



De-biasing on University Campuses in the Age of Misinformation

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DE-BIASING ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES IN THE AGE OF MISINFORMATION

ABSTRACT

Purpose

In today's polarised information environment, we must be careful not to conflate freedom of speech with freedom to spread demonstrable lies unchallenged, which is why we argue for a review of information literacy instruction to focus on social justice and help participants understand the implications of the views they may hold on vulnerable minority groups.

Design/Methodology/Approach

In this paper, we review and reflect upon the delivery of a staff development training on the facts and myths surrounding transgender issues. We also encourage other library and information professionals to expand their information literacy instruction into polarised issues that are marked by considerable amounts of misinformation.

Findings

Training participants reported that being more aware of transphobic media coverage will help them reduce bias and better support trans students and staff. It also enabled further opportunities for colleagues across teams and a variety of roles to incorporate the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion into their practice. The success of the sessions also contributed to wider institutional change.

Originality/Value

Trans people are a vulnerable minority facing severe, persistent harassment and discrimination both in everyday life, and potentially in educational settings. Offering staff effective tools to educate themselves about media transphobia is a step towards creating an environment where trans students and staff can flourish. We explored how the media coverage of trans issues allows misinformation to stick and spread. Through applying the concepts of critical thinking and information literacy to trans issues, we explain how unconscious bias towards the trans community can be challenged.

INTRODUCTION

Trans people are a vulnerable minority who already face severe, persistent harassment and discrimination in non-university settings: in everyday life, at work, in familial and intimate relationships, and when accessing healthcare. Feeling uncomfortable, invisible, and implicitly unwelcome in the workplace (or on university campus more generally) can derail aspirations and goals (Fisher et al, 2019). This article argues that through applying the concepts of critical thinking and information literacy to trans issues, unconscious bias towards the trans community can be challenged. Training on trans issues, and, as addressed in this article, offering staff effective tools to educate themselves about pernicious media transphobia, is therefore an important first step towards providing an environment where trans students and staff can flourish. In the 2018/19 academic year, the London, UK-based University of Roehampton Library delivered a new development opportunity for professional services staff entitled "Fake News? Transgender Edition". In this paper we review the pedagogical approach undertaken, reflect upon the delivery of the sessions, and explore possibilities to expand information literacy instruction into polarised issues that are marked by considerable amounts of misinformation. We

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3 explain how critical literacy and transgender identity awareness training were combined in response to the
4 current socio-political climate and cultural shift against inclusion of minority groups. Here, the focus was on
5 self-reflection and metacognition, i.e. self-awareness of one's thought processes (Flavell, 1979; Livingston,
6 2003). This entailed engaging participants in successful de-biasing through encouraging them to examine their
7 information seeking behaviour. This type of information literacy instruction therefore, with a focus on social
8 justice, can help different campus groups understand the origins (and implications) of the views they hold.
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11 In designing the workshop, we were guided by two main models of information literacy. We adopted the
12 definition put forward by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP, [2018]), which
13 defines information literacy as “the ability to *think critically* and *make balanced judgements* about any
14 information we find and use. It empowers us as citizens to reach and *express informed views* and to engage
15 fully with society” (emphasis ours). We also consulted the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher*
16 *Education*, paying close attention to the set of dispositions in the first frame, which says that authority is
17 constructed and contextual (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2016). Library and information
18 professionals have a greater responsibility in identifying thematic ideas that advance the affective, attitudinal,
19 or valuing dimension of learning. We wanted to ensure that the workshop helps participants develop
20 information literacy abilities that include an “awareness of the importance of assessing content with a
21 skeptical stance and with a self-awareness of their own biases and worldview” (Ibid). While university and
22 college campuses should champion freedom of expression, we must be careful not to allow for freedom of
23 speech to be conflated with freedom to spread demonstrable lies and inflammatory rhetoric without being
24 challenged. According to O’Brien (2018), those who demand that their right to free speech be respected,
25 actually demand their speech be *free from scrutiny*. This need for scrutiny was our rationale in delivering an
26 information literacy workshop promoting more critical examination of news media coverage of trans issues.
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30 This article begins with a Background section introducing the global, UK and institutional context in which this
31 workshop took place. We first discuss global networks of support for rolling back hard-won transgender rights
32 before focusing on the UK legal and social context. We argue that, despite greater visibility, current media
33 representation creates a divisive, sensationalist and hostile environment. Section two discusses in detail the
34 “Fake News? Trans Edition” workshop's design and methodology. By incorporating audio-visual media
35 coverage including tabloid headlines and a variety of examples from popular culture, the active process of
36 deconstructing these texts provided an opportunity for staff to develop critical analytical skills about the
37 narratives which surround us and act as a backdrop to trans “debates”. Further, by examining our information
38 seeking behaviours and broadening the parameters of our “news diet”, the opportunity for a wider range of
39 voices can be amplified. In section three, we reflect upon the success of this training as a first step in a
40 sustained intervention. As such, we discuss how we would improve “Fake News? Transgender Edition” for a
41 wider audience in future, incorporating participants’ feedback. This paper concludes with thinking points for
42 other critical literacy practitioners on how to incorporate social justice into library instruction.
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49 1. BACKGROUND

