

Background:

A British tabloid, the Daily Mail, widely known for its libelous and salacious articles, has publicly defamed a private American citizen recently thrust into the spotlight by no choice of her own for doing nothing more than attempting to protect the integrity of the data and science being used to inform Florida citizens and drive policy decisions about the COVID-19 pandemic.

Why a British tabloid is so interested in Jones' personal life, when Jones has only made one public appearance since she was publicly defamed and is a private, American citizen, and why they would publish the names, birthdates and ages, and even photographs of her young children, can be for no other reason than to allow American alt-right extremists to publish libelous and personal details about Jones' private life while evading laws in the United States that would allow for a multitude of civil and even criminal actions against the publishers, and to distract from the initial claims that pushed Jones into the spotlight – which are not even addressed in the article itself.

The tabloid's article is corrected line by line below based on public records, statements from Jones and others with knowledge of the below incidents, and court documents.

The Daily Mail's actions here should be considered an immoral, unethical and criminal invasion of an American citizen's private affairs, and we encourage the British government to investigate the tabloid while Jones' seeks civil damages and legal recourse for the lies and details about her children and her personal life that the tabloid published.

EXCLUSIVE: Married Florida data scientist axed for refusing to alter COVID-19 stats was **fired from university job for having affair with a student and charged with stalking, threatening him with revenge porn, writing a 342-page manifesto on their sex life**

Facts: Jones was dismissed from Florida State University, and later provided the opportunity to re-enroll, because she allegedly had sex with a fellow classmate (Sweeterman) in her office on campus while she was PhD student teaching undergraduate courses; Sweeterman was not in Jones' class the semester their relationship began and, in fact, was a classmate in a course in the geography department where they were both enrolled as students. Jones never threatened her abusive ex boyfriend with revenge porn, is not under investigation relating to revenge porn, and is not under investigation for or charged with any crimes related to sexual harassment or revenge porn.

Rebekah Jones **led a team of Florida Department of Health scientists and public health officers to create and design a comprehensive COVID-19 dashboard.**

Facts: Jones designed the dashboard by herself, and analyzed, processed and managed the data by herself, as evidenced by multiple articles published about her work long before she was reassigned from the dashboard (not fired) by DOH.

The 30-year-old said in a May 5 email that she was fired for refusing to 'manually change data to drum up support for the plan to reopen'

Facts: Jones was not terminated until May 21, by order of political-appointee Deputy Secretary of Health Shamari Roberson, but was removed from the dashboard on May 6, the day after she was ordered to hide and delete data on the COVID-19 dashboard she created and managed. An internal email sent May 15 to inform concerned scientists across the state about dramatic changes in the data

and the repeated crashing of the dashboard under its new management, never mentioned data manipulation, the governor, or any conspiracy related to her work.

DailyMail.com can reveal that she was fired in 2017 from Florida State University when she was a PhD student and instructor for having an affair with her student

Facts: The Daily Mail cannot reveal that information because it is false. Jones was dismissed from Florida State University, and later provided the opportunity to re-enroll, because she allegedly had sex with a fellow classmate (Sweeterman), who was not her student when their affair occurred, in her office on campus.

Jones was charged with three counts of cyberstalking her student Garrett Sweeterman, then 21, who filed a restraining order against her. She allegedly created a 'revenge porn' website called SurvivingGarrett and sent the link to online boards focusing on women's issues and the #metoo movement.

Facts: Jones was falsely accused of posting revenge-porn on a blog that mentioned the repeated abuse and harassment she was subjected to by Sweeterman while they dated in college- a charge that was investigated by police and rightfully dismissed. Although the blog post, which was featured as part of a collection of stories by women who had survived abuse, had been published for weeks before he filed the complaint. Sweeterman did not file his false complaint regarding the site until the day after he attempted and failed to have Jones' paternity suit against him dismissed with prejudice, which court records also show the Judge in that case advised Sweeterman to cooperate with Jones regarding medical information and history related to her daughter's health, and even told him to "grow up."

She claims in the essay that the fling with Sweeterman led to a pregnancy. She gave birth to a little girl in mid-2018 and shares an eight-year-old son with her husband.

Comment: Stating the ages of her children, which the Daily Mail failed to get correct, like all of this tabloid article attempted to smear Jones, is a sick and unethical misuse of the agency of the press. From Jones: "Using photos of my family – my children – in a libelous attempt to distract from the issues that thrust me into the spotlight against my will, is an unacceptable and abhorrent practice used only by tabloids and media terrorists, and all photos, which I took and thus own, should be removed with a full apology."

Article:

The fired Florida Health Department employee in charge of the state's COVID-19 response **website has a lurid past including three arrests, a torrid affair with her student** and being fired from her previous university teaching job, a DailyMail.com investigation can reveal.

Facts: The evidence and statements available through public records flatly refute this oft-repeated and libelous claim, which show that Jones and Sweeterman were classmates during their brief and volatile relationship. The above-mentioned arrests were all initiated by complaints made against her former boyfriend, and all were dismissed due to lack of evidence and repeated false statements made to police by the complainant. Jones has had no involvement with law enforcement outside of or since these false statements, made by an abusive and controlling ex who sought to intimidate Jones from filing a paternity suit against him.

