

## SILENCING AND CENSORSHIP IN THE TRANSGENDER RIGHTS DEBATE

The recent launch of the group Transforming Tasmania, which aims to lobby for law reforms that improve the lives of transgender and gender-diverse people, is an opportunity for the community to engage in robust, open and safe discussions on matters concerning gender identity.

The media has an important role to play in such discussions, and needs to actively encourage the expression of diverse viewpoints. Tasmanian media organisations could follow the example set by prominent UK publication, *The Economist* - <https://www.economist.com/transgender> - and invite individuals holding a range of opinions on transgenderism and transgender identities to express their ideas in writing in a dedicated forum.

It's a challenge, and one that media players should have the intestinal fortitude to accept, with all the alacrity expected of dedicated members of the Fourth Estate.

### OVERVIEW

Identity politics is becoming an increasingly controversial topic especially within women spaces, schools, sports clubs, universities and the LGBTQI community.

Since 2012 in Tasmania, a number of examples of bullying, threats and intimidation by trans activists against people with different points of view have been brought to light in the media. Until now, several other cases have not been reported.

This article will outline those cases and also provide a broad introduction to media reports on no-platforming and censorship at universities, proposed changes to anti-discrimination laws, and acts of silencing and intimidation against critics of trans rights tactics and campaigns.

### SUPPRESSING DEBATE

Australian feminist activist and scholar **Germaine Greer**, while stating that transgenderism is not her issue, has been repeatedly targeted by the trans rights movement with attempts to have her no-platformed and banned from speaking at universities because of her views on

transgenderism. As **Claire Lehman** said in relation to no-platforming on **The Drum** -

*'While the stated aim of this approach is to reduce harm, the end result is enforced ignorance. No-platforming does not change people's hearts and minds, it intimidates people into silence. It is an anti-Enlightenment movement'.*

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-10-27/lehmann-greer-and-the-no-platforming-scourge/6887576>

In an open letter published in the **Guardian's 'Observer'** section in February 2015 titled 'We cannot allow censorship and silencing of individuals: Universities have a particular responsibility to resist this kind of bullying', **Beatrix Campbell** wrote about -

*'...a worrying pattern of intimidation and silencing of individuals whose views are deemed "transphobic" or "whorephobic". Most of the people so labelled are feminists or pro-feminist men, some have experience in the sex industry, some are transgender.*

*Last month, there were calls for the Cambridge Union to withdraw a speaking invitation to Germaine Greer; then the Green party came under pressure to repudiate the philosophy lecturer Rupert Read after he questioned the arguments put forward by some trans-activists. The feminist activist and writer Julie Bindel has been "no-platformed" by the National Union of Students for several years.*

*"No platforming" used to be a tactic used against self-proclaimed fascists and Holocaust-deniers. But today it is being used to prevent the expression of feminist arguments critical of the sex industry and of some demands made by trans activists. The feminists who hold these views have never advocated or engaged in violence against any group of people. Yet it is argued that the mere presence of anyone said to hold those views is a threat to a protected minority group's safety.'*

[https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2015/feb/14/letters-censorship?CMP=tw\\_t\\_gu](https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2015/feb/14/letters-censorship?CMP=tw_t_gu)

Campbell's piece was co-signed by over 130 feminists, activists and academics.

**Peter Tatchell**, a high profile gay rights activist in the UK, was a signatory to Campbell's open letter and, as a result, attempts have subsequently been made to no-platform him. He describes this as -

*'yet another example of "a witch-hunting, accusatory atmosphere" symptomatic of a decline in "open debate on some university campuses".'*

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/feb/13/peter-tatchell-snubbed-students-free-speech-veteran-gay-rights-activist>

**Associate Professor Bronwyn Winter** from the European Studies and International Studies programs in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Sydney, wrote in her article 'Tomboys and sissies: where we're going wrong' -

*'There are many things that Peter Hyndal, director of Transformative Solutions, and I agree about. We agree that no human being should be treated with disrespect and that it is unhelpful to express our disagreements through such personalising tactics as pejorative labelling, harassment and bullying, and attempts to shut down events organised by others.'*

*Unfortunately, I am aware of several instances of bullying, by some (mainly male-to-female) transgender people of some feminists and lesbians who disagree with male-to-female transgender claims that they are women just like us and therefore should have unrestricted access to women-only events and spaces.*