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51 An effective intervention challenging information bias must be embedded into the context in which it takes
52 place. We must be aware of the biases that our participants have: as a result, we need to critically examine the
53 political, legal, medical and media landscape in which biased information about trans people is produced,
54 disseminated and consumed. It is therefore crucial to understand that trans rights do not exist in nation-based
55 silos but instead are complex, globally informed and globally connected. These connections may exist through
56 multinational organisations such as the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), the European
57 Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH);
58 precedents set by other countries in areas such as employment protections for transgender people and the
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3 legal recognition of non-binary genders; and complex networks of trans activists communicating in both offline
4 and online spaces.
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6 Opposition to trans rights is informed by similarly complex networks. Hostility to trans people takes place in a
7 political, legal and media environment where misinformation has become weaponised, and where the
8 everyday reality of trans lives is drowned out by the sheer volume of inaccurate, misleading information
9 produced and disseminated in print, broadcast and online media (Kennedy, 2019). As Kennedy (2019: 55)
10 notes, misinformation about trans people is intentionally produced by those seeking to make the lives of
11 transgender people “more dangerous, more stressful, more liminal, more isolated and less productive”.
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14 1.1 GLOBAL CONTEXT 15

16 In a present-day Western context, opposition to transgender rights is supported and amplified by the (often
17 evangelical) Christian Right, libertarian free speech absolutists, trans-exclusionary feminists and neoliberal
18 critics of higher education, with arts, humanities and social science departments singled out in particular.
19 More globally, transgender rights are seen as a Western import (especially in parts of Latin America and Africa)
20 and symptom of Western degeneracy, undermining family life and social order.
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23 However, attacks against transgender rights are characterised by uneasy truces crossing religious, political and
24 national divides (Lewis, 2018; Miller, 2018; Greenesmith, 2019). Coalitions such as Hands Across the Aisle bring
25 these disparate groups together; “claim[ing] to count radical feminists, lesbians, Christians and conservatives
26 in its membership” (Wang, 2019). As H el ene Barth el emy from the Southern Poverty Law Center (2017) notes,
27 these groups position transgender rights as,
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30 anti-feminist, hostile to minorities and even disrespectful to LGB individuals. This seems to be
31 part of a larger strategy, meant to weaken transgender rights advocates by attempting to
32 separate them from their allies, feminists and LGBT rights advocates
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34 These networks cross borders; of particular relevance in this paper are the links between the American
35 Christian Right and UK-based trans-exclusionary activists (Ibid). Misinformation disseminated by these groups
36 tends to focus on two groups: trans women and trans children. Communication about trans women largely
37 focuses on the perceived risk that trans women pose to cis women, and are grounded on the belief that “trans
38 women” simply do not exist. Instead, trans-exclusionary discourses about trans women conjure up the figure
39 of the burly male sexual predator who attacks (cis) women in bathrooms, the deceitful interloper who gains
40 access to domestic violence shelters in order to abuse (cis) women or prevent them from using the shelter,
41 and the testosterone-fuelled elite male athlete who unfairly dominates women’s competitive sport.
42 Misinformation about trans children tends to focus on the perceived threat to children’s ability to express
43 gender non-conformity: that a girl who likes sport or a boy who likes dolls will be “transed” and forced into a
44 transgender identity. Trans-exclusionary activists focus particularly on trans boys and teenage trans men,
45 viewing them as young butch lesbians who have internalised misogyny.
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49 Misinformation rears its head again in the “diagnosis” of Rapid-Onset Gender Dysphoria (ROGD), which asserts
50 that teenagers and young people are influenced by websites (such as Tumblr and YouTube) and/or
51 transgender peers into claiming their own trans identity. In response to a publication on ROGD (Littman, 2018,
52 later retracted and published as Littman, 2019, and critiqued by Restar, 2019) , WPATH issued a statement
53 highlighting the term’s lack of recognition and use by professionals, stating the importance of “gender-
54 affirmative evidence-based care that adheres to the latest standards of care and clinical guidelines”, and
55 urging “restraint from the use of any term—whether or not formally recognized as a medical entity—to instil
56 fear about the possibility that an adolescent may or may not be transgender with the a priori goal of limiting
57 consideration of all appropriate treatment options” (Williams, 2018). Despite this response from a relatively
58 conservative authority on transgender health, trans-exclusionary activists continue to use the term.
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Misinformation is used to justify and shape policies that ignore or actively discriminate against trans people. This is clearly seen in Trump's administration, which has not only failed to enforce existing laws but has consistently rolled back protections aimed at helping marginalised citizens, especially the LGBT community. The first measure in the President's anti-trans agenda was to ban trans people from serving in the military citing "tremendous medical costs and disruption that transgender in the military would entail" (Stonewall, 2017). The US Department of Health and Human Services (2018) proposed stronger "conscience protections", which would allow employers to refuse services they have moral objections to and has serious implications for healthcare provision, especially abortion or gender affirming surgeries (*Patriot Act with Hasan Minhaj*, 2019). It was not that long ago that Robert Eads, a trans man, died of ovarian cancer when his attempts to find a medical provider failed because the oncologists refused to treat a transgender/transsexual patient (Rachlin, Green and Lombardi, 2008; Burns, 2019a). Furthermore, there are currently important LGBT cases pending US Supreme Court decisions, one involving Aimee Stephens, who was fired from her job after coming out to her boss (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2019). These presidential initiatives have led to a rise of anti-trans campaigns, exacerbated political polarisation and continue to fuel misinformation on transgender issues (Burns, 2019b).