Rebekah Jones, 30, claims she was asked to leave by health officials this month because she refused to fudge coronavirus infection numbers. **But a different picture has now emerged after Florida Governor Ron DeSantis said that Jones was canned because of insubordination and called her 'disruptive.'**

Facts: While the governor stated initially that Jones was just “tired” and on “vacation,” his office later stated she was terminated for “insubordination” and being “disruptive” for refusing to manipulate data, then warning her superiors of the potential consequences of hiding and deleting the data from the public; then the next day DeSantis defamed Jones by falsely stating she was under active investigation for sexual harassment, then he later claimed she was fired *because* of that non-existent investigation, then later claimed she was fired for a Facebook post in which there is no evidence of.

A DailyMail.com investigation has revealed Jones, a married mother-of-two, was fired from Florida State University for having an affair with one of her students while she herself was a PhD student and instructor in 2017.

The affair - which she chronicled in great detail in a 342-page essay that she filed as part of a now dismissed defamation case - **ended with three arrests and revenge porn and cyber stalking cases against her as well as her claim of a pregnancy.**

Facts: There was never and is not currently any case against Jones for revenge porn, as the statute does not allow for charges against those who publish details of sexual encounters without posting photographs for the sole intent of harming the person in the pictures; the charge, based solely on her abuser’s statement, *was* for cyber harassment after Jones publicly named her abuser in an expose about survivors and shared it with her friends and family.

The essay, obtained by DailyMail.com, includes page after page of graphic details on alleged sexual encounters with then-student Garrett Sweeterman, then 21, as well as X-rated text messages about sexual fantasies both were having about one another.

Facts: By repeatedly listing her abuser’s age at the time, 21, but omitting Jones’ age at the time they met, 26, when both were students AND classmates at Florida State University, and both enrolled in the same class at the time of their brief affair, this tabloid is attempting to defame Jones and libelously paint her as a predator. By removing the context of the blog – which included sexual messages Jones received from her abuser as evidence of how controlling, aggressive and unstable he was – this tabloid is attempting to re-victimize a victim of abuse.

She allegedly created a 'revenge porn' website called SurvivingGarrett and sent the link to online boards focusing on women's issues and the #metoo movement showing naked photos of her student and lover Garrett Sweeterman, 21, (pictured)

Facts: Jones never created a revenge porn site; her post was shared through a women’s issues blog focused on support for abuse survivors, in which Jones detailed her experience as a victim of sexual assault and domestic violence, and never shared photos on the website of any kind of either herself or her abuser. Additionally, if this tabloid believed Jones’ attacker was in fact a victim, publishing his name and photograph would be a clear violation of Florida law, and a gross invasion into his privacy.

The essay even describes her body's sensations when she had sex with Sweeterman on the floor of her university office, as well as the size of the student's manhood . FSU, like most universities, bans sexual contact between professors and their students.

Facts: Florida State University does not ban sexual relationships between professors and former students, and Jones and Sweeterman were classmates at the time of their relationship.

The affair, Jones claims in the essay and court records, led to a pregnancy. She gave birth to a little girl, [name redacted] in mid-2018.

Comment: Naming an infant child and sharing a photo of an infant child without consent is a criminal act in Florida and in most states in the United States. A European tabloid evading U.S. law and publicly naming an infant child without consent in an article about a private citizen is unfathomable, unethical, unprofessional, illegal and morally reprehensible.

Records show Jones is still living with her husband, 34-year-old Jacob Romer, their eight-year-old son and the new toddler.

Facts: The Daily Mail (tabloid) is incapable of even getting the most basic of facts right – including the ages of Jones' family – in its abhorrent attempt to smear a private citizen for no other reason than that she refused to mislead the public during a pandemic.

Neither Jones nor Romer returned calls or responded to emails and text messages asking for their comment. An email to Jones triggered an automatic reply asking those who contact her to donate to the GoFundMe page of her father and mother. Their house in Mississippi was destroyed by tornadoes April 12. So far, donors sent \$6,565.

Facts: Jones and her family are private citizens, and according to email records, the tabloid the Daily Mail never contacted Jones about the validity of their libelous and defaming statements, though they did harass her former boyfriend by repeatedly calling when he asked them not to.

Sweeterman, who works for a tech company in Tampa, Florida, picked up his cellphone and said: 'I'm sorry, I just don't want to talk about this.'

Facts: The former abusive boyfriend of Jones' has repeatedly asked not to be contacted in any way regarding his relationship with Jones, or the controversy over her firing, but records show the Daily Mail has continued to harass Sweeterman, who they have publicly named as a victim of a crime, which is illegal in the state of Florida.

Because she allegedly texted Sweeterman about using a coat hanger to end her pregnancy and wanting to die, her second arrest affidavit shows, Florida State University campus police knocked on the door of her marital home and attempted to have Jones committed to a mental institution. Jones did receive treatment and was released.