*I certainly know that not every member of the transgender community engages in such bullying, but those who do engage in it are vocal enough, and powerful enough, to do serious damage to women. Some women are now either too angry or too intimidated to even attend the upcoming IQ2 Debate hosted by The Ethics Centre in Sydney on Thursday March 3, where the proposition 'Society Must Recognise Trans People's Gender Identities' will be debated.*

*That sort of polarisation, fear and anger are not helpful. We have to be able to have an intelligent and respectful conversation on the politics of gendering, where no one fears bullying or reprisals'.*

<https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/bullying-out-of-place-in-gender-debate-20160229-gn6058.html>

## DOCUMENTING THE SUPPRESSION

***Banned By Trans: Who's Silencing Who*** is a recently published online blog that outlines various cases of 'assault, unemployment, de-platforming, unpublishing, disinvitation and event cancellation as a direct result of "offending" transactivists'.

<https://bannedbytrans.wordpress.com/contact/>

The site introduction reads as follows –

*'Transgender ideology is rapidly gaining mainstream attention, popularity and acceptance. Transgender people and their supporters (both hereafter referred to as "transactivists") often accuse those who disagree with them of the following:*

- *silencing and "talking over" trans people*
- *denying transgender people's right to exist*
- *making them feel unwelcome, unsafe and triggered*

*However, from **our** end of things, it seems to be the other way around. Many people, both within and outside of transactivism, agree that it is transactivists who are actively silencing and triggering others, creating a climate in which questions and criticisms of their ideas are not only discouraged, but sometimes outright punished. Even fully transitioned transwomen and "detransitioners" have written about this dangerous spiral of silence in transactivism, and have been ostracized by the trans "community" as a result.*

.....

*Please take care to notice a few things:*

- *Most of the people censored are women, particularly radical feminists and lesbians*
- *In some of these cases, people were censored for alleged transphobia, but other kinds of bigotry in the same context (particularly misogyny) were **not** censored*
- *Sometimes there is no evidence of transphobia at all, but an accusation of transphobia alone is worthy of punishment*

.....

- *Transgender people represent an estimated 0.3 % of the U.S. population*
- *The transgender interest lobby is worth millions of dollars, mostly spent on advertising*
- *It's not difficult to see that the amount of rights, sociopolitical power and social recognition that the very small transgender lobby has accrued in a very short time span is vastly disproportionate to the amount of power other marginalized groups (women, people of color, LGB people) have accrued after rallying for much, much longer periods of time.*

*For instance....there are some protections that trans people have that women and other minorities don't have (such as, 6-figure fines for "misgendering" while no such fine exists for using racial and misogynistic slurs).*

*It's highly unusual, and perhaps even suspect, that a special interest group representing a minuscule portion of the population has become this powerful, this fast, and yet claims that they are "silenced" and "invisible" to society.*

*And it's also highly unusual/suspect that 0.3% of the population has been this effective in censoring entire political organizations (such as Deep Green Resistance) and political ideologies (radical feminism).*

## **LESBIANS AND TRANSGENDERISM**

Other pressures from elements within the trans-activist movement are also gaining increased media attention, particularly the pressure on butch lesbian women to come out as transgender and begin female to male transition. Tasmanian comedian and lesbian, **Hannah Gadsby**, for example, recounts an instance of unsolicited feedback in her most recent live comedy show, *Nanette*. She says -

*'I got a letter on Facebook recently....Dear Hannah, You owe it to your community to come out as transgender. Now, all jokes aside, I really do want to do the best by my community, I really do, but that was new information to me. I don't identify as transgender. I don't'.*

<https://www.netflix.com/au/title/80233611>

The **Independent** report on 8 July this year titled 'London Pride: Anti-trans activists disrupt parade by lying down in the street to protest 'lesbian erasure'' quoted lesbian activists who demonstrated and handed out leaflets at the Pride rally in London. They said -

*'We want to get the L out of Pride, a man cannot be a lesbian, a person with a penis cannot be a lesbian.'*

*Another accused trans people of "pressuring lesbians to have sex with them", and stated she and other had been referred to as Terfs (trans-exclusionary radical feminists)'.*

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/anti-trans-protest-london-pride-parade-lgbt-gay-2018-march-lesbian-gay-rights-a8436506.html>

**Lily Maynard**, a woman who negotiated a transgender journey with her daughter, and now publishes an online blog titled *Welcome to Transtopia*, attended the London Pride march. She asked -

