Twitter Thread by Rob Ford

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One of the authors of the Policy Exchange report on academic free speech thinks it is "ridiculous" to expect him to accurately portray an incident at Cardiff University in his study, both in the reporting and in a question put to a student sample.

> This is ridiculous. Students were asked for their views on this example and several others. The study findings and conclusions were about student responses not the substance of each case. Could\u2019ve used hypotheticals. The responses not the cases were the basis of the conclusions.
>
> — Eric Kaufmann (@epkaufm) February 17, 2021

Here is the incident Kaufmann incorporated into his study, as told by a Cardiff professor who was there. As you can see, the incident involved the university intervening to *uphold* free speech principles:
https://t.co/c0aOGU9aUZ

> The UK govt\u2019s paper on free speech in Unis (with implications for Wales) is getting a lot of attention.
>
> Worth noting then that an important part of the evidence-base on which it rests relates to (demonstrably false) claims about my own institution
> 1/https://t.co/buoGE7ocG7
>
> — Richard Wyn Jones (@RWynJones) February 16, 2021

Here is the first mention of the Greer at Cardiff incident in Kaufmann's report. It refers to the "concrete case" of the "no-platforming of Germaine Greer". Any reasonable reader would assume that refers to an incident of no-platforming instead of its opposite.

> However, we sought to move beyond abstract questions of free speech to concrete cases, exploring student opinion on the banning of Jacob Rees-Mogg, dismissal of Jordan Peterson from Cambridge, no-platforming of Germaine Greer, and the idea of having a dress code for costume parties.

Here is the next mention of Greer in the report. The text asks whether the University "should have overruled protestors" and "stepped in...and guaranteed Greer the right to speak". Again the strong implication is that this did not happen and Greer was "no platformed".

We described a series of high-profile cases involving Jordan Peterson and Germaine Greer. By a 41-31 margin, students agreed with Cambridge University's decision to rescind Jordan Peterson's fellowship, with 24% undecided and 4 percent saying they didn't know. When asked whether Cardiff University should have overruled protesters to allow Germaine Greer to speak, just 35% agreed with the free speech position, while 44% did not agree that the University should have stepped in to overrule the anti-Greer campaigners and guaranteed Greer the right to speak. The rest were

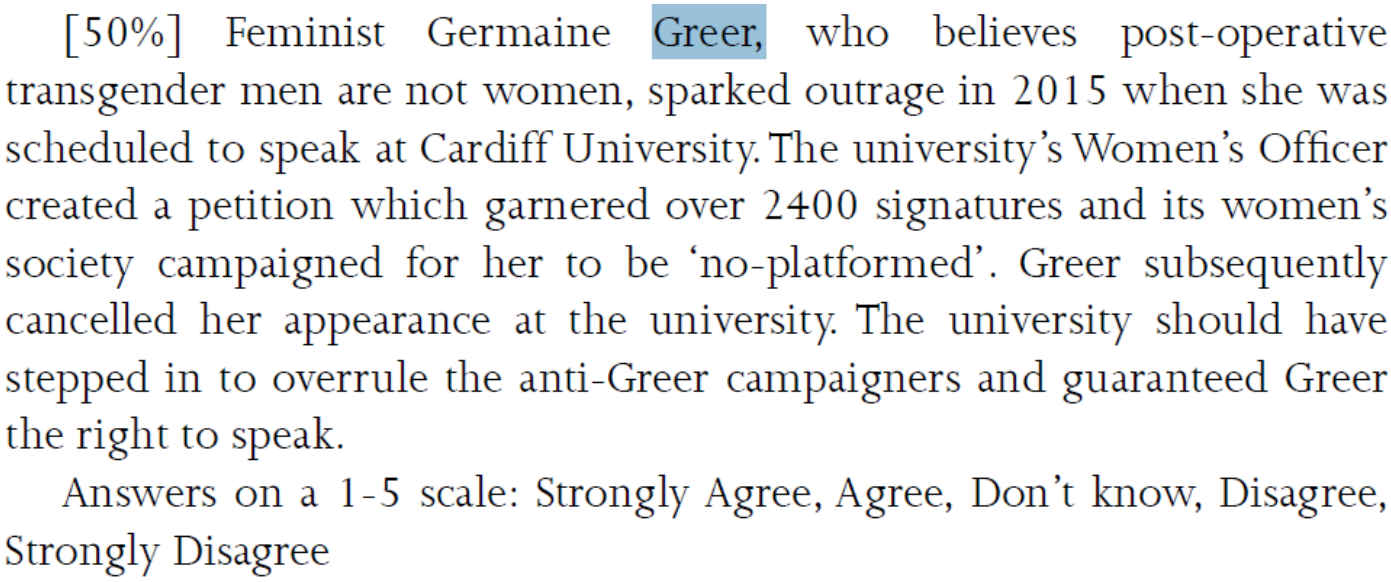
The authors could easily have added a footnote at this point explaining what actually happened in Cardiff. They did not.

Here is another section of the text, where the authors consider where students "acquired their opinion" about the "Greer case". Again, the implication is that the "Greer case" is, as it was initially described, an incident of university sanctioned no-platforming

Are academics brainwashing students?

When asked how most students acquired their opinion on the Peterson and Greer cases, 68% said social media. This was by far the most important influence on student opinion on these issues, with parents well down the list at 14%. New partisan online news sites like *Vox*, *Buzzfeed*, *Breitbart*, the *Mail* or the *Guardian* came in at 8%. University lecturers and schoolteachers both scored a paltry 1%. This suggests that the content of what students are learning is not directly shaping their worldviews on the speech issue.

And here is the kicker - the actual question asked to students in the study. This quite clearly presents the Greer incident as a matter of historical fact, which occurred as presented. It is not presented as a scenario or thought experiment.


[50%] Feminist Germaine Greer, who believes post-operative transgender men are not women, sparked outrage in 2015 when she was scheduled to speak at Cardiff University. The university's Women's Officer created a petition which garnered over 2400 signatures and its women's society campaigned for her to be 'no-platformed'. Greer subsequently cancelled her appearance at the university. The university should have stepped in to overrule the anti-Greer campaigners and guaranteed Greer the right to speak.

Answers on a 1-5 scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Don't know, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

The question is deceptive. It asks students to pass judgement on an actual university failing to intervene to prevent the actual cancellation of an actual event. But the actual university in question *did* intervene to ensure the actual event *did occur*.

Why does all this matter? Because the report in question is being used to argue for heavy handed government interventions to deal with universities' alleged failure to protect free speech. Kaufmann, one of the main authors, has written in emotive language of "woke sorcerers"

who must be prevented from suppressing free debate. Any academic should be free to criticise university policy and culture. But that criticism should be grounded in factual evidence. The evidence presented as fact in this case is nothing of the sort.

This is not a minor error. The study questionnaire could have presented cases as scenarios or thought experiments. It did not. It presented the case in question as fact. The report could have caveated the findings, explaining the real context. It did not.

These errors, and the reasons they are problematic, have been pointed out to Kaufmann. He has dismissed them as "ridiculous". You can judge for yourselves - I have presented all the evidence here. Personally, I think it is "ridiculous" than an academic misrepresent in this way

Therefore, I ask again that Kaufmann take the step he has so far resisted taking, and amend his report to include a correct statement about the event in Cardiff, making it clear to his readers (who include the Education Secretary, who has cited this report heavily) are aware

that an event he presents to his student sample, and presents to his readers, as an incident of a university failing to stand up to a no-platforming campaign was in fact an incident of a university standing against a no-platforming campaign and ensuring an event happens.

I hope that @epkaufm will reconsider his views on this and amend his report. He should also apologise to Cardiff University for misrepresenting their behaviour repeatedly with regards the Greer case.

Further testimony on this from the individual responsible for organising and managing the Germaine Greer event at Cardiff: https://t.co/0PxLlWLxxh

> Not spoken up until now, but I was in charge of organising and managing the Germaine Greer event at Cardiff University in 2015.
>
> I can assure everyone that it most definitely went ahead because the whole thing still haunts my dreams. https://t.co/SecUTA5IBG
>
> — Jack Bailey (@PoliSciJack) February 18, 2021