

Screening Adult Human Female at the University of Edinburgh: A response

University of Edinburgh Staff Pride Network Committee

This response also has the support of UCU Edinburgh branch and University of Edinburgh Unison branch.

Free speech, academic freedom, freedom of expression. These are all phrases applied tactically to justify questioning the validity or the rights of people with marginalised identities. Most will be familiar with the history of scaremongering fostered by right-wing, often religious groups, designed to fuel moral panic directed at the gay community during the AIDS epidemic in the 80s and 90s which extended into legislation (including Section 28 in the UK) which limited the rights of gay people to live freely. The arguments often centred around the need to 'protect children', typically due to the conflation of queer identities with predatory behaviour towards minors. Today, we see the same tactics being levied at the trans community and it is happening here at the University of Edinburgh under the guise of academic freedom.

On the 26th of April 2023, the group Edinburgh Academics for Academic Freedom plans to screen the film 'Adult Human Female'. Their event description begins with two provocative questions:

1. Is it really harmless when men identify into the female sex?
2. Is it progressive for doctors to modify the bodies of

young people in the name of changing their 'gender'?

These questions on the surface may appear like a reasonable inquiry, when in fact they are a thinly veiled attempt to undermine the lived reality of trans people's lives. Permit me to unpack this for you, and feel free to skip this section if you've already figured it out.

The first question, by inference, is implying that it might be harmful for "men to identify into the female sex". This sets up the premise that the organisers believe that trans women, who it appears they are referring to here when they say 'men', are just men choosing to identify as women. It questions the validity of their identities and implies it might be a choice taken for potentially harmful reasons.

The second question is written in a manner that implies doctors are modifying the bodies of young people to change their gender. It centres the medical profession as the ones potentially doing harm to a vulnerable group. "Think of the children" – remember? Now, this could be the set-up for a discussion about surgeries performed to enforce binary gender on intersex children, children with diversities of sexual development, when they are too young to consent to the surgery or haven't had time to establish their own gender identity before undergoing surgery. Unfortunately, if you are familiar with the content of the film, this is not the case. What do they mean by modifying? Are they referring to puberty blockers which are reversible? Do they refer to well-established hormone therapies based on those used by cis people at many stages of their lives? Do they mean trans affirming surgeries for which the referral period is currently at least 5 years in the UK? This "think of the children" style dog-whistle does not instill much hope that the content of this event will

feature real stories from trans people who experience navigating trans affirming healthcare.

Then there's the decision to put the word gender in quotes. This implies they do not really believe gender is a real thing (and if you read their blogs on the subject you'll know this to be true). It's a consistent belief of those ascribing to the "gender-critical" movement that biological sex is immutable, binary and factual (erasing chromosomal and hormonal variation, intersex lives, and multiple non-European cultural worldviews) and that only gender is a construct. There is an abject failure to appreciate that the way we understand sex is also a human construct, something people have created language around in order to understand and label it. Furthermore, our understanding of both sex and gender, like all scientific understanding, is subject to change when given new evidence and information.

Then let's look at who is being represented on their panel. First, we have their film-makers whose expertise lies in journalism and film-making, so one might assume they will be there to discuss production of the film itself? Then we have a panel member who is staff at the University of Edinburgh that has organised a number of anti-trans events and contributed to AFAF blogs questioning trans rights, and another who is a member of a policy analysis collective who regularly writes about trans rights from a gender-critical position. Finally, we have the co-director of an organisation whose primary campaign function has been to prevent the reform of the Gender Recognition Act. So, how exactly will these two questions be treated by this panel? Every panelist appears to have the same agenda.

- There is no evidence of trans people forming part of the panel, so there will be no one to represent how trans people might experience the questions posed.

- There is also no one from the medical community, or anyone with academic expertise in human biology, available to contribute to these questions.

We are left to assume that responsibility will lie with the audience. In the face of a panel so clearly opposed to trans rights and trans people existing on their own terms, it will take a very brave person to challenge this ideology. It also begs the question of whether it is even ethical to expect a trans person to put themselves in the position of defending their existence against people so clearly opposed to it. Then there's the question of the role of allies in this situation. If you are not trans and you understand how hateful and problematic the content of this film is, what is to be achieved by arguing with the panel about it? Do you expect to change their minds? Is this the right environment to attempt to educate the rest of the audience about how problematic it is, given you will likely only have a few minutes to ask one question against the upwards of 90 minutes the film lasts plus the time the panel will have to speak? It is our contention that this is a fruitless task at best and deeply risky to someone's well-being to be forced into the position of trying to challenge this event as part of the audience. This event represents an echo-chamber of 1 specific viewpoint that is very clearly a vilification of trans people, questioning their right to exist, under the guise of academic freedom. That the event is hosted at the University of Edinburgh only adds to this veneer of credibility as it appears our esteemed institution endorses these hateful views.