Donald Trump's stance on transgender rights and transphobic tweets gain traction in global right-wing echo chambers and trans-exclusionary media, which also contribute to the outpouring of hate towards the UK trans community. Stonewall, a UK charity for LGBT rights, notes that Donald Trump's tweets about transgender individuals serving in the US military are "a wake-up call to *anyone* in the LGBT community who thought their rights were safe" (emphasis ours) (Stonewall, 2017). As discussed later in this section, prejudice towards and misinformation about trans people are most clearly demonstrated in the prominent media platforms given both to the claim that trans rights conflict with cis women's rights and the moral panic over trans children and youth. The global and UK contexts are thus intertwined.

1.2 UK LEGAL CONTEXT

Trans rights in the UK are informed by two main pieces of legislation – the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) (2004) and the Equality Act (2010). The GRA (2004) emerged out of a decade-long process (Burns 2018: 129-133) and was recognised as being "the best legislation in the world for its time" (Ibid: 133). The GRA allows a transgender individual to apply for a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) by submitting evidence of a medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria to a Gender Recognition Panel composed of medical and legal experts. Obtaining a full GRC enables the individual to change their birth certificate to reflect their lived gender, with implications for sex discrimination, pensions, healthcare and imprisonment. The 2010 Equality Act identifies nine protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation) and legislates against discrimination on the basis of these characteristics. The GRA interacts with the Equality Act through the latter's exemptions for a service provider providing single-sex services. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (2019) identify exemptions as appropriate "[i]n very restricted circumstances" and, in such circumstances, allows "an organisation to provide a different service or to refuse the service to someone who is undergoing or has undergone gender reassignment".

The GRA has long been criticised for the amount of documentation required, the use of a panel to decide if someone is "trans enough", the fees involved and the lack of non-binary recognition (c.f. The National LGBT Survey [Government Equalities Office, 2019: 23]). The UK government ran an online consultation on the GRA from 3 July 2018 to 22 October 2018, inviting organisations and individuals to submit responses to a set of questions exploring other options for legal gender recognition, such as self-identification. Self-identification has been introduced in Argentina (since 2012), Ireland (since 2015), Malta (since 2015), Norway (since 2016), Belgium (since 2017) and Portugal (since 2018). The process usually involves making a statutory declaration of one's gender. Trans-exclusionary groups and individuals responded by claiming the need for "sex-based" rights

and arguing that self-identification would allow cisgender men to claim that they are transgender women for the purposes of entering women-only spaces. This is despite the evidence from countries that have introduced self-identification.

1.3 UK SOCIAL CONTEXT

In addition to discrimination enacted through the legal system, numerous surveys, including the Trans Mental Health Survey (McNeil et al., 2012), LGBT in Britain: Trans Report (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018) or the National LGBT Survey (Government Equalities Office, 2019) all indicate that transgender people in the UK experience a high level of hate crime, discrimination, and distress. The Stonewall report by Bachmann and Gooch (2018: 6) found that 41 per cent of trans people and 31 per cent of non-binary people had experienced a hate crime or incident because of their gender identity in the last 12 months.

Significantly for this study, 36 per cent of trans university students had experienced negative comments or conduct from staff in the last year, and 14 per cent of trans university students considered dropping out or had dropped out of a higher education course due to harassment or discrimination from students and staff in the last year (Ibid: 12). It is also crucial to note that trans awareness affects more than just the trans students and staff that we know about. We may interact with trans students and staff without even knowing that they are trans. We may be cisgender ourselves but have trans relatives, partners, friends who we care deeply about. Finally, people - and especially the young adults who make up the majority of Roehampton's student population - have emerging identities and while they may not understand themselves as trans now, they may come to understand themselves as such in the future. Bachmann and Gooch (2018: 22) further highlight pessimism among transgender people about the future of LGBT rights in the UK. Some highlighted the role of the media:

Even just five years ago it was not safe for me to come out as trans, the pace of change has been amazing. Unfortunately, there now appears to be a backlash against that progress in the last year with hate from the media against trans increasing disturbingly in the last six months. This increasing transphobia is accelerating and is causing acute anxiety in my daily life.

