

We, the undersigned, make up the overwhelming majority of the Reproduction Sexualities and Sexual Health Research Group and the Sexuality and Reproduction SIG. We are writing to express our dismay at the establishment of the gender critical research network (GCRN); to request that all university support for the network is withdrawn; and that GCRN are removed from the Health and Wellbeing Strategic Research Area (HWSRA) and all other Open University websites. If these actions are not taken, we have regretfully taken the decision that we must close our SIG, and will instruct the HWSRA to remove any reference to us or our work from their online presence and other materials from the HWSRA. We list our reasons for this request and our decision below.

Like gay men at the height of the AIDS crisis, and alongside refugees and travellers, trans people are the target of media-generated hatred in this UK. *The Times* has published, on average, two articles per day in the last two years on trans people, the vast majority of which actively question their right to exist. Internationally the picture is worse. States across the USA are actively rolling back trans rights while violence, including rape and murder against trans people, particularly trans women, remains endemic. Researchers at the OU recently highlighted the case of trans women fleeing violence in their home countries being burnt to death in their beds in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya.

The current environment is compounding longstanding societal stigma to contribute towards a health crisis among trans people in the UK. Current OU research surveying more than 2,000 UK trans people found that trans people have much higher rates of disability/chronic health conditions than the general population (53%) and that a third have seen an NHS or private counsellor, psychologist, therapist or community mental health team in the last two years for reasons unrelated to their gender. This research strongly illustrates the massively detrimental health effects of the current environment.

It is very disappointing that in the midst of this crisis, with human lives at stake, and while colleagues are working so hard to counter these trends, the OU's Health and Wellbeing SRA should choose to create and support a Gender Critical Research Network, that has already repeated trans-phobic tropes.

We question the good faith of this network's aims because:

- (a) The network was launched with no prior notification to colleagues across the OU who are currently working on matters related to health, wellbeing and gender. There was no attempt by the network's founders to engage any of these colleagues in conversations about what purpose such a network would serve, nor any invitation to join it or help set it up. It has been presented as a *fait accompli*.
- (b) Notwithstanding what the network claims to take as its focus, the term 'Gender Critical' is widely perceived as questioning trans-people's self-identity. Language and terminology matter, and we cannot but conclude that this name was chosen as a deliberate provocation to trans communities.
- (c) Despite claims otherwise, the network immediately began to share materials containing transphobic comments made by its members. We ask that this network be judged on its immediate and flagrant actions and not on how it describes itself on its webpage.
- (d) Neither co-convenor currently researches health and wellbeing, and only one member appears to. Only one affiliated member undertakes research on health and wellbeing topics,

and not on topics related to gender. Given this, we query why it is appropriate for this group to make its home within the Health and Wellbeing SRA.

There are many reasons why our research group must actively disavow any real or perceived connection with this network and we would strongly advise the university to do the same. First, it risks fatally undermining our and the university's reputation with the communities we serve and work alongside, not only trans communities, but communities who are closely allied to them, such as LGB communities and disabled communities. Many of us have received concerned enquiries from members of these communities since the launch of the GCRN. Second, it runs directly counter to the values of our most valuable research collaborators in the areas of gender and health, who are committed to trans health and serving the needs of trans people e.g. the LGBT Foundation, Frontline Aids, the International Planned Parenthood Federation, MESMAC and The Bisexual Index. This makes our position with current and future funders extremely difficult.

We ask:

- That the HWSRA and the OU more widely withdraws endorsement of this network. We cannot accept the argument made in last Friday's statement on the intranet that OU does not resource nor endorse this network: it funds the SRA and the group's webpage represents OU's investment and endorsement.
- That a full enquiry is made into the process of approving this network for inclusion as part of the HWSRA e.g. whether an equality impact assessment and risk assessment were undertaken.

Failing this, we have voted to disband the Sexuality and Reproduction SIG and will instruct the HWSRA to remove any reference to us or our work from their online presence and other materials. We would also urge other academics associated with the Health and Wellbeing SRA to do the same, and we would boycott all HWSRA events and encourage others to do the same.

Signatories:

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