*'Is lesbian erasure now a trans right'?*

*'I have honestly never heard anyone say 'I hate trans people'. Believing that it is not possible to be born in the 'wrong' body is not hateful and erases no-one. We all have a right to our religious and spiritual beliefs, and if you want to believe that souls are gendered and that we have pink and blue brains; if you want to worship at the altar of the gender fairy, then go for it. Nobody can tell you what to believe. Your beliefs are your own business. It's when you start demanding that everyone around you agrees with you and that if they don't share your ideology then they must be evil people who hate you and wish you ill; that they must be silenced – well, that roar is the sound of transactivism rearing its tyrannical, despotic head.'*

<https://lilymaynard.wordpress.com/2018/07/12/pride-prejudice-who-is-standing-with-lesbians-getthelout/>

## **GENDER APOSTATES – CHALLENGING TRANS IDEOLOGY**

**Gender Apostates** is a group of women and transwomen who are challenging the trans rights movement. Transgender woman, **Miranda Yardley**, writes -

*‘Transgender ideology is in a state. Its central ideas are inconsistent with each other, have little support in science or the ethics of power analysis and are so divorced from reality they require a complete suspension of disbelief in order to sit in one’s head without suffering cognitive dissonance’.*

While drawing a distinction between transsexuals and those who identify as transgender, Miranda Yardley outlines 12 actions that those who support transgender ideology can take to support the lives of women including -

*‘To accept that sex and gender are not the same thing. Sex is a biological reality based on reproductive potential, and gender is a social system that harms women through stereotyping behaviour, by giving women the negative stereotypes and men those that are positive; gender itself is oppression, not a civil liberty. All transwomen by definition are biologically male, socialised as boys then usually ‘transition’ as adults, although in the present climate it appears to be coming acceptable for children to ‘transition’, which should be examined critically rather than accepted unconditionally. That our underlying biological reality remains fundamentally unchanged is not a value judgement, it is a morally neutral statement of fact, neither good nor bad, it just is and being a woman is not a feeling or an opt-in’.*

and

*‘To cease insisting that language specific to describing over 50% of the population be erased to indulge the fragile egos of the 0.3% of the population that is trans. This means respecting women’s right to be able to describe their own bodies and experiences and also getting rid of the inherently redundant and coercively imposed ‘cis’; we already have a word for ‘women’ and that is ‘women’. Penises are the male sex organ, vaginas are female; this is how human reproduction works’.*

<http://genderapostates.com/transgender-ideology-needs-to-change-to-support-women/>

## THE CASE STUDIES – TASMANIA

The transgender debate is increasingly characterised by no-platforming, withdrawal from participation, censorship, bullying, threats, intimidation, silencing, stonewalling and expulsion from groups for those who express dissent from the ‘popular’ transgender narrative.

The following Tasmanian case studies outline examples of trans rights crusaders and their ideological supporters apparently acting in a manner inconsistent with freedom of speech, academic freedom, open, fair and respectful debate and inclusivity.

**1. Dr Meredith Nash, Deputy Director of the Institute for the Study of Social Change at the University of Tasmania withdrew from chairing the UTas World Environment Day Forum on 5 June 2017.**

Speaking at the forum was Robert Jensen, Professor of Journalism at the University of Texas, Austin. Professor Jensen was in Australia to speak at the Sydney Writers' Festival and to launch his latest book, *The End of Patriarchy: Radical Feminism for Men*. The forum was presented by the University of Tasmania in partnership with Spinifex Press, Nordic Model Australia Coalition (NorMAC) and the Institute for the Study of Social Change.

Professor Jensen's talk, titled 'Male Supremacy, Human Supremacy and the Fate of the Ecosphere' posed the question – '*On World Environment Day, can critical feminist and ecological analyses help us see another path to save our planet?*'.

Two hours before the forum commenced, a communications officer from the University of Tasmania Institute for the Study of Social Change notified the NorMAC organisers that Dr Nash had withdrawn from chairing the forum.

**Saffire Grant, a student member of the UTas Women's Collective**, had allegedly made a complaint to Dr Nash about Professor Jensen's views on transgender people, saying they amounted to hate speech.

When interviewed for this article, Ms Grant did not deny making the complaint. She was reluctant to discuss the matter with someone who did not identify as transgender or non-binary, and asked that questions be forwarded by email.

At the time of writing, Ms Grant had not responded to the queries submitted as she requested.

