

# Response to the Letter from the Safe Community Team

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We have reviewed your *Letter from the Safe Community Team* (SCT). It contains several errors of fact and reasoning. Provided these are corrected, we would be prepared to sign an updated draft.

## Definitions:

Gender ideology: The belief that whether one is a man, woman, boy, or girl is defined not by biology, but by feelings and self-ID.

Gender critical: A philosophy that embraces science, biology and evolution, recognizing that, for humans, sex is determined by biology rather than feelings.

## Essential principles.

The following principles must be clearly spelled out in any document you would like us to sign.

1. Affirm that, as always, the accused in a dispute is assumed innocent until proven guilty.
2. Affirm that civil, respectful discourse, where ideas contrary to one's own are expressed, is deemed insufficient grounds for claiming to have been harmed.
3. Explicitly recognize the right of Eliot community members to hold gender critical views. This includes, but is not limited to, the view that sex is binary, immutable, defined by the gonads at birth; and the view that trans-identified males (males who identify as female), like other males, should not be allowed in women's spaces or sports.
4. Affirm that when a civil discussion leads to a difference of opinion about how someone's ