

Right-Wing Grievance Studies

The team behind the Sokal 2.0 hoax self-consciously targeted what they call “grievance studies.” What ties all their targets together? My preferred answer is that grievance studies embrace both *antipathy* and *self-pity*. Or to be more precise, each of these fields intellectually justifies both:

1. Antipathy for a large, unselective group.
2. Encouragement of self-pity for the alleged victims of the aforementioned large, unselective group.

Feminism, for example, normally combines antipathy for men with encouragement of self-pity for women. Ethnic studies normally combines antipathy for whites with encouragement of self-pity for the relevant ethnicity. Sexuality studies normally combines antipathy for cisgendered heterosexuals with encouragement of self-pity for everyone else. While I don’t claim that every person working in these areas embraces antipathy and self-pity, these fields would be unrecognizable without their antipathy and self-pity.

I realize that this is an unflattering portrait, but please don’t caricature my position. I’m *not* saying that grievance studies is about groups “hating their oppressors and feeling sorry for themselves.” “Antipathy” is milder than hate, and you don’t have to belong to group X to encourage its members to feel self-pity. Indeed, there’s no reason why a fan of grievance studies couldn’t accept my characterization, then add, “In this case, antipathy and self-pity are justified.”

But what if, like me, you deplore all theories of collective guilt? You could just condemn the standard examples of “grievance studies” and move on.* But the judicious move is to see whether the standard list is complete. All of Sokal 2.0’s targets were decidedly left-wing. Does grievance studies have any right-wing analogues?

If you limit your domain to academia, maybe not. Given left-wing dominance in higher education, that’s hardly surprising. But you only have to mildly expand the search grid to find thriving examples of right-wing grievance studies.

First and foremost, there is “right-wing populism” also known as “nativism” or just “anti-immigration movements.” While I don’t think it’s fair to say that the typical member of these groups hates foreigners, their *antipathy* is obvious – and so is their eagerness to make native-born Americans feel sorry for themselves. Look, for example, at the Center for Immigration Studies website. What will you see, day in, day out? First, constant negativity toward the foreign-born, a tireless and one-sided effort to enumerate complaints. Second, promotion of self-pity for native-born Americans: “Oh, this poor

abused people, when will the globalist politicians finally hear their pleas?" (If you want to see an even more extreme version of nativist grievance studies, check out the *Social Contract*).

The same goes for the numerous conservatives eager to escalate the "clash of civilizations" between the West and Islam. Though it seems unfair to accuse them of outright "hatred" for Muslims, it also seems blind to deny their antipathy. Whenever I privately discuss Islam with them, their distaste for Muslims is obvious. And so is their gospel of self-pity: "We have the military strength to settle this clash of civilizations once and for all, but lack the moral courage to defend ourselves. Our weakness will be our undoing." (Needless to say, the Muslim world is also saturated with its own versions of grievance studies).

Isn't there any important difference between left- and right-wing grievance studies? The fundamental question, too big to address here, is the extent to which each grievance study's antipathy and self-pity are justified. The more visible difference, though, is that left-wing grievance studies is too drenched in obscure academic jargon to reach the common man. Right-wing grievance studies, in contrast, attempts to speak to the masses in their own language, which sharply increases the probability that politicians will eventually make their brand of antipathy and self-pity the law of the land.

* The Sokal-2.0 team states that their papers "span at least fifteen subdomains of thought in grievance studies, including (feminist) gender studies, masculinities studies, queer studies, sexuality studies, psychoanalysis, critical race theory, critical whiteness theory, fat studies, sociology, and educational philosophy." To my mind, sociology - a extremely diverse field - clearly does *not* belong on this list; and no sociology journals were successfully hoaxed. I'm also puzzled by the inclusion of "educational philosophy."