Facts: Sweeterman was later discovered to have sent text messages to himself from a VOIP number, pretending to be Jones, hoping action would be taken against her by the University. However, Jones was never committed to a mental institution, never received any "treatment," and filed a complaint with law enforcement for Sweeterman's attempt to abuse the Baker Act to exact revenge on his ex for choosing to keep her pregnancy and go back to her husband. The complaint was filed the same night

be made the false statements and filed with the Florida State University police; later, a Title IV investigation into Jones' allegations of Sweeterman's repeated stalking, harassment and violence toward Jones concluded with a statement encouraging disciplinary action against Sweeterman.

In March 2018, Jones was charged with violation of a court order, robbery without violence and trespassing. FSU Police had been called to the campus after Sweeterman reported Jones had slapped his cellphone from his hands then left with it, according to an FSU police report. Jones was banned from campus but still had managed to find Sweeterman in one of his classes.

Facts: Text records included in the court records show that Sweeterman asked Jones to meet him at his class "to talk," which Jones did, but after he became violent, grabbed her, and attempted to throw her down a flight of stairs – while she was six months pregnant – Jones left, at which time Sweeterman called police and made a false statement claiming he was robbed. The District Attorney's office later filed an order stating they would not file formal charges or pursue a case against Jones based on Sweeterman's false statements and repeated lies and attempts to harass Jones through the police in the past. According to police records, Sweeterman's phone was traced to an apartment building where one of his friend's lived, while Jones was on the other side of the city at the exact same moment.

What's more, weeks earlier, Sweeterman obtained a restraining order against Jones, according to legal documents. She was booked and spent the night in jail. A judge then allowed Jones to go free for as long as she took medications prescribed to her during a mental health evaluation, an FSU police report shows.

Facts: Jones was forced to spend three days in jail, at six months pregnant, based on her abuser's false statements to police, of which the only evidence found after a thorough investigation and multiple interviews with investigators, during which Sweeterman made many contradictory and false statements, was her abuser's own statement.

Citing conflicting statements about the incident from both Jones and Sweeterman as well as a lack of witnesses and evidence of any kind, the state attorney declined to prosecute Jones.

Facts: Finally, a true statement.

Jones' brushes with the law continued in July 2019, days after she gave birth to her daughter. This time, she was an employee of the state's health department.

Facts: The Daily Mail tabloid stated just paragraphs earlier that Jones' infant daughter, who the tabloid recklessly and illegally published the name and photograph of, was born in July 2018, not 2019. However, the tabloid failed to mention that, in 2018 (actually days after Jones had a child), Jones participated in a disciplinary hearing that resulted in a decision *not* to permanently expel Jones. Sweeterman became angry, argumentative and yelled at the administrator during the hearing, contradicted the multiple-versions of stories he had previously provided to police, lied repeatedly even when faced with evidence, and even left the hearing early in frustration that it was not going his way.

Court records show she was charged with three counts of cyberstalking Sweeterman after she allegedly created a 'revenge porn' website called SurvivingGarrett and sent the link to online boards focusing on

women's issues and the #metoo movement. According to court records, the website included photos of Sweeterman naked that he allegedly shared with her when they were lovers.

The Tallahassee Police report also shows, in June 2019, Sweeterman was receiving 'multiple calls' from the state's Department of Health that he didn't pick up. The cyberstalking case is still pending. She could be facing prison time, according to a lawyer familiar with the case.

Facts: Repeating false statements within a single article will not make them true. No photographs were ever published on the abuse-survivor's blog, there is no evidence these photos were ever published or published by Jones, and Sweeterman's statements about "anonymous calls" were never verified. Jones absolutely does not face prison time, and the only evidence in the case was her abuser's personal statement, none of which was verified after thorough investigation.

Comment: As the rest of this tabloid's article is a blatant attempt to smear a scientist and private citizen for no reason other than to support a false media and political narrative, and our time would be better spent defending the right of Florida's citizen's to have access to accurate and transparent data about the COVID-19 pandemic, we will not be individually responding to each of the dozens of libelous and inflammatory claims below. Jones has repeatedly refused to speak to journalists and has asked the media to respect her and her family's privacy, which the tabloid The Daily Mail has refused to do, even harassing Jones' husband, her ex lover, her children, and other members of her family, in a vicious and slanderous failed campaign to discredit an honest and hard-working scientist who's work has been published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, praised by the Governor and the White House, and endorsed by the American Association of Geographers, the American Statistical Association, URISA, and many others.

Despite our encouragement to make a public statement regarding the tabloid's gross abandonment of truth, Jones has only agreed to issue one comment.

Jones: "I refuse to let British tabloids turn me into a person who hates or broadly distrusts the press, though as a private citizen, it has become shockingly clear to me that there are no limits to what a tabloid can say or publish about you, your family and even your children – babies – in their pursuit of greed and relevance within extremist and far-right circles. My lawyers are exploring lawsuits for libel and defamation for the vile and false things stated in this article and others, copyright infringement for using photos of myself and my young children without consent and in an abusive and harassing manner, and potential criminal avenues related to publicly disclosing the details of a sex crime complaint and investigation, of which I was the victim. I hope even a British tabloid like the Daily Mail would not need to face such aggressive legal repercussions to issue a full retraction and apology, as any legitimate press agency would do."