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Behind the News — October 26, 2012 03:00 PM

CNN says women vote with their hormones

The Twitterverse goes mental

By Hazel Sheffield

TAGS: [cnn](#), [health](#), [unpublishing](#)

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It took seven hours of Internet backlash on Wednesday night for the Internet to convince CNN that an article it published needed to be removed. The article? A piece written by CNN's Elizabeth Landau, based on unpublished research, saying that women's voting choices are affected by their ovulation cycles. For a time, the story was featured on the CNN homepage.

CNN: How the media trivialize election / Do hormones drive women's votes?
twitter.com/msicism/status...

— Michael Sicinski (@msicism) October 24, 2012

The original post has since been taken down and replaced with a holding page, but the whole thing is [republished in full here](#).

Stories that engender big reactions, like this one, rarely disappear without a trace. The mushrooming coverage after the piece was taken down suggests CNN might have done more to either defend or apologize for their reporting in this case.

Here are the best bits from the piece:

The researchers found that during the fertile time of the month, when levels of the hormone estrogen are high, single women appeared more likely to vote for Obama and committed women appeared more likely to vote for Romney, by a margin of at least 20%.

and:

When women are ovulating, they "feel sexier," and therefore lean more toward liberal attitudes on abortion and marriage equality.

In the comments, which are still [visible on the holding page](#), readers expressed shock and

About the Author

Hazel Sheffield is an assistant editor at CJR. Follow her on Twitter [@hazelsheffield](#).

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disappointment at the poor standards of CNN in publishing the article. Twitter also lit up with responses:

Really, CNN? bit.ly/Prlt32 #really

— Liz Heron (@lheron) **October 24, 2012**

Really, @cnn? Do hormones drive women's votes? Insulting & unproven, go report on Viagra influencing male votes
thechart.blogs.cnn.com/2012/10/24/do-...

— Cindy Ritzman (@iplayallgames) **October 24, 2012**

Actual CNN headline: "Do hormones drive women's votes?"
thechart.blogs.cnn.com/2012/10/24/do-...

— Jessica Valenti (@JessicaValenti) **October 24, 2012**

I'd comment on CNN's stupid story on whether women's hormones affect their votes, but I'm hormonally enraged & want to bitch-slap them.

— Nina L. Diamond (@ninatypewriter) **October 24, 2012**

The author of the article, Elizabeth Landau, voiced some clarifications:

@jorcohen @kyliesobel @skenisberg Hi everyone, I included several political scientists saying these conclusions are not valid.

— Elizabeth Landau (@lizlandau) **October 24, 2012**

For the record, I was reporting on a study to be published in a peer-reviewed journal & included skepticism. I did not conduct the study.

— Elizabeth Landau (@lizlandau) **October 24, 2012**

Plenty of sites weighed in, too. Bust started their blog with, simply, "WTF." Over at The Cut, [Kat Stoeffel counseled women](#), "Please do not share this "science" with the Republican lawmaker in your life. He might actually believe it." *Washington Post's* Alexandra Petri contributed a [particularly barbed assessment](#) that stated, "I would go on, but I have to go turn into a werewolf now. That is what women do, yes? It is so weird that we can hold jobs and own property."

Despite the obvious comedic potential of a post like this, the furor has raised some useful points, many of which surfaced in [a live chat](#) hosted by Kelly McBride of Poynter on the issue of unpublishing and its alternatives.

"The biggest argument against unpublishing is that it has a destabilizing effect on the audience," McBride said, "which will place less trust in other information that you publish. If stuff just disappears, without a thorough explanation, people get very suspicious. So ultimately it's bad for democracy and citizen participation in the marketplace of ideas."

She also said that when unpublishing does occur, it should come with a big apology and explanation. Instead, CNN is offering radio silence, which stops the company from getting caught in a back-and-forth with readers but also fails to be transparent about what went wrong. If the post had appeared on The Huffington Post or Gawker, readers might expect sensationalist headlines and patchy reporting. Instead, many were upset that "a trusted

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news-source” would post on an unpublished study with such a strong gender bias.

1 **2**

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Fair enough. But I remember NPR running a story on 'women's dreams about President Clinton' early in that administration, and I'm not making that up. I've also read more than one woman (Judith Warner comes immediately to mind among urban chattering-class women) confess her sexual fantasies about President Obama. It's a fairly orthodox theme among such women that Democratic men are sexually attractive and Republican men are not. (There's also recent research alleging that Republican women in Congress have more 'feminine' features than do Democratic women.) As usual with the politically-correct, one wishes to say 'lighten up'.

#1 Posted by Mark Richard on Fri 26 Oct 2012 at 04:55 PM

Mark, you clearly haven't been following the chattering classes' discussions of Paul Ryan's body and workout, and Romney's many features . I believe the media has spent more time discussing Ryan's workout routine than his budget. Then again, his workout routine has more details available and is more consistent than his budget.

#2 Posted by Astraea_M on Fri 26 Oct 2012 at 08:26 PM

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