

**Griffiths, M.D. (2019). Paraphilias and the press - Don't always believe what you read:
A comment on Ventriglio et al. (2019). *Medical Journal Armed Forces India*, in press.**

Abstract: The recent review on fetishism by Ventriglio, Bhat, Torales and Bhugra contained material based on a hoax in its opening paragraph (i.e., that a British man had been caught having sex with a tractor and had been placed on the country's Sex Offender Register). If the authors wanted to highlight cases of individuals having sexual (paraphilic) relationships with inanimate objects there are a number in the scientific literature that could have been used rather than unsubstantiated stories in the print media. Scholars and researchers should (i) not believe everything they read in newspapers as facts, (ii) try to verify the source of information from non-peer-reviewed sources, and (iii) should try to use examples from the peer-reviewed scientific literature to highlight relevant case studies rather than resort to the print media.

Keywords: Sexual fetishism; Unusual paraphilias; Hoax case studies; Objectophilia; Objectum sexuality

Paraphilias and the press – Don't always believe what you read:

A comment on Ventriglio et al. (2018)

As someone who has been publishing papers on unusual fetishes and paraphilias over the past few years such as eproctophilia (sexual arousal from flatulence) and dacryphilia (sexual arousal from crying)¹⁻⁵, I was interested to read the recent review on fetishism by Ventriglio, Bhat, Torales and Bhugra⁶. As the main 'hook' for their paper, the very first paragraph of the paper by Ventriglio et al. asserted that:

“Cases who are sexually turned on by inanimate objects may fall foul of the law in a number of ways. In the UK, in early October 2015, a man was arrested for having had sex with 450 tractors. According to the news report, he was found to have over 5000 tractor images on his laptop. He had a special desire for John Deere and Massey Ferguson tractors, particularly the green ones. He was into axle grease, which apparently turned him on sexually. He was placed on the Sexual Offenders' Register” (p.1).

Arguably, this opening anecdote was potentially a great way to open a paper and gain the readers' interest, but the authors did not check their sources because the report they cited from the UK newspaper (*The Daily Star*⁷) was a hoax. The source of the story in the *Daily Star* report was a story first published in a local British paper, the *Suffolk Gazette*⁸. The 'author' of the *Suffolk Gazette* story was written by “Hugh Dunnett, Crime Correspondent”. ‘Hugh Dunnett’ is quite clearly a play on words for ‘whodunit’ which should have alerted any reader to potentially suspicious content. Ventriglio et al. may argue that they never tried to trace the original source of the story purely relying on the content of the *Daily Star* report but if the authors had read down to the bottom of the news story they cited, they would have found that the story was highlighted as a spoof by the newspaper article they actually cited. More specifically, the *Daily Star* article went on to say:

“[This] is where the story becomes stupid – well even more stupid. And the clever spoof has been fooling people around the world. The original hoax story has been shared thousands of times online...but not many people saw through the ridiculousness. It continues that police officers later raided his home and discovered a stash of more than 5,000 indecent images of tractors on his laptop. He was reportedly released without charge but banned from the countryside and forced to sign the sex offenders' register. Being banned from the countryside seems like quite a harsh punishment for a bit of tractor fun? But some bizarre quotes from the

police seemed to give the game away a bit. A police spokesman reportedly said: "He is now not allowed to go within one mile of a farm. "So he has to live and remain in the middle of Ipswich to comply with that. "However, we are watching him because we are worried about the safety of several street-cleaning machines." And another policeman added: "He'll also need to keep away from the town's gardens – if he takes a fancy to a lawn mower he might find he loses more than just his liberty." Wow, if only it was real – what a story" (p.1).

If the authors wanted to highlight cases of individuals having sexual (paraphilic) relationships with inanimate objects there are a number in the scientific literature. For instance, a case study by De Silva and Pernet⁹ involved an unusual sexual deviation in a young 20-year old British man ('George') who had little social interaction and was incredibly shy. De Silva and Pernet reported that his main sexual interest and excitement was from cars – particularly Austin Metro cars. George's family belonged to a strict religious sect who strongly disapproved of any sexual involvement by their son with women. Things changed for George when his parents bought an *Austin Metro* car. George began masturbating inside the car, and then masturbating outside the car while crouching down next to the car's exhaust pipe. So that he could not be caught masturbating, he would go to great lengths to find deserted places to engage in his sexual activity with the car. George used to become very sexually excited when the car's exhaust pipe was running and pumping out car fumes. The authors also speculated there may have been an increase in George's arousal due to a reduction of oxygen intake and related asphyxiation. This was possibly seen as a mild form of hypoxyphilia (sexual arousal from reduced oxygen supply).

Alternatively, Ventriglio et al. could have actually made reference to a case reported in the scientific literature of a man who did indeed have a romantic and sexual relationship with a tractor. A paper by Dietz and O'Halloran (1993) reported two case studies of men who used *"the hydraulic shovels on tractors to suspend themselves for masochistic sexual stimulation"* (p.359). One of the two men actually developed a romantic attachment to his tractor, and went as far as giving his tractor a name and writing poetry about it. Unfortunately, the man *"died accidentally while intentionally asphyxiating himself through suspension by the neck, leaving clues that he enjoyed perceptual distortions during asphyxiation"* (p.359). More generally, the cases described by De Silva and Pernet, and Dietz and O'Halloran are now referred to as objectophiles and are among the 40 or so objectophiles identified worldwide by Marsh in her pioneering research on 'objectum sexuality'.

The underlying issue in writing this letter is that scholars and researchers should (i) not believe everything they read in newspapers as facts, (ii) try to verify the source of information from non-peer-reviewed sources, and (iii) should try to use examples from the peer-reviewed scientific literature to highlight relevant case studies rather than resort to the print media.

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