

The Student Anti-Sexism Working Group at Highgate School, who coordinated the Forum, have offered a response to recent media coverage about this event:

As the students who organised the Anti-Sexism Forum the media seem so vehemently opposed to, we thought it necessary to respond to the attempts to demonise the work we have put in over the last six months. Much of the coverage has fundamentally misunderstood our work, and Highgate's progress in responding to rape culture and Everyone's Invited.

Highgate has been criticised for being 'woke', and for mischaracterising intersectional feminism. Out-of-context quotes have been taken from two presentations from a day-long forum of presentations covering many different aspects of anti-sexism. The argument that education on intersectionality is harmful to the fight against sexism and rape culture falsely assumes it does not hold any real importance in its eradication. That assumption is built upon fear, ignorance, and hostility. Ironically, these three traits have been seen throughout the media coverage.

Any potentially-judicious views these articles hold on intersectional feminism are immediately discredited by the blatant transphobia underpinning them. "It doesn't take much for someone to say they are non-binary and enter a woman's space anymore" in one piece clearly demonstrates a lack of understanding as to how gender identity works and the regulations surrounding it. The utter disregard for valid gender identification among young people in the media coverage has left us feeling disgusted and worried for any genderqueer youth who may have the misfortune of coming into contact with the articles.

The anonymous teacher quoted says that "[m]y fundamental concern is that a school so widely criticised for the behaviour of some of the students in terms of sexual harassment and sexual assault should launch an anti-sexism forum that doesn't deal with those issues whatsoever". We ask this person what they would've preferred this Anti-Sexism Forum to entail? We have found it difficult to reckon with the fact that this teacher cannot recognise how educating young people on intersectional feminism, medical misogyny, the role of pornography, and other key tenets of anti-sexism would lead to a reduction in rape culture. This criticism also disregards all the progress that has been made by students and staff at Highgate in addition to the Forum, which the teacher would not know about in detail, given their lack of any involvement in Highgate's anti-sexism and sexual violence policies and work.

The aim of the Anti-Sexism Forum was to create a network of schools who could collaborate on creating a space free from sexism and discrimination. The invitation itself stated that the Forum was "a space for communication, education, and growth". It is therefore entirely wrong to accuse the Forum of virtue signalling, when this was not a public forum, and was never supposed to be. Virtue signalling requires intentional publicity. These journalists had to rely on leaks and secondary sources.

There is more that we could say, with more space and more time. Ultimately, we are shocked that, as a group of children who were trying to make environments safer for ourselves and our peers, we have been nationally and publicly criticised.

The Student Anti-Sexism Working Group at Highgate School

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