

## **Gendered Intelligence response to IMPRESS Code Review: Call for Evidence**

### **ABOUT GENDERED INTELLIGENCE**

#### **1. Gendered Intelligence**

- 1.1. Gendered Intelligence, established in 2008, is a registered charity that works to increase understandings of gender diversity and improve the lives of trans people.
- 1.2. We are a trans-led and trans-involving grassroots organisation with a wealth of lived experience, community connections of many kinds, and an exemplary depth and breadth of trans community knowledge, backed with rigorous academic thinking and knowledge to PhD level.
- 1.3. Through our Professional and Educational Services, we work throughout the UK, offering a broad spectrum of non-judgmental, practical services to the public, private and not-for-profit sectors, including: staff training, speakers and panellists for events and conferences, and wide-ranging consultancy. Overall, we have delivered over 1,100 training sessions to over 22,000 people. Our work includes trans-inclusive best practice with professional and organisational settings.
- 1.4. We also provide services through our Youth and Communities Services for trans and other gender diverse people. We specialise in supporting young trans and gender questioning people and those who support them, especially within educational settings.
- 1.5. Our Public Engagement work centres around working with a range of media, influencing public policy and engaging in research.

#### **2. Organisational purpose**

- 2.1. Gendered Intelligence imagines a world where people are no longer constrained by narrow perceptions and expectations of gender, and where diverse gender expressions are visible and valued. We believe everyone can be intelligent about gender
- 2.2. Trans experiences provide a valuable lens through which we can examine our cultural perspective on gender, and we believe it enhances everyone's life to open up more possibilities and options and remove unnecessary gender-based constraints.
- 2.3. As part of this, we want to ensure everyone feels that media coverage of trans rights and issues are fair and balanced, and do justice to the wide variation of backgrounds and experiences of trans people and communities without legitimising or normalising anti-trans hatred or continued ignorance.

## **RESPONSE**

### **3. Introduction**

- 3.1. We welcome IMPRESS's code review, and the opportunity for us as a trans-led charity to respond to it.
- 3.2. Gendered Intelligence acknowledges that it is not at the forefront of media analysis vis-à-vis trans reporting, with other organisations such as Trans Media Watch specialising in this. However, we have witnessed, albeit anecdotally, a shift in the nature in the way trans matters are reported in recent years, and the number of pieces having skyrocketed. We trust that experts on trans media portrayal will have responded to this call for evidence with detailed figures and annual breakdowns, whereas our response will focus primarily on general issues.

### **4. Trans people in the British press**

- 4.1. Overwhelmingly with larger mainstream publications within the British press, trans people are portrayed as "an oversensitive group, which is often made the target of attention in relation to their physical appearance or sexual misconduct"<sup>1</sup>.
- 4.2. A pernicious habit has taken hold across the broadsheets and tabloids in recent years of referring to any trans person, their trans status otherwise irrelevant, being referred to as a 'trans activist'. This reduces any potential for political action or of reasoned profile to that of a rabble-rouser. Similarly, 'trans activists' are widely cast as being behind actions unconnected to trans people, where there is any mention of gender or sex. For example, any gradual shift in language from healthcare providers to be more inclusive of trans people is often framed, rather conspiratorially, in mainstream reporting as having been as a result of some cabal of 'trans activists' exerting pressure, whereas the truth is usually for more benign reasons.
- 4.3. Studies on the particular language used around trans identities, in particular the focus on medical transitional pathways in the media, may "mislead the frivolous reader to the association of transgender identity to a condition, something related to health even a disease"<sup>2</sup>
- 4.4. The media landscape has shifted dramatically in recent years as to how trans people are reported, with a shared sense that we have entered moral panic territory. Articles ostensibly of little interest otherwise are reeled off the presses where there is an opportunity to attack or denigrate trans people as a whole, with trans individuals becoming collateral damage in a wider 'culture war'.

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<sup>1</sup>

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327139465\\_Who\\_writes\\_the\\_story\\_matters\\_Transgender\\_identity\\_through\\_the\\_lens\\_of\\_citizen\\_journalism](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327139465_Who_writes_the_story_matters_Transgender_identity_through_the_lens_of_citizen_journalism)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.puntoorginternationaljournal.org/index.php/PIJ/article/view/48/35>

- 4.5. There is an increasingly blurred line between reporting and opinion pieces, with many pieces gathering quotes and information from nefarious sources and presenting them as evidence to pre-existing biases. This is to present an aura of balance, and is simply an exercise in managing optics: reasonable debate and reporting on trans issues has transformed in recent years so that only those with the most sensationalist voices are platformed. This includes the repeated opportunities given to groups which are openly hostile to trans people to increase their reach and platform through the dissemination of soundbites which ultimately run tantamount to mis- and disinformation. In short, a country which continues to be largely unknowledgeable about truths, priorities and real life experiences of trans people is being fed lies by a media keen to create sensationalist headlines, which do not reflect the reality on the ground, in order to increase reach and profit.
- 4.6. The same is true of other minoritized and racialised communities.
- 4.7. We note that whilst the larger mainstream publications which are not covered by the IMPRESS Code continue propagating falsehoods and generalisations about trans people, the more community and citizen journalism minded publications as covered by the Code are less prone to hyperbole and generalising.
- 4.8. That is not to say that publications using the Code are somehow unimpeachably trans-friendly by their very nature, but rather that adherence to the Code itself may be forestalling a more active proliferation of the trans exclusionary statements as seen in other publications.
- 4.9. Overwhelmingly through our quick research, we found only reasoned articles surrounding all things 'trans' across the publications covered by the IMPRESS code, an unfortunately rare and commendable feat in 2021.

## **5. Responding to future actions**

- 5.1. With regards to Section 4 of the Code (Discrimination), taking into consideration the current heightened fears of minorities within the UK, we would be interested in the inclusion of a wider definition of "prejudicial or pejorative reference to a person... that makes that person vulnerable to discrimination". We know as a trans-led organisation, made up primarily of trans individuals, that the simple inclusion of superfluous information in an article about our trans status can make us more likely to be victim of discrimination, as well as adding to exclusionary framings. For example, an article which unnecessarily and without consent mentions an interviewee's trans status may put that person in real, acute harm, especially if reported with other identifiable information. It would also add to a dangerous narrative and framing of trans people, as highlighted in 3.2, of trans people as uniquely worthy of being 'outed' even when their trans status is not otherwise relevant to the reporting.

- 5.2. The above relates also to Section 7 of the Code (Privacy), in particular 7.2.c (exacerbation of distress through intrusive reporting) and 7.1.a-7.1.c (how information was communicated, if freely and voluntarily, including relevant attributes of the person). It may be beneficial that supplementary guidance takes into consideration the situation of all minoritized groups who may not wish for identifiable or personal information which is otherwise available to be stated on the record.
  
- 5.3. We would be remiss if we imagined that current systems of press regulation were enough to put a halt to misinformation surrounding trans people. More stringent processes need to be put into place if we are to collectively and robustly tackle the scourge of anti-trans propaganda masquerading as reporting of objective fact when it is nothing of the sort. We hope that this review of the IMPRESS Code will act as a step towards bettering the media environment for trans reporting more widely.