

Tim Davie
Director-General
BBC
Broadcasting House
Portland Place
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29th November 2023

Dear Tim

I want to follow up on the letter on 15th November signed by women representing groups concerned with the malign consequences for human rights of the erasure of biological sex in law, policy-making and everyday life.

The letter was sent on the morning of the episode of *Woman's Hour* in which Steph Richards and Jodie Hughes of Endometriosis South Coast were interviewed about the controversy surrounding Richards' appointment.

Presenter Emma Barnett's handling of the interview rightly attracted a favourable response. However, the key points of concern we raised remain unresolved. In particular:

- Although Barnett's questions were robust and well-informed, platforming ideologues predictably led to misinformation being aired on a flagship BBC programme – in this case that endometriosis isn't a sex-based condition (it absolutely is, affecting millions of women with only around 20 cases ever recorded of men experiencing something similar, though not the same). This sort of misinformation is commonplace in the BBC's output on sex and gender. Just a week earlier misleading remarks by Caster Semenya were allowed to pass unchallenged. Semenya self-described as "female" and as having a medical condition that causes "abnormally high testosterone", when it is a matter of scientific fact that Semenya has a disorder of sex development that affects only males, and has normal testosterone levels for a male.
- Secondly, as we predicted, Richards' public and self-documented history of insulting, demeaning and threatening women was barely touched upon. The only mention of this behaviour was that he has called campaigners for sex-based rights "TERFs". Had a man who had exhibited this kind of behaviour but who did not identify as a woman been interviewed on *Woman's Hour*, we think it would have been a key focus of the interview.
- The final issue is one we did not raise in our previous letter. Sexologists have known for over a century that men who identify as women often do so for erotic reasons. Among

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these men's motivations is the desire to seek validation as women. They gain this validation when accepted and presented as "women" – especially when women who demur are overruled, sidelined or silenced.

These issues are complex and sensitive, and the implications for the safeguarding and wellbeing of women and children are poorly understood within the media. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss them further with you.

More broadly, Richards' interview illustrates a wider pattern of misinformation, obfuscation and misjudgement in the treatment of sex and gender by the BBC.

Following years of investment in and engagement with transactivist organisations, its corporate position appears to be that people are men or women, male or female, according to what they say they are, not their immutable biology.

- This is contrary to UK law: the Gender Recognition Act cannot change people's sex in material reality, and does not impose any obligations on private individuals or on journalistic coverage to pretend that it can.
- It is contrary to material reality: humans are mammals, and mammals can't change sex.
- It is contrary to human rights: gender ideology is harmful to the rights of women (sexism is based on women's sex, not our avowed "gender identities"), gay people (if sex isn't real, then neither is sexual orientation) and children (thousands of whom are being subjected to harmful experimental medical treatments).

The dominant culture at the BBC appears to define acknowledging the reality and immutability of binary sex as bigotry, both within the workforce and when engaging with external parties. This is entirely incompatible with the BBC's status as the national, taxpayer-funded broadcaster, with a statutory duty to be impartial.

It is also a fringe position held by only a small minority of Britons. Polling consistently shows broad rejection of the assertion that "transwomen are women" and of the claim that transwomen (men who identify as women) should have a right of access to female-only spaces, services or sports.

The embedding of a problematic ideological approach to sex and gender has affected the BBC's output across the board, including news and current affairs, sport, entertainment and children's programming.

We would like to propose a process of strategic engagement with experts and campaigners who promote mainstream, legally accurate and scientifically sound positions on sex and gender. In the interest of keeping this manageable, we request a meeting in the first instance between you and whichever other senior executives you think appropriate, and five women who can speak to different aspects of sex and gender:

- Dr Nicola Williams and Fiona McAnena of Fair Play For Women, who are experts on physiological differences between the sexes, especially male sporting advantage

- Joan Smith, author of *Misogynies* and former adviser to London Mayor Sadiq Khan on violence against women and girls, who can speak to the way obfuscation about the two sexes harms the fight to end male violence against women
- Maya Forstater and Dr Helen Joyce of Sex Matters, who can explain the legal position on sex and gender identity, and more generally the need for clarity on sex in law and everyday life.

I would also be happy to meet you. I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Naomi Cunningham', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Naomi Cunningham
Chair