

Statement Regarding Misleading Reporting of Research Findings

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In recent weeks, Professors Pascale Joassart-Marcelli and Fernando Bosco have received personal threats and insults following selective and misleading reporting of their research on farmers' markets in San Diego, CA. The purpose of this statement is twofold. First, it intends to draw attention to the ways viral sharing of partial reporting can result in intimidating tactics that pose a threat to academic freedom and free speech in general. Second, it seeks to correct the false characterizations made by reporters and provide some of the contextual information that was selectively ignored.

On December 27th, 2017, *Campus Reform* – a site that describes itself as exposing “liberal bias and abuse against conservatives on America’s colleges and universities” – published an article titled “Prof: Farmers’ markets cause environmental gentrification.” The article initially mischaracterized the research findings by hand-picking quotes, focusing on a couple of lines related to race and whiteness out of the section reviewing other academic work on this topic, and taking them out of context. However, the full article summarizes the research relatively well. Unfortunately, many readers do not get beyond the headlines of an online article.

Within less than 24 hours, a series of other outlets, including *The Blaze*, *Daily Mail*, *Breitbart News*, and *Fox News*, began reporting on the story in much more biased and distorted ways. Given that the book in which the research is published had not been released yet and that the researchers were not interviewed, those reports were based entirely on the Campus Reform headlines. Quotes were transformed to suggest that the main and only finding of the research is that “farmers’ markets are racist”, “insidious white spaces that oppress minorities”, “weed-like white spaces,” and “too white” – phrases that are not found in the chapter because they are gross distortion of the actual research findings. Reports were also full of other inaccuracies, including claims about the researchers’ race and attribution of authorship to the entire anthology in which their chapter was published.

Almost instantaneously, the professors began receiving vile and violent emails and voice mails, while their professional social media platforms became inundated with vicious and hateful posts. With a few exceptions, none of these hundreds of messages were meant to ask for clarification or voice a diverging opinion, but instead they simply sought to intimidate and insult. The racist and sexist slurs used by their authors suggest that extremist groups had been mobilized in this viral outrage. Unfortunately, according to *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (<https://www.chronicle.com/article/Signal-Boost-How-Conservative/240423>), this form of intimidation is increasingly common and organized in what they call “an assembly line of outrage.”

The views ascribed to Professors Joassart-Marcelli and Bosco by these outlets are serious misrepresentation of their research. For the past two decades, together, individually, and with other colleagues, their work has focused on issues of social inequality and exclusion facing various segments of society, including women, immigrants, low-income families, young people, and people of color. One of their primary goals has been to identify solutions to create a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable society, usually through policies and initiatives at the local level. In the past 7 years, they have been researching San Diego’s food environment and exploring how food can play a role in growing local economies, sustaining communities, bringing people together, and preserving the environment. They have published articles, reports, book chapters and a book on these issues and their work on farmers’ markets is just one part of a larger research project.

Much of their published work provides evidence of the benefits of community gardens and farmers' markets in improving access to healthy food, building community, and generating economic opportunities. They have both been actively involved in a number of local community-based initiatives to promote local food systems. However, in their research, they have found that, despite their great benefits, some of these local food initiatives tend to exclude those who cannot afford the high prices of many items and/or are intimidated by unfamiliar foods, products, or ingredients sometimes featured at farmers' markets. They also mapped the geographic distribution of farmers' markets within San Diego and found that many of them are located in affluent and gentrifying areas – not in poor neighborhoods or so-called food deserts. Further research indicates that farmers' markets are sometimes used by developers, policy makers, and real estate professionals as a way to brand a neighborhood and attract new residents, who can afford higher rents and pay higher prices. Unfortunately, rising rents and prices push older residents out into poorer neighborhoods, threatening their economic livelihood, destabilizing their daily lives, and dismantling their social networks. While this is certainly not the goal of farmers' markets, it is perhaps an unintended consequence (at least in particular urban areas of San Diego) that ought to be considered seriously. In short, Professors Joassart-Marcelli and Bosco's research generates a more nuanced understanding of a popular solution to food desert, with the aim of informing policy and making local food initiatives more accessible to all.