Willow, 40 (Wales)

We are constantly questioned on our existence, treated hostilely and ridiculed in the name of debate. We are constantly exposed to hate and criticism in the media and daily life as the public respond to the media's attitudes. I'm sick of being described as a mentally ill freak.

Esme, 32 (Scotland)

Thus, while trans rights have gained greater visibility, current media representation creates a divisive, sensationalist and hostile environment for trans individuals. This environment extends to higher education institutions.

1.4 INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The University of Roehampton is a campus-based public university in London, UK, formed of four constituent colleges that were all established as teachers' training institutes in the nineteenth century. As a close-knit, campus university, with a cohort of around 12,000 students and 1,000 staff, it is vital that Roehampton's trans students and staff are welcomed and supported. The university has a strong LGBT+ presence, with the Students' Union having a Gender Equality Officer, LGBTQ+ Officer and Trans Students Officer elected from the student body, as well as a student-run LGBTQ+ Society. In addition, the institution offers a LGBTQI+ Chaplain, and as of autumn 2019, students can attend a weekly LGBTQ+ Wellbeing drop-in. LGBT awareness and

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3 presence is also increasingly important during recruitment; prospective students look at issues of LGBT
4 representation and any bespoke services offered by universities, such as a LGBT+ society and specific policies,
5 to determine whether they would feel safe on campus. LGBT+ staff and allies can join “UR Pride” - the
6 University’s LGBT+ network, which is currently made up of roughly 10 per cent of all permanent staff¹. This
7 includes ourselves, one of whom is network lead.
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10 The wider goal, for ourselves and our institution, is to work together towards a creative and supportive culture
11 where all members of our community can participate and fulfil their potential in an environment where they
12 are valued and respected. As trans visibility increases and more and more students and staff feel comfortable
13 disclosing their trans identity, we will need to adapt to ensure that Roehampton continues to meet the needs
14 of its diverse student and staff population. Thus in November 2018 the institution approved its first
15 “Transgender, Non-Binary and Intersex Equality: Policy and Guidance”, developed by the Pride network in
16 consultation with stakeholders across the university. The policy provides guidance which covers the transition
17 process for both staff (including information for line managers) and students, addresses issues of bullying and
18 harassment, and provides institutional protection for transgender individuals’ self-determined bathroom
19 usage, amongst other rights. At present however, our institution has in the region of 120 policy, procedural
20 and guidance documents. Thus, it has been a priority to inform staff of the existence of the new policy, so that
21 our colleagues can understand its provisions and how this relates to their role, in order to ensure that it is
22 correctly implemented. A key first step was identified as the need to offer training sessions which would de-
23 bias staff around trans identity, rights and issues to eliminate any unconscious discriminatory attitudes which
24 may hamper the policy implementation. This was in part a response to concerns raised from colleagues which
25 indicated the influence of media misinformation around such issues of bathroom usage.
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29 The introduction of the policy and the need to challenge misinformation presented a unique opportunity to
30 engage staff in exploration of how the current information landscape fuels unconscious bias. It was crucial for
31 us that the training be anchored around the same pedagogic values of our teaching, that of critical thinking
32 and information literacy to help staff navigate the increasingly polarised media information environment. It
33 was also important that the focus be on fostering dialogue, rather than rehashing “trans debates” on an
34 already sensitive and potentially volatile topic. In what follows we detail the session design, structure and
35 methodological approach.
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40 2. “FAKE NEWS? TRANS EDITION” WORKSHOP

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42 The “Fake News? Trans Edition” session was co-ordinated to run on the first working day following
43 International Transgender Day of Visibility on 31 March. All library, technology and media services
44 departmental staff were invited as a trial audience. The session was repeated in two time slots to offer greater
45 availability to our colleagues, and was also recorded (edited and subtitled for accessibility) for any participants
46 who could not attend in person. The session comprised of six parts: the invitation itself and preparatory
47 materials including a trans specific glossary; an introduction outlining the session’s aims; a group discussion to
48 establish participants’ prior knowledge and experiences; an examination of myths about trans people; an
49 engagement with critiques of media representation by trans people; and exploration of media representation
50 in the form of news articles and television shows.
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54 2.1 SESSION AIMS