We are putting efforts into supporting a peaceful protest outside the venue that will be an opportunity to take a stand against transphobia on our campus. This peaceful demonstration will take place opposite the Gordon Aikman Lecture Theatre from 5.30pm, allies welcome. Also on the 26th April, at 6.30pm HCA are hosting a talk entitled Saving Lives and the Colonial

Project of Gender at the Centre for Global Indigenous Futures by Professor Sandy O'Sullivan, a transgender/non-binary Wiradjuri (Aboriginal) person leading the Intimacies node of the Centre for Global Indigenous Futures at Macquarie University. This talk in HCA was arranged prior to the announcement of the rescheduled screening.

International Asexuality Day 2023

Today is International Asexuality Day. To our asexual members we wish you a Happy International Asexuality Day and to the rest of our members today is a day to learn, to share knowledge, and to be the best allies you can be to our asexual friends. Feel free to raise awareness with our asexual flag Staff Pride Network logo design (credit to Gill Kidd, SPN graphic design volunteer).

<https://internationalasexualityday.org/en/>

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/news/six-ways-be-ally-asexual-people>

Allyship in Informatics

by Jonathan MacBride (he/him) IGS Administrative Assistant

Today (Monday the 27th March 2023) the School of Informatics emphasised their allyship of trans and non-binary people at the University of Edinburgh. It's not often as a cis gay man that I see inclusion at a high level. Today I felt that little bit more valued, motivated, inspired, more proud to work in Informatics. Allyship is usually seen where individuals want to make a difference in ways they can achieve. Today the School of Informatics quarterly School General Meeting featured the Director of People & Culture Chris Heunen presenting the School Values, announcing a new family fund grant and then giving time for a former Staff Pride Network Trans & Non-Binary Rep to share insights about being a good ally to LGBT+ people. Dr Gina Gwenffrewi shared some of her personal story, comparing her life as an undergrad at Cardiff University 20 years ago, unable to be her true self, unable to achieve her full potential, to now at the University of Edinburgh where she has achieved her PhD, currently teaching Introduction to Trans Studies to UoE undergrads. It's quite a turnaround which she puts down to being able to live and study as Gina, focussing only on what she's here for. Gina highlighted that if we can all show respect and care to trans and non-binary colleagues and students that they will be more successful in their research and work, happier, healthier, more creative, instinctive.

How do we do that? Baby steps are a start. A Rainbow Lanyard shows others that you are a safe person to approach. Hang one from your pocket or on your office wall if you don't tend to wear it round your neck. Ask someone which pronouns they use and respect their answer. Add your own pronouns to your e-signature. Many people aren't familiar with gendered names of

cultures around the world so not only does it highlight your understanding of inclusion, it helps others know who they're replying to. After all, here in Edinburgh a 'Chris' could use he/him, she/her or they/them.

A non-binary Informatics PhD student explains how the world around them impacts their day-to-day life:

"In most scenarios, I am the first non-binary person my colleagues will have encountered. Maybe English is not their first language, and they have never learned that it is grammatically acceptable and correct to use "They/Them" for a single person. Maybe English is their first language and they have just never had to think in this way before. There is nothing wrong with learning, and making mistakes. However, there is a huge mental load on being everyone's first learning experience, that could be reduced by faculty members and staff simply by showing support in their actions and using the right etiquette.

It takes a significant amount of energy (and quite honestly courage) to persevere through conversations where someone is knowingly and consistently using the wrong pronouns for me. All anyone needs to do is ask if they forget, and correct themselves and others when they make a mistake."

▪ Persie Rolley-Parnell, RAS PhD

What do I hope was achieved today? Perhaps a few people hearing a trans woman speak in person for the first time, personalising a message which they have only heard in the media. Maybe a message they haven't heard before, particular to their role in the School, relating it to how they teach, how they interact. A fellow trans and/or non-binary staff member or student could have been sitting there feeling hope, that things in life will get better. Or simply that one person tells another that a trans woman spoke at their School General Meeting. Visibility makes a difference. Personalisation of an

issue.

