Twitter Thread by Jonny Best



Jonny Best
@JonnyWorst

Academic staff at universities can't be open about the complaints against them - and most complaints of transphobia from students seem to be directed at staff. I'm just a final year PhD student, under no contractual requirement to be confidential, so I can share.

The original complaint against me was typical of the sort of thing directed at many female professional academics (and some male too). The strategies employed by my complainants are commonly used.

One of these is to perform vulnerability while behaving aggressively. Performing vulnerability is essential in order to trigger the university's awareness of its duties under the Equality Act, and establish an oppressor/victim dynamic to the case from the outset.

My complainants did this effectively. The complaint was initiated by a fellow PhD student, who joined forces with the SU. A student from the SU wrote the actual complaint. This is how it begins:

In all my dealings with @HuddersfieldUni I accepted that sometimes anonymous complaints were necessary - and that, sometimes, victimisation could be a concern. However, I have never victimised anyone. Nobody has ever argued that I have.

The university was completely incurious about why the complainant feared victimisation. They made no enquiries into this matter. This is remarkable given that the student initiating the complaint had been a good friend of mine for several years.

This student (an adult and a fellow gay man) had threatened to in Autumn 2018 to report me to the SU, after reading an article I wrote about my experience with trans activists while leading Queer Up North festival a decade ago. I ignored the threat and distanced myself from him.

Back to the text of the initial complaint. The SU student writing the complaint performs their own vulnerability a few sentences later:

Another common strategy - one on which the complaint against me fundamentally relied - is to take legitimate arguments about ideas and politics and argue that they amount to hate, victimisation or some sort of personal attack.

Here's a couple of blatant examples. These are screen-grabbed tweets which the complainants hunted for via the internet archive. The complainants' interpretation of the tweet is at the bottom of the image:

I'm not saying my twitter conduct was beyond reproach. There are tweets I regret and think were poorly expressed, or rude. But there were never personal attacks. I was always focused on the ideas and the politics. Here I ridicule pronoun culture:

I'm not particularly proud of that tweet. It is puerile and pointless. But it's not mockery of transgender people. For the record, I continue to find pronoun culture narcissistic and mildly authoritarian. It deserves to be mocked. Here's another example:

Trans politics seeks to influence language useage and normalise concepts from gender identity theory, while preventing critical discussion of these words and concepts. I don't go out of my way to offend by 'misgendering', but nor do I accept these concepts uncritically.

What concerned me at the time of the university's investigation is that these interpretations of my words were not seen as evidence of malicious intent. The investigator, the Director of Registry and the Dean all denied that the complaint was in any way malicious.

Malice is an intent to do injury to another person. It involves either untruth, or a recklessness towards the truth. The complaint against me evidences this in spades. But, according to the Director of the Registry, when I asked her specifically about this:

Remember that this was a complaint which not only cited my social media activity, but every single essay or article I had written on sex, gender and LGBT politics, mostly during the GRA consultation in 2018, or early 2019.

This was taken seriously by the university, despite any evidence at all to support it. This complaint sought explicitly to argue that I should not be allowed to teach, that I presented a threat to the safety of the university community.

Again, this is a common strategy by complainants - a claim that someone's ideas or views threaten the safety of students is often taken at face value by university management. This empowers bullies - and I consider my former friend and fellow PhD student a straightforward bully.

The malicious strategies inherent in the complaint against me are seen over and over again by professional academics - mostly women, but some men too. Most of these complaints are not upheld, but that is irrelevant: the investigation process itself is the point of the complaints.

As someone wise on twitter put it to me, 'the process IS the punishment'. Universities must filter complaints more rigorously, and quickly reject those which depend upon intolerance of another's legitimate speech and which use the sorts of tactics I've outlined here.