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56 We began with a structural overview outlining the session’s aims and objectives: to raise awareness of
57 transgender issues, representation and rights; to dispel common myths and explore key facts; to examine how
58 media [mis]representation and our own information seeking behaviours reinforce an unconscious bias towards
59 the trans community and individuals; and to start a conversation (rather than a debate) around transgender
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3 staff and students' rights and how we can better support them. In order to establish our participants' level of
4 knowledge, attendees were asked to discuss in groups how much they knew about trans people, issues, and
5 rights. This revealed a broad range of familiarity with the topic, and enabled us to shape the session content to
6 engage both those new to trans issues and those with advanced knowledge. It also served as a good
7 icebreaker for this sensitive topic, introduced colleagues from different teams to each other, and helped foster
8 the key objective of dialogic exchange.
9

11 2.2 MYTHS AND FACTS

13 The session then addressed key myths perpetuated by the media: that being trans is a "new phenomenon",
14 that transgender people are "mentally ill" or "dangerous" and that trans people are "all the same" which
15 enabled a discussion around binary and non-binary trans identity, intersectionality and the diversity of trans
16 experiences. From myths we moved to facts. While we noted that the UK Government Equalities Office (2018)
17 itself states that "no robust data on the UK trans population exists", we looked to US data which may be
18 potentially more accurate and certainly was more readily available. From this we attempted to extrapolate the
19 data to our geographical and demographical context whilst problematising its reliability through questioning of
20 "who counts" in statistical data and how it is collected i.e., to whom and by what method a trans individual
21 discloses their identity. Thus, we suggested that current population data may underestimate the number of
22 trans people in the general population/s. Ultimately, through the discussion of the albeit limited available
23 data, it was important that session attendees understood that not only are trans individuals not a separate
24 *Othered*² group, but that they comprise both our local and institutional population. In so doing, attendees
25 would understand that they will (and do) interact with trans students and colleagues, thus cementing the
26 relevancy of the session.
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28 Focus then turned to trans individuals' experiences, first of bullying and harassment (c.f. Metro Charity, 2014
29 and McNeil et al., 2012) and then to media representation, which were presented as intrinsically linked. This
30 connection was illustrated using Stonewall's (2018) "Come Out For Trans Equality" YouTube video in which
31 Lewis Hancox, a young trans man, discusses his experiences,
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33 I worry for people who are trans and haven't come out yet, because all the negative press can
34 make them think that they are setting themselves up for such a hard life. It can scare people
35 off from coming out or making those steps to finally being happy. I think we need more positive
36 role models out there.
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38 It was vital for us that trans voices were privileged. Firstly, this is because seeing both binary and non-binary
39 transgender people has been proven to increase support for transgender rights (Flores et al, 2018). Secondly,
40 including trans voices through video and other media was especially important because the session was
41 delivered by Sarah and Sebastian, who both currently identify as cisgender (though we worked in consultation
42 with our co-author Kat, who is trans). Furthermore, we chose to feature Lewis specifically to diversify
43 representation since the majority of media representation tends to focus solely on trans women.
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51 2.3. WHY REPRESENTATION MATTERS

