

November 28, 2021

Controversial Scholar Resigns

Scholar of pedophilia at Old Dominion University steps down amid controversy about comments on “minor-attracted persons.”

By Colleen Flaherty



Allyn Walker

Allyn Walker

An assistant professor of sociology and criminology at Old Dominion University who was accused of being an apologist for pedophilia following a recent interview about their research has agreed to leave the university.

The professor, Allyn Walker, who was put on leave earlier this month over the controversy and reported threats to their safety and that of the campus, did not respond to a request for comment. Previously, Walker said their comments defending nonoffending “minor-attracted persons” had been taken out of context or willfully misunderstood by critics.

In a joint statement announcing the resignation, Old Dominion University and Walker said that Walker will remain on leave through the end of their contract in May and officially step down from the university after that.

“We have concluded that this outcome is the best way to move forward,” President Brian O. Hemphill said in that statement. “We hope today’s action helps bring closure for our Monarch family. As we move forward, I encourage all members of the Monarch family to continue our efforts toward healing and civil discourse.”

Walker said their scholarship aims to prevent child sexual abuse, but that this work “was mischaracterized by some in the media and online, partly on the basis of my trans identity. As a result, multiple threats were made against me and the campus community generally.”

Walker thanked Old Dominion “for giving me the opportunity to teach

and to conduct my research, and the ODU Department of Public Safety for monitoring the threats against me and the community. I am particularly grateful for the outpouring of support from many among the ODU community, as well as others in my research fields who have publicly affirmed the value of my work in advancing child safety.”

In a separate statement, Hemphill said that “our decisions were made to protect the life and safety of faculty members and others on campus and beyond.”

Regarding academic freedom and free speech, Hemphill said, “Debate and disagreement are at the heart of research and learning. ODU faculty members in many disciplines are engaged in cutting-edge research that, by its very nature, tests boundaries and challenges accepted wisdom. Some of it may be controversial, and controversial research is often misunderstood and mischaracterized.”

‘We Have More Work to Do’

The “vast majority of Monarchs engaged in civil discourse, even those among us for whom personal experience made the subject of child sexual abuse especially painful,” Hemphill also said. Yet, “clearly, we have more work to do in order to generate greater understanding of research without acts of intimidation or threats of violence.”

Walker’s research attracted attention, much of it negative, after they granted an interview with an advocacy group called the Prostasia

Foundation. The foundation describes itself as a “child protection organization combining an evidence-based approach to child sexual abuse prevention with its commitment to human rights and sex positivity.”

During the interview, Walker said, “A lot of people, when they hear the term ‘pedophile,’ they automatically assume that means a sex offender, and that isn’t true, and that can lead to a lot of misconceptions about attractions toward minors.” Walker recommended that affirming therapies—as opposed to “conversion” therapies—become more widely available, to help nonoffending “minor-attracted persons” navigate their attractions in moral and legal ways.

“Having an attraction to minors, as long as it isn’t acted on, doesn’t mean that the person who has those attractions is doing something wrong,” Walker told ProStasia. “From my perspective, there is no morality or immorality attached to attraction to anyone, because no one can control who they’re attracted to at all. In other words, it’s not who we’re attracted to that is either OK or not OK, it’s our behaviors in responding to that attraction that is either OK or not OK.”

While fellow academics and said that Walker’s statements aligned with current research and best practices, some students and parents, along with others from outside the Old Dominion campus community, accused Walker of taking a weak stance against pedophilia or even endorsing it. The campus reportedly experienced safety threats, as did Walker.

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, which supported Walker throughout their brief suspension from campus and teaching, said in its own statement about Walker's resignation that "threats of violence (or violence itself) must not dictate what can be said or researched in higher education. By removing Walker from the classroom, Old Dominion capitulated to the loudest, angriest voices and gave hecklers a veto over what faculty can research, publish or say. The First Amendment rights of free speech and academic freedom protect the ability of public college faculty to explore ideas, no matter how controversial or how many people agree or disagree with them."

Daniel P. Richards, associate professor of English at Old Dominion University and president of the campus chapter of the American Association of University Professors, said that he and his colleagues "are—first and foremost—glad that Dr. Walker as well as our faculty, staff and students are safe, and that no violent acts were carried out."

That said, "We vehemently condemn the transphobic hate speech and physical threats directed at Dr. Walker," Richards continued. Referring to Walker's book, *A Long, Dark Shadow: Minor-Attracted People and Their Pursuit of Dignity*, on which Walker's comments to Protopostasia were based, Richards said it's "apparent" that those who have criticized it have not read it.

"We understand the resistance to the topic, especially from those affected with past trauma," Richards said. "These concerns are valid and legitimate, and we should continue to discuss them. Even so, we

are disappointed in the public reaction to Dr. Walker’s research and the continued misunderstanding of academic freedom and mischaracterization of rigorous, peer-reviewed research.”

Noting that Walker’s research was known to and even funded by the university prior to the controversy, Richards said Old Dominion “could have done much more in their messaging to draw a useful distinction between the value of Dr. Walker’s work and the right they have to pursue it and the discomfort and controversy around the topic itself.”

Richards said the AAUP chapter is working on a formal statement about the Walker case and is “committed to creating better conditions for faculty moving forward in the areas of shared governance, academic freedom and coalition building so that we don’t lose a cherished colleague like Dr. Walker again.”

Written By

Colleen
Flaherty

Share This Article

Copyright © 2026 Inside Higher Ed All rights reserved. |