Dr Nash chose to remove herself from participation in the forum on the basis of Ms Grant's complaint. The university did not provide a substitute staff member to welcome Professor Jensen at the forum – a serious failure to observe the courtesy normally afforded visiting academics.



Attempts to contact and interview Dr Meredith Nash for this article were unsuccessful, however the communications office at the Institute for the Study of Social Change confirmed the complaint and Dr Nash's response.

**. 2. Adrienne Moreton, President Tasmanian Women Lawyers (TWL), withheld an invitation to attend an International Women's Day (IWD) forum in 2017 from TWL members. The refusal to pass on the invitation was explained on the basis that members of the Women's Liberation Front, Tasmania Branch, were speaking at the event.**

On 1 March 2017 Nordic Model Australia Coalition (NorMAC) sent an email message to Adrienne Morton, TWL President, extending a personal invitation to the staff, board and members of the TWL to attend NorMAC's IWD forum titled 'Men's Violence to Women – A Broader Conversation' on 8 March. The forum included a number of speakers, including University of Tasmania Professor Bob Pease, former Tasmanian Children's Commissioner Patmalar Ambikapathy, Madeleine Ogilvie MP, NorMAC Director, Simone Watson and two speakers from the Tasmanian branch of the Women's Liberation Front (WoLF).

Adrienne Moreton replied later that day -

*'Thank you for your kind invitation.*

*Given the short notice and the sheer number of IWD events neither myself nor any members of the Committee will be able to attend in any official capacity.*

***Furthermore, given the stance of WoLF in relation to the participation of transwomen in the feminist movement I am also unable, in good conscience, to forward the invitation on to my members'.***

Despite several attempts to seek an explanation of this response from Ms Moreton over the course of the following six months, nothing substantive eventuated. Ms Moreton either attributed her lack of contact to a 'clerical error' or promised to table the matter 'at the next committee meeting', and finally delegated the task of addressing NorMAC's concerns to TWL Vice-President, Seva Iskandarli, who also failed to offer anything relevant.

The TWL includes in its charter a commitment to provide a forum for the exchange of information and opinions on aspects of the law relating to women. NorMAC shares this commitment and continues to question Ms

Moreton's apparently unilateral rejection, on behalf of TWL members, of an opportunity to participate in such an information exchange.

### **3. Robin Banks, former Anti-Discrimination Commissioner and Leica Wagner, Policy Adviser, Equal Opportunity Tasmania – allegations of bullying, harassment, threats and discrimination**

Robin Banks, former Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, and Leica Wagner, Senior Policy Adviser with Equal Opportunity Tasmania were the subject of three articles written by Matthew Denholm in *The Australian* between August 2016 and January 2017, as follows -

#### **'Feminists decry sex change proposals on men who identify as women' –**

**26 August 2016**

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/state-politics/feminists-decry-sex-change-proposals-on-men-who-identify-as-women/news-story/600466f4e420ad31dca556c23d863bbc>

#### **An Anti-discrimination commissioner bullied me: feminist**

**1 October 2016**

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/antidiscrimination-commissioner-bullied-me-feminist/news-story/a54f7c4dda6bebe92b4c8d0574fe60e1>

#### **Anti-discrimination boss to face bias claim over sex change plans**

**16 January 2017**

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/antidiscrimination-boss-to-face-bias-claim-over-sex-change-plan/news-story/8e661a713bd591a7233fef4292fb23e7>

During her tenure as Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commissioner Ms Banks put forward a proposal to amend the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1999 (Tas) to allow certain changes to birth certificates. Specifically, the

amendments would allow individuals to change the sex noted on their birth certificate on the basis of self-identification alone, with no need to prove the medical treatment and assessments currently required to make such a change. These alterations to birth certificates could be made every 12 months, according to Ms Banks proposal.

In response to a request for community feedback, the Women's Liberation Front (WoLF), Tasmanian Branch presented a submission challenging the proposed legislative amendments, and arguing they would have a negative impact on women's rights and freedoms.

A member of WoLF sought a personal meeting with Ms Banks to discuss the issues. The ensuing meeting was attended by the WoLF representative, Ms Banks and Ms Leica Wagner, senior policy adviser with Equal Opportunity Australia.

Over a period of two and a half hours, the WoLF representative was insulted, bullied and harassed by both Ms Banks and Ms Wagner. Her concerns were dismissed and she was accused of being 'naïve' and holding 'bigoted' views for highlighting the negative impact of the proposals on women's existing right to establish female-only services.