52 We next included a section titled "Why Representation Matters" in which we looked at data from trans
53 individuals discussing their relationship to the media portrayal of trans issues. Drawing upon research
54 conducted with the UK trans community by Trans Media Watch in 2010, we examined evidence that: 70 per
55 cent felt that representations of transgender people in the media are, overall, negative or very negative; 21.5
56 per cent had experienced verbal abuse that they believed was associated with representations of transgender
57 people; and 8 per cent reported that they had received physical abuse that they believed was connected to an
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3 item or items in the media (Trans Media Watch, 2010). Session participants were asked how this data made
4 them feel, placing themselves within the narrative which enabled an emotive connection to trans people.
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6 Having established the role that media representation plays in negative attitudes towards trans people and
7 issues, and connectedly trans rights, we then examined a series of tabloid front page headlines. These
8 included: *Daily Mirror's* "NHS TREATING TRANSGENDER KIDS AGED 3" (Gregory, 2015), *The Sun's* "SEX CHANGE
9 RAPIST IN FEMALE JAIL" (Doran and Diaz, 2017); and the Scottish *The Mail on Sunday's* "SEX-CHANGE MEN TO
10 GIVE BIRTH ON NHS" (Manning and Adams, 2016). We discussed how such media coverage presents
11 transgender issues as both violent and perverse, and, as discussed in section 1.1, centres around a moral panic
12 of supposed harm to children. Further to this, we examined the 2018 *The Express* opinion piece "We Must Halt
13 This Transgender Madness— it is hurting woman and girls" in which Leo McKinstrey makes the assertion that
14 "Transgenderism will prove to be a bigger scandal than Sir Jimmy Savile". This is accompanied by a large image
15 of Saville, a celebrity notorious for serial paedophilia. This was compared to the *New York Daily News's* 2006
16 front page headline "SEX CHANGE SHOCKER: JonBenet suspect treated at transsexual clinic in Bangkok" (Scott
17 and Lisberg, 2006). The intention was not only to demonstrate that such representation is not unique to British
18 tabloid journalism, but also to evidence the symbiotic US-UK cross-cultural dialogue and how such narratives
19 play out on the global stage. Further, through these examples we examined the cumulative affect of depictions
20 of transgender people as evil, violent and monstrous Others, and discussed how such coverage can act as a
21 background noise to "trans debates", shaping unconscious bias towards the trans community.
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26 We then turned to the "Transgender Rights" episode of the news satire television programme *Last Week*
27 *Tonight with John Oliver* (2015) to show an example of critical evaluation of media bias. Political satire can be
28 an effective pedagogical tool to teach information literacy (Krutkowski, 2019) while the use of humour in the
29 classroom improves recall and recognition (Carlson, 2011). In the chosen segment, John Oliver offers a critical
30 commentary on matters of everyday discrimination that transgender people face. Using footage of negative
31 media coverage Oliver points out the contradictions, misinformation and spin surrounding the trans issues.
32 The satirical form acts as a means of "pointing out and holding up for scrutiny and criticism that ridiculousness
33 by, ironically enough, being somewhat ridiculous" (Jones, 2010).
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36 The excerpt initiated discussion among participants about the nature of information seeking behaviour in the
37 post-truth era, especially the persuasive impact of personalised emotionally-targeted news. We tend to seek
38 out information that fits our own views and to gravitate towards information environments that reinforce
39 rather than challenge this (Baer and Cook, 2019). Social and political psychologists refer to this emotion-based
40 decision-making behaviour as "motivated reasoning" (Heider, 1958; Kunda, 1990; Taber, Lodge and Glathar,
41 2001). We have individual belief systems and motivations that may affect our reasoning - leading us to rely on
42 a biased set of cognitive processes, e.g. strategies for accessing, constructing, and evaluating information
43 sources. It is part of the human condition to maintain a coherent belief system - we tend to build mental
44 models of the world and like these to be complete (Ecker, 2018). All of this is amplified in the current polarised
45 information environment.
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48 Motivated reasoning often results in a type of cognitive bias we call "blind spot" i.e. believing we are less
49 biased than others. During the discussion after John Oliver's segment, one participant commented that
50 following "reliable" news outlets helps to avoid misinformation. This was a particularly useful "teachable
51 moment" (Valentine and Wukovitz, 2013) that we used to discuss de-biasing. We examined the participant's
52 information-seeking preferences, which included reading the British broadsheet *The Guardian*. While we were
53 careful not to dictate what people should be reading (gatekeeping), we pointed out that seemingly progressive
54 news media have also been condemned for transphobic reporting. Over the past year, two trans employees
55 left the UK branch of *The Guardian* as a result of its reporting on trans issues. They argue that the newspaper
56 has disproportionately focused on characterising trans people and feminists as distinct oppositional groups
57 and ignored pro-trans feminist voices (Strudwick, 2019). What happens in liberal echo chambers is potentially
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3 more dangerous because it “intellectualises prejudice” for liberal-minded people and insulates them from
4 more trans-inclusive perspectives and narratives (Ibid). Echo chambers, regardless of the side of the political
5 spectrum they are located in, cause us to adopt information (or misinformation) with a high degree of
6 confidence.
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8 9 2.4 TRANS VOICES AND NEW NARRATIVES

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11 The next set of slides focused on examples of increased trans visibility in popular culture, including *Vanity Fair*
12 and *Time* magazine covers with Caitlyn Jenner and Laverne Cox, respectively. We also featured Janet Mock, the
13 first transgender woman of colour in history to write and direct a TV episode, for the FX show *Pose* (2018). Our
14 focus on trans visibility and representation was informed by recent study by Jones et al. (2018), who reveal
15 that viewing television programmes or series (but not other forms of media exposure) cultivates more
16 favourable views of transgender people. Their research also found that the more positive a person’s views of
17 transgender *people*, the more they tend to support protecting their *rights*. We can hope that positive
18 narratives of transgender people in popular culture can result in changes similar to what the gay and lesbian
19 community experienced in the 1990s. According to Brewer (2003), the increasingly positive attention to gay
20 people in the media gradually ensured more positive public perceptions of the gay community and resulted in
21 an increased support for gay rights.
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25 With the above in mind and as a counterbalance to the negative persuasion of tabloid media, we discussed the
26 positive “narrative persuasion” of shows from television and online streaming platforms as compelling ways of
27 combating stereotypes. For example, the narratives and character development in *Orange is the New Black*
28 (2013) and *Pose* (2018) can provide a motivating force for continued attention to transgender issues.
29 Identifying with the characters can instil curiosity and inspire audiences to research the topic of the messages
30 or plots in the programmes. Nabi and Green (2015: 140) argue that when audience members are highly
31 engaged, “transported” by or immersed in a fictional narrative, they often experience attitude and belief
32 change in line with those expressed in the story. Accordingly, participants expressed interest in learning more
33 about transgender issues through the popular culture examples included in the session. In the following
34 section, we discuss attendee feedback in greater depth, consider further work on trans inclusion at
35 Roehampton prompted by the workshop, and outline the next steps in the delivery of the workshop.
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41 3. IMPLICATIONS