The Informatics Forum reception has a small stock of the latest design of UoE Rainbow Lanyards, featuring a more inclusive Progress Pride flag. Anyone with a staff card can also get them free from Card Services at the Main Library. They are available to everyone from the Visitor Shop who sell them with a card holder for £2.

LGBT+ History Month: Calendar of Events at UoE

February is LGBT+ History Month – this year’s theme is **Behind the Lens**. Join us at an upcoming event!

Some event details will be updated throughout the month. Please check the SPN member SharePoint for the most up-to-date calendar of events.


Table of Events


Date	Time	Venue	Event
06.2.2023	18:00-20:00	Lounge Bar, Teviot [RSVP]	Trans and Non-binary Social Mixer – In collaboration with EUSA
08.2.2023	15:00-16:00	Nucleus Café [RSVP]	Western General / IGC: SPN Coffee & Cake
10.2.2023	17:00-21:00	Meow Studios [Register for waitlist]	LGBTQ+ Workshop – Photography – Part of the EUSA Celebrating Queer Joy campaign
13.2.2023	17:30-19:30	Lounge Bar, Teviot [RSVP]	Ace+ Social Mixer – In collaboration with EUSA


13.2.2023	16:00-18:00	Sydney Smith Lecture Theatre [Register here]	Trans Awareness event (for staff) – Hosted by HCA Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee
15.2.2023	13:00-14:00	Magnet Cafe [RSVP]	Kings Buildings: SPN Coffee & Cake
16.2.2023	17:30-19:30	Main Library [Register here]	Our History: Real Voices – An evening event remembering Lothian Lesbian & Gay Switchboard, co-hosted by SWAN and Lothian Health Services Archive
17.2.2023	14:00-15:30	Meadows Lecture Theatre [Register here]	Professor Zoë Playdon: ‘Making Trans History, Making Trans Futures’ – Guest lecture, hosted by HCA
17.2.2023	16:00-18:00	Chrystal Macmillan Building [Register here]	Trans Awareness event (for students) – Hosted by HCA Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee
17.2.2023	16:00-18:45	Dining Room, Teviot [Register for waitlist]	LGBTQ+ Workshop – Sculpture – Part of the EUSA Celebrating Queer Joy campaign
20.2.2023	16:00-17:00	40 George Square [Register here]	PPLS Panel Session: What Barriers to Education do the LGBTQ+ Community Face?
20.2.2023	17:15-19:00	Centre for Regenerative Medicine [Register here]	BioQuarter/CMVM EDI Committee Movie Night – with short films from LGBT Health & Wellbeing, followed by discussion and pizza
20.2.2023	18:00-20:00	Lounge Bar, Teviot [RSVP]	Bi+ Social Mixer – In collaboration with EUSA
22.2.2023	13:00-14:00	Bayes Café [RSVP]	Central: SPN Coffee & Cake
22.2.2023	18:00-19:30	Off campus @ Kafe Kweer [Register here]	SPN FEATURE EVENT: The ‘Sissy-photographer’: Gender through the lens of Jürgen Baldiga – Workshop for anyone who wants to understand more about gender variance and art history. No prior knowledge required!
24.2.2023	16:00-19:00	Old College [Register here]	LGBTQ+ Workshop – Life Drawing – Part of the EUSA Celebrating Queer Joy campaign
27.2.2023	17:30-19:30	Lounge Bar, Teviot [RSVP]	Lesbian+ Social Mixer – In collaboration with EUSA
27.2.2023 – 28.2.2023	12:00-16:00	The Venue, Potterow Dome [Register here]	CELEBRATING QUEER JOY EXHIBITION SPN – LGBTQ+ Liberation Campaign collaboration with funding from IAD’s Student Partnership Agreement Fund. Launch event 27.2 @12:00. Submit your work by 25.2: https://edin.ac/40FuTNL
28.2.2023	12:00-16:00	Teviot Study, 13 Bristo Place Edinburgh, Scotland, EH8 9AJ (map) [£3 at the door]	Film Screening: “Farewell My Concubine” Palme d’Or winner at Cannes Film Festival 1993. Co-hosted with FilmSoc to mark LGBTQ+ History Month 2023. https://www.eufilmsoc.com/screenings/week-6-farewell-my-concubine

Any questions about any of these events? Get in touch:
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Staff Pride Network Members' Newsletter February 2023



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