they are enraged with those who voice concern about the elimination of due process and the presumption of innocence for the targets of the #MeToo campaign, they are unbothered by the fact that the writings of Adolf Hitler are published and praised in feminist academic circles.

Pluckrose, Lindsay and Boghossian are self-described liberals who are concerned that the present identity

hysteria is “pushing the culture war to ever more toxic and existential polarization,” by fanning the flames of the far right. As a result, identitarians are “affecting activism on behalf of women and racial and sexual minorities in a way which is counterproductive to equality aims by feeding into right-wing reactionary opposition to those equality objectives.”

In contrast, the authors’ aim is to “give people—especially those who believe in liberalism, progress, modernity, open inquiry, and social justice—a clear reason to look at the identitarian madness coming out of the academic and activist left and say, ‘No, I will not go along with that. You do not speak for me.’”

The hoax’s authors are correct to link the identity politics proponents’ hostility to equality with their opposition to rationalism, scientific analysis and the progressive gains of the Enlightenment. But the roots of this right-wing, irrationalist, anti-egalitarian degeneration are to be found in the economic structure of capitalist society.

The academic architects of postmodernism and identity politics occupy well-paid positions in academia, often with salaries upwards of \$100,000–\$300,000 or more. As a social layer, the theoreticians of what the *World Socialist Web Site* refers to as the “pseudo-left” are in the wealthiest 10 percent of American society. Their political and philosophical views express their social interests.

The obsession with “privilege,” sex, and racial and gender identity is a mechanism by which members and groups within this layer fight among themselves for income, social status and positions of privilege, using degrees of “oppression” to one up each other in the fight for tenure track jobs, positions on corporate or non-profit boards, or election to public office. A chief purpose of the #MeToo campaign, for example, is to replace male executives and male politicians with women while ignoring the social needs of the vast majority of working class women.

The weaponization of identity politics is directed down the social ladder as well. By advancing the lie that white workers benefit from “white privilege,” for example, the proponents of identity politics argue: the spoils of Wall Street should not go to meeting the social needs of the working class, including white workers, who face record rates of alcoholism, poverty, opioid addiction, police violence and other indices of social misery. Instead, the world’s resources should go to *me*. It is this visceral class hatred that serves as the basis for absurd and reactionary arguments like those advanced in the hoax papers.

Nor have the politics of racial identity improved the material conditions for the vast majority of minority workers. Inequality within racial minorities has increased alongside the introduction of affirmative action programs and the increasing dominance of identity politics in academia and bourgeois politics. In 2016, the top 1 percent of Latinos owned 45 percent of all Latino wealth, while the top 1 percent of African-Americans owned 40.5 percent and the richest whites owned 36.5 percent of white wealth.

The influence of postmodernism in academia exploded in the aftermath of the mass protests of the 1960s and early 1970s. Based explicitly on a rejection of the revolutionary role of the working class and opposition to the “meta narrative” of socialist revolution, it is not accidental that identity politics and postmodernism have now been adopted as official ideological mechanisms of bourgeois rule.

In recent decades, a massive identity politics industry has been erected, with billions of dollars available from corporate funds and trusts for journals, non-profits, publications, fellowships and political groups advancing racial or gender politics. Identity politics has come to form a central component of the Democratic Party’s electoral strategy. Imperialist wars are justified on the grounds that the US is intervening to protect women, LGBT people and other minorities.

The growing movement of the working class, broadening strikes across industries, and widespread interest in socialism on college campuses pose an existential threat to the domination of postmodernism. Pluckrose, Lindsay and Boghossian have struck a well-timed blow against this reactionary obstacle to the development of scientific socialist consciousness.

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