42
43 The feedback from the two sessions was overwhelmingly positive. Most attendees became aware of the new
44 policy for the first time. Participants who were in student and/or staff-facing roles responded that their
45 knowledge about trans issues increased as a result of the session. They were more able to resist the type of
46 cognitive bias we can refer to as “status quo” and stated their intention to refrain from using gender as an
47 example of binary systems and how they plan to be more sensitive with their use of language when working
48 with students. For instance, one attendee in a student-facing role said,
49
50

51 It hadn’t occurred to me that trans students might feel isolated or marginalised within existing
52 social spaces on campus, for example. That was an eye-opener [...] I will have more awareness
53 that these issues might be impacting on some of the students I deal with, and their sense of
54 belonging on campus.
55
56

57 One comment from participant feedback mentioned how “being more aware of media coverage and
58 misleading information will help reduce bias and keep more open mind”, which is in line with our intended
59 aims for the workshop.
60

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2
3 All respondents answered “yes” to the question of being more confident in identifying transphobic news
4 coverage. One staff-facing librarian noted,
5

6 I sometimes see transphobic comments from a TERF³ perspective on my social media, which I
7 haven't challenged previously as although I disagreed I didn't have the confidence to challenge
8 these often very forthright opinions. Now I think I have more evidence to back up an argument
9 – for instance the media scare stories illustrated here have been used to defend these opinions
10 – now I feel I can debunk them or show how people have been manipulated by them.
11
12

13 We also received positive comments regarding the trans-specific glossary handout we provided as part of the
14 session as well as the new online reading list on transgender issues. A participant with academic liaison
15 responsibilities told us she would apply what she learned in the session by raising awareness of trans issues
16 when dealing with academic staff and helping them to diversify their course reading lists.
17
18

19 We were also very pleased to have received positive feedback from staff who are service managers involved in
20 recruiting and leading teams:
21

22 Thank you both for the excellent session today. I thought it was very insightful and will be very
23 useful to me. Thinking about starting conversations and resources (with a manager hat on), I
24 am forwarding this link to some ACAS' [recruitment-related] resources on the topic in a
25 workplace environment.
26
27

28 Even participants working in specialist units with limited cross-team working opportunities (i.e. in neither
29 student nor staff-facing roles) found the training useful and relevant:
30

31 The session allowed me to gain better awareness about how some parts of my job, despite not
32 being public-facing, could affect trans staff / students. As the person responsible for much of
33 the information organisation in our catalogue and resources, I am now much more aware of
34 how my work could create a more inclusive environment. The session has also led me to do
35 more research into the topic autonomously.
36
37

38 The above participant works in the Library Collections team. After the training, they expressed an interest in
39 sharing their knowledge of library cataloguing in the context of trans issues:
40

41 As a consequence of the session, I proposed to develop and deliver another session on a
42 different aspect of information science, i.e. names and authority control with a focus on trans*
43 author, together with one of the organisers of the original session. This then became a podcast
44 [...] Without attending the 'Fake News' session, it would never have occurred to me to propose
45 that.
46
47

48 This was an interesting follow-up from the workshop as it reminded us that systemic social issues thrive in
49 administrative environments, many of which have been crafted to support, disseminate, and reinforce
50 hierarchies of race and gender (Polebaum-Freeman, 2019). We should consider the role of cataloguers and
51 metadata specialists who hold the power to interpret the professional identities of transgender authors in a
52 way which challenges or upholds binary, essentialist, and ultimately transmisogynistic ideals (Ibid: 156).
53 Working with our colleague we developed a training session on “Cataloguing Trans Authors” which addressed
54 how library catalogue metadata deals with transgender authors' name changes, and how our institution's
55 publishing staff can update their records both locally and internationally. This short session was then delivered
56 to the LGBT+ staff network, and recorded as a permanent learning resource for all staff. In addition, we are
57 working with our frontline library team to develop guidance on best practice for utilising gender-neutral
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3 language with our service users to ensure that all trans students and staff feel welcomed and supported within
4 our department.
5

6 In future we intend to develop “Fake News: Transgender Edition” to run again for the wider student and staff
7 population. Rather than focusing on tabloid headline examples to illustrate transphobic media representation,
8 we will expand this to include a wider variety of media outlets. We will also use research by Gupta (2019) on
9 discursive enactments of transphobia through pronoun use as a way of exploring more subtle ways in which
10 transgender individuals’ identities can be undermined.
11
12

