

CW: TRANSPHOBIA, CONVERSION THERAPY, BIPHOBIA, INTERSEXISM

As an LGBTQ+ welfare society, we feel compelled to speak out about a pattern of the university repeatedly elevating anti-trans campaigners without meaningful opposition, in contradiction to its own equality policies, while simultaneously misappropriating the name of our community for marketing purposes.

On Monday, the Department of Sociology is planning to host a talk by Professor Michael Biggs as part of an LGBTQ+ History Month seminar series. Biggs is a director of an anti-trans pressure group, Sex Matters, and an advisor to SEGM, designated as an anti-LGBTQ hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. Both groups routinely promote anti-trans fringe theories and conversion therapy. Biggs has compared gender-affirming care to "eugenics", said that "transphobia is a word created by fascists", and suggested that the elevated rates of suicide among the trans community are exaggerated. He has also appeared in an anti-trans film produced by Ickonic, the production company of conspiracy theorist and Holocaust denier David Icke.

For the university to promote Biggs' views on trans people under the banner of LGBTQ+ History Month, founded in the wake of Section 28 and intended to combat prejudice against the LGBTQ+ community, is wildly inappropriate. To our knowledge, none of the talks in the seminar are by openly trans or non-binary speakers or are focussed on offering a more mainstream academic view on trans issues. We have requested that the department apologise for including the talk as part of an LGBTQ+ History Month series, affirm its commitment to the welfare of trans and non-binary students, and commit to hosting a trans or non-binary speaker to speak on trans issues later this month.

Meanwhile, Helen Joyce, a director of the same anti-trans pressure group, has been invited to speak at two separate events, one at Balliol on Thursday and one at the Oxford Literary Festival, which uses the university logo and for which the university is providing use of the Sheldonian Theatre. Joyce has previously called for "reducing" the number of trans people in a speech for Genspect, a pro-conversion therapy lobbying group which is also designated as an anti-LGBTQ hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. She has said that every person who has transitioned is "a huge problem". Elsewhere, she has been criticised for claiming that the global agenda on trans issues is shaped by Jewish billionaires George Soros and Jennifer Pritzker. In the case of the Oxford Literary Festival, this is again being promoted as an LGBTQ+ event despite Joyce not being a member of the LGBTQ+ community.

Balliol's elevation of Joyce's views by agreeing to let her use their space directly contradicts their own equality policy, which states that the college "will ensure that in the conduct of all its activities, steps are taken to avoid the occurrence of discrimination, whether direct or indirect, and to promote good relations between different protected groups", which includes trans and non-binary people. It goes on to say that "any discriminatory behaviour, including harassment or bullying by individuals or groups, will be regarded extremely seriously". Joyce's repeated deliberate misgendering of trans people, which the university rightfully recognises as a form of harassment, is a matter of public record. We have requested that Balliol clarify whether their equality policy is still in place as well as their position on trans inclusion at the college.

Julie Bindel, another anti-trans campaigner who has labelled bisexuality a "fashionable trend" which she attributes to "sexual hedonism", has also been invited to speak at two events at the festival. Similarly, last year, they hosted Sharron Davies, a campaigner against trans and intersex people's participation in sports who has compared drag to "blackface", again in the Sheldonian, while Sonia Sodha, who has openly opposed attempts to ban anti-trans conversion therapy, was invited to speak at the Vice Chancellor's inaugural Sheldonian Series last term.

While the university has said that trans and non-binary students are free to go and ask questions at these events, none have any kind of meaningful opposition, fact-checking or structured debate built in—with anti-trans campaigners always setting the agenda and maintaining control of the floor—nor has the university offered trans and non-binary people an equivalent platform to challenge these campaigners' portrayals of them. The university's own equality policy states that it seeks to create an environment "free from discrimination, harassment or victimisation, where all transgender people are treated with dignity and respect" and that this "applies to all members of the University community, including students, staff, applicants, associate members, visitors and contractors." We ask that the university enforce its policy with regard to the events it promotes and provides space for, and ensures that trans and non-binary people are afforded fair and equal opportunities to speak for ourselves.

References:

Biggs:

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