

Opinion

Helen Saxby

Speaker at Women's Place UK Brighton

**Women's concerns must be listened to**

On Monday July 16 I was one of the speakers at an event in Brighton entitled 'A Woman's Place is Turning the Tide'. The event was organised, at the request of local women, by a group called Woman's Place UK, who have organised similar events around the country.

The aim of the group is to publicise the current consultation on reforms to the Gender Recognition Act, and to ask for women's concerns to be listened to. It's important because it will determine who is allowed into women-only spaces such as changing rooms, refuges etc. Some transactivists don't think women should have a say in this and try to stop women meeting up for debate.

Woman's Place meetings have been targeted before, and venues have pulled out because of the trouble caused to them. There was a bomb threat at the previous meeting in Hastings. The group is smeared as anti-trans for discussing women's rights.

This meeting had to change venue at short notice due to the harassment of the previous venue by transactivists, and a loud protest

was held outside Jury's Inn where it was eventually held. The meeting went ahead anyway, with 180 tickets sold. I spoke about the political tactics of the transgender lobby and why women are angry.

Dr Kathleen Stock, philosophy lecturer at Sussex University, talked eloquently about the avoidance of the subject in academia, and why this needs to change if we are to understand the issues, and Gill Smith, a young detransitioned woman, talked movingly about her own experiences of identifying as trans, the subsequent realisation that it was a mistake, and her journey back to identifying as a lesbian woman.

Ruth Serwotka summarised current news and reiterated the five reasonable demands of the group (which can be found on their website). There was then a Q&A session from the floor where audience members, including trans allies, got to have their say and ask questions.

Despite the protests, this was an energetic, informed and exciting meeting in which women came together to share concerns, raise awareness and make new friends. On all counts it was a huge success!

Rachelle Foster

Freelance journalist and trans ally

**Challenging a worrying anti-trans agenda**

Woman's Place UK is using the government's suggested reforms to the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) as political backdrop for its non-inclusive 'debates' on the principle of women-only spaces. The GRA regulates the acquisition of a new birth certificate for trans people, which they might need for marriage or the right pension provision. Currently the law demands applicants to submit reams of personal information to an anonymous panel, which is an expensive process, with almost no appeals procedure. The suggested changes simply seek to make this administrative process less bureaucratic.

WPUK is obsessed with self-identification, incorrectly believing the changes would compromise safety in women-only spaces such as refuges and toilets, but the law has protected self-identifying gender since the Equality Act 2010 and this legislation is not up for reform. Also, there are no statistics supporting this notion that trans women are a danger in these spaces.

I attended WPUK's recent Brighton

meeting to contribute respectfully and challenge what I consider to be a worrying agenda. The meeting turned into a sophisticated perpetuation of intolerance towards a marginalised group of society.

It was not a simple discussion, but a rallying of angered attendees who proceeded to heckle when I tested their circulating misinformation. Stonewall's research shows that one quarter of trans women in a relationship suffer domestic abuse – the same percentage as women who aren't trans. WPUK dismiss this type of evidence as 'irrelevant' and seek to further undermine it by arguing that trans activists cannot be trusted.

But Stonewall only embraced the 'T' in LGBT four years ago — thanks to a more inclusive attitude on queer rights brought to the charity by new CEO Ruth Hunt. Denying credible research is an established way of spreading propaganda and scaremongering.

There is a system of oppression we all should fight against and WPUK have a legitimate fear of patriarchy. Their mindsets are misdirected though, in their prejudice against trans people and not accepting trans women as anything but men.

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