13 Further, following the success of our session, the institution’s Human Resources department has recognised
14 the need for university-wide staff training on our Transgender, Non-Binary and Intersex Equality Policy - as well
15 as LGBT awareness more broadly. Training on the policy has also now been integrated into the university-wide
16 staff induction training programme. This training forms one element of a wider set of individual and
17 institutional actions such as: normalising pronoun discussions; avoiding heteronormative and cisnormative
18 language; increasing the visibility of LGBT+ inclusion on campus (with rainbow lanyards, email signatures,
19 displays and events); diversifying our collections and resource lists; offering opportunities to learn about
20 transgender issues and people through their own stories (e.g. LGBT film screenings and discussions); being
21 open about our identities and being positive role models as LGBT+ staff and allies (c.f. Nottingham Trent
22 University, 2019). This will enable our institution to take a two-pronged approach of challenging
23 misinformation and debunking myths about trans people, while also creating space for the truth of trans
24 experiences, narratives and lives.
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30 CONCLUSION

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32 Trans people are a vulnerable minority who face global discrimination and are the victims of media
33 misinformation most clearly typified by the Trump administration rhetoric. Fake news thrives because of its
34 sensationalist and emotive immediacy and critical thinking cannot be “outsourced”. This article has argued for
35 the need to debias and detoxify ourselves of this fake news diet which constructs trans people as dangerous,
36 monstrous Others, so that we can build communities in which trans people are instead safe, welcomed and
37 valued. The sessions described in this article mark a first step into a university-wide intervention specifically
38 designed to address media bias, misinformation and misrepresentation that can potentially prejudice our
39 perception of, and attitudes towards trans students and staff. Information professionals in the UK agree that
40 information literacy can help to address social exclusion (CILIP, 2018). We have argued for a pedagogical
41 approach which embraces the concepts of critical thinking and information literacy in which unconscious bias
42 towards the trans community can be challenged. Embedding such information literacy training more widely at
43 our university would allow student and staff community to reach informed views as well as to recognise and,
44 where appropriate, challenge assumptions, orthodoxies and bias (including their own) about vulnerable
45 minority groups.
46
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49 Successful de-biasing occurs when our knowledge overrides our automatic thinking: this is an active and
50 participatory process, and not something which can simply be instructed. Central to this is a methodological
51 approach in which we can begin to move away from polarising and divisive “debates” towards a reflective
52 discussion. Whether teaching staff or students, we should also take learners through different emotional
53 states that foster deep learning and reflection. Taking participants on a journey with us from hostility to
54 empathy, and from misinformation to criticality, we were able to show *where* misinformation about
55 transgender issues spreads and *how* information systems allow fake news to spread more easily and travel
56 faster, especially in online environments. We hope this case study illustrates how exploring the role of
57 emotions, whether empathy, horror or humour, can function as effective pedagogical tools for analysis and
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3 critique in the classroom and how such an approach is best suited for incorporating social justice in our
4 instruction.
5

6 In sharing our practice, it is not our intent that other information literacy professionals will follow our format.
7 Our article is less about drawing conclusions and more about exploring possibilities to expand information
8 literacy instruction into polarised issues of misinformation. We do not intend to make generalizable
9 conclusions, but to provide thinking points for you the reader to explore for yourselves. For example, consider
10 the spin tactics and discriminatory policies of the Trump administration, and how they inform you and those
11 around you. What do the instances of transphobia mean for you (as an information literacy instructor,
12 reference librarian, wellbeing officer, or academic)? How could you use your role and expertise to help others
13 explore LGBT issues in media discourse? How could this be extended to focus on additional social justice issues
14 appropriate to your regional or demographical context? How can you better support students (and staff) in
15 navigating the increasingly polarised information environment that fuels unconscious bias? What could this
16 mean for teaching and learning at your institution? For ourselves as practitioners, our goal is not only to
17 demonstrate throughout our work our commitment to the values of social justice, equality, diversity and
18 inclusion, but also to understand each of our roles in actively creating an environment in which everyone is
19 welcomed and valued, and has the opportunity to thrive.
20
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23 Notes

- 24 1. This figure excludes temporary staff such as visiting lecturers, or contractors. While these colleagues
25 are welcome to join the network, they are not figured into staff population data.
- 26 2. "Othering" refers to the process by which social categories (such as gender, race, nationality,
27 disability, religion etc) are constructed in terms of the Self social category, to which the individual
28 belongs, and the Other social category, to which the individual does not belong. The Self is considered
29 positively - as representing normality and other things valued by that culture. The Other is considered
30 abnormal, exotic, unfamiliar and potentially hostile, violent or monstrous. While there is a tradition of
31 trans people reclaiming monstrosity (c.f. Stryker [1994, 2019] and Pearce, Gupta and Moon [2019] to
32 name just two examples), this is a process emerging from within the trans community and a different
33 dynamic to the Othering described in this paper.
- 34 3. An acronym for Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist.
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