The meeting left her extremely humiliated and distressed, and she lodged formal complaints with the Tasmanian Attorney General and the Tasmanian Integrity Commission.

No action was taken against Ms Banks, although the Attorney-General expressed sympathy for the WoLF representative's position.

**4. The University of Tasmania Women's Collective expelled several women from the organisation in 2015 because they expressed views questioning the prioritisation of male trans and 'gender queer' members' interests above women's interests within the collective.**

In 2015 Bronwyn Williams was a mature aged student enrolled in a master's degree at the University of Tasmania. Ms Williams joined the Women's Collective to engage with other women on campus, but was shortly expelled from the group, without notification, at a private meeting of group administrators. She was accused of breaching the group's 'rules' after

questioning why trans and queer members were to be shown special consideration.

There was no contact to advise of the supposed transgressions, however Ms Williams sought confirmation she had been removed from the group from administrative officer, Heidi La Paglia. Ms La Paglia confirmed the meeting and the group's decision to ban her from the group, but offered no explanation for the blatant lack of due process.

Ms Williams was abused and insulted online by several members of the Women's Collective, including Saffire Grant, Laura Nilssen, On Ee Chin and Isaac Foster. After being summarily dismissed from the group, Ms Williams located other members of the group who had been removed in similar circumstances.

Ms Williams lodged a formal complaint with the University of Tasmania Union, and after several follow-up requests, an inquiry was conducted by an independent investigator. The investigator presented several recommendations to the Student's Union and months later the Union Board advised Ms Williams the Women's Collective had been instructed 'to implement fair procedures for managing inappropriate behaviour, and a clear complaints and appeals process in their Constitution and Safer Spaces Policy'. Adherence to this recommendation was to be a condition of the Women's Collective's re-affiliation with the Union, should they choose to apply for it.

It is unfortunate that a university student organisation needed to be told they should have robust and transparent processes in place, after numerous instances of bullying and discrimination by members and a formal complaint about their actions.

A summary of this situation was published in the University of Tasmania student newspaper, *Togatus*, on 16 October 2015 - <http://www.togatus.com.au/utas-womens-collective-a-new-meaning-for-inclusive/>.

**5. In 2012, the Scarlet Alliance Tasmania attempted, but failed, to have Professor Sheila Jeffreys no-platformed at a U Tas Law School staff seminar and a public forum at the Friends Meeting House.**

Professor Jeffreys, formerly with the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne, and Public Officer of the Coalition Against

Trafficking in Women Australia, was scheduled to give a series of talks in Tasmania at the invitation of Whistleblowers Tasmania.

Whistleblowers Tasmania had taken an interest in the government's 2012 review of the Sex Industry Offences Act 2005 (Tas) and had concerns about the international links between organised crime, corruption, trafficking, human rights abuses, and violence to people in the sex industry.

Given her extensive academic background in the field of women's human rights, Professor Jeffrey's agreed to address these issues at the events noted above.

Prior to her arrival in Tasmania, however, a member of the Scarlet Alliance attempted to halt both public appearances by attacking Professor Jeffrey's professional integrity and discrediting her views on the sex trade and transgenderism.

Members of the Quaker community were intimidated with threats of a smear campaign if they allowed the public forum to proceed at their meeting house. The forum organisers were similarly discouraged from hosting Professor Jeffrey's, as were those participating in the UTas staff seminar

These efforts were unsuccessful, but are typical of the tactics used against academics and activists who speak out about exploitation in the global sex trade, and the aggression shown by some in the trans rights movement.

In response to the Scarlet Alliance campaign to no-platform Professor Jeffrey's, Whistleblowers Tasmania issued a media release and ABC News Tasmania interviewed her – when the interview aired, images of Scarlet Alliance members with posters vilifying Professor Jeffrey's were shown.

<http://www.tasmaniantimes.com.au/index.php/article/scarlett-alliance-fails-in-bid-to-gag-professor>

## THE CHALLENGE

These instances of attempted no-platforming, exclusion and intimidation of those who oppose the pro-sex work, pro-trans agenda are becoming more and more commonplace worldwide.

Does Transforming Tasmania want to encourage respectful community discussion on transgender and gender diverse issues?

Do they want community members to feel safe expressing an opinion that may be different to theirs?

If so, they should reflect on the negative tactics used to promote trans ideology and silence legitimate dissent, and consider advocating against them.

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Bronwyn Williams

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