



## Media Attack Dr. Duke Pesta for Exposing “Furries” in Classrooms

Dr. Duke Pesta is executive director of [FreedomProject Academy](#) (an affiliate of *The New American's* parent organization, The John Birch Society). He has given over 1,000 talks nationwide exposing problems in education such as Common Core and Critical Race Theory. The latter presentation includes a segment on “furries,” people — in this case, children — who “self identify” as animals.

There is no question that the furry phenomenon exists and that it is in schools (more on this below). How, therefore, to discredit Pesta for describing this phenomenon? Simple: Point to a letter from a woman describing what (she says) her grandchildren witnessed in a particular school district, quote the district as denying the grandmother’s account, claim that Pesta presented the grandmother’s account as entirely accurate when in fact he was simply reporting what the grandmother said, and make no mention of the fact that the furry phenomenon is very real. Voila! — Pesta is peddling disinformation.

The irony, of course, is that this dismissal of Pesta is disinformation. So let’s take a closer look at what liberal media is ignoring in its smear of Pesta and what he actually said.

Revealingly, when not attacking conservatives or traditionalists such as Dr. Duke Pesta for exposing “furries” in schools, both mainstream and alternative liberal media have reported on their existence — even *favorably*. Furries may still be considered a bit of a fringe subculture. But that perception seems to be changing as they are becoming more accepted. There are even [heavily-attended and intricately-planned furry conventions](#). Photos posted online from those conventions [show people of all ages dressed as their “animal personas.”](#)

Children who are shy, withdrawn, or otherwise awkward have been reported to come out of their shells when they “become” their animal counterparts. As *Rolling Stone* — which cannot be accused of spreading right-wing “false information” — [reported as far back as December 2019](#), “Gen Z Kids [are] Becoming Furries” to feel more themselves:

Jen’s daughter is nine years old, with shoulder-length brown hair and darting, fearful eyes. She’s anxious and withdrawn, and her mother says she doesn’t get asked to go on play dates



Maryna Auramchuk/iStock/Getty Images Plus



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very often. When she speaks to people she doesn't know, she keeps a careful distance, like she's trying to decide whether or not to pet a tarantula at a zoo exhibit.

But then Jen's daughter becomes Emily the deer. She has a pink head with zebra stripes, white tufts of fur, and giant, ink-black antlers. In an instant, she goes from withdrawn to animated and gregarious. "She'll put her head on and go play and join the other kids," Jen tells me, as we watch her daughter chatting gaily with other sundry woodland creatures.

Part of Pesta's presentation addresses reports of schools allowing children to identify as animals in the classroom and implementing protocols and policies to make them feel accepted while in their animal personas. Major media and online debunkers jumped in to discredit Pesta, claiming that his presentation was false and that schools do not have "protocols" or policies favoring kids who identify as animals in the classroom.

And while mainstream media and online debunkers such as Snopes attempt to discredit accounts of furies in the classroom, there are many such reports ([here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)) from all over the country and in other parts of the world. And as the links listed in that last sentence show, it is not all right-wing media reporting on the phenomenon as if to expose it; many such reports are positive affirmations of the bizarre practice.

One such positive affirmation is from a blog for counselors at high schools. The title of the blog post is a solid indicator that schools are trending toward acceptance of furies in the classroom: *Making a Safe Place for Students Who Identify as Furies, Therians, and Otherkins*. [That post](#) begins:

Recently my daughter and I were having a conversation about "furies" as I was getting dressed for work (we have a lot of random conversations). It had been several years since I had a student who actually dressed as an animal and it brought back memories of him sitting in my office crying because other students made fun of him. In our conversation, my daughter was quick to point out that there are whole communities of people who self identify as animals, elves, vampires, dragons, and so on. As she was talking, it occurred to me that the majority of school counselors are unconsciously unaware of their existence in the school community. I shared with her that this was a great idea for a blog post and she rolled her eyes at me. Undeterred by her negative reaction, I decided it would be helpful to write about these subcultures that are often hidden in our mainstream culture and schools.

So, the phenomenon exists and is accepted in at least some schools where there is an effort to make "a safe place" for students "who self identify" as animals. But when Pesta made that very point, he was accused of making a false statement. And the tactics used by the media and Snopes to accuse him of dishonesty were themselves dishonest.

Take Snopes, for example. In a post declaring Pesta's claims "false," [Snopes writes](#), "Unbelievable rumors about students identifying as cats have unfortunately proved believable to some audiences." That post goes on to say:

In April 2022, a false rumor about a school district in Wisconsin implementing a set of "furry protocols" in order to deal with a rash of students who were "identifying as cats" was presented as genuine news on a conservative podcast. A video of Wisconsin talk radio host



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Vicki McKenna's appearance on the Dr. Duke Show, a podcast hosted by Dr. Duke Pesta, racked up more than 100,000 views as it circulated on social media.

The Snopes post then includes a video of Pesta's show with McKenna as his guest. In that episode, McKenna tells of a grandmother who shared with her — under the condition of anonymity — her grandchildren's account of the Waunakee Community School District in Wisconsin telling kids "not to take pictures of, make fun of, stare at, or in any way call out the behavior of their classmates who identify as 'Furries.'"

The post then states, "There's no truth to this rumor. The Waunakee school district has not seen a wave of students identifying as cats, and they did not enforce any 'furry protocols' in order to deal with these alleged students."

The post also takes Pesta to task for including this account in his presentation, stating, "In the days before McKenna appeared on Peta's [sic] podcast, Pesta gave a few presentations that mentioned this alleged email. A photograph from one of those presentations went viral on social media." By referring to "this alleged email," Snopes deliberately implies that either McKenna or Pesta simply made the whole thing up.

Perhaps an explanatory note is in order. Pesta *never* claimed the anonymous grandmother's account was true. He simply shared it as a claim made by the anonymous grandmother. This is a standard practice in journalism and other reporting. And Snopes knows that. To pretend otherwise is deliberate dishonesty in an attempt to pretend that schools are not allowing students to bring their delusions to school where other students are forced to play along, even if by simply ignoring the delusions.

But Snopes — which bills itself as the premier debunking site on the web — went further, writing:

Interestingly, Pesta follows the slide about "furry protocols" with another false rumor about a teacher being fired for protesting against the installation of litterboxes at schools in Michigan for students who identified as cats. While Pesta claims that this woman was fired, she was not fired. Furthermore, there's no evidence that any schools in Michigan installed litterboxes for their students.

But the video Snopes includes does not show that at all. Snopes simply lied. The video shows Pesta sharing a video by a high school substitute teacher who claims to have been fired for refusing to accept the cat persona of a male student. Snopes lists links to prove the woman was not fired, but those links show that (1) she never claimed there were litter boxes in schools and (2) the woman — who *does* actually appear to be a high school substitute teacher — *made the whole thing up as an exercise in trolling*. She then complains that she is "disappointed" about "how fake news is made."

So, this is a liberal teacher purposefully making "fake news" and then complaining about it when people take the bait she goes out of her way to throw down.

And somehow, Pesta is to blame for reporting her claim.

Major media also jumped on the story. And while the path of journalistic integrity would have caused those news organs to reach out to Pesta, only Reuters got back to him to ask for his side. Pesta provided them with the following statement:



Happy to explain the process.

I was alerted to the story by syndicated talk show host Vicky [sic] McKenna, who shared the account with me.

A grandmother with family in the school wrote the account of what was allegedly going on in the school via a vis “furries.” Her account was based on direct information from the students in her family.

After verifying that this was the backstory, I added the account to my presentation, maintaining—as you can see in the slide—that this was a report from a *grandmother*. I never claimed it was a first hand account.

I was subsequently approached by a concerned party about a week ago, who insisted that no such thing had occurred at the school in question. I told her just what I have told you now. But, because the source of the story was unwilling to go public—claiming that the school had targeted her relations in the past—I agreed to remove the slide as a courtesy. I also said that if the source decided to become public with her experience, I would reinsert with a relevant update.

The slide in my presentation was an addition to other “furry”s stories being reported from around the country. It was not presented as fact, but as an account that lined up with other related stories around the country.

For the record, I do not believe that the persons who created the initial complaint are just making things up.

Reuters published a “Fact Check” article regurgitating the same old claims. The piece was so hastily written that it is filled with poor formatting and typos. It appears that Reuters had already decided what to publish before doing its “fact check” — the piece only included one part of one sentence from Pesta’s e-mail to them, stating, “In an email to Reuters, Pesta said the slide ‘was not presented as fact, but as an account that lined up with other [furry] related stories around the country.’”

One is left to wonder why — with even liberal media such as *Rolling Stone* reporting *favorably* on the practice of kids “becoming” animals and doing so at school — there is such a push to discredit Pesta for informing parents of this phenomenon. Could the reason be that it is hard to miss the connection between humans identifying as animals and boys identifying as girls (and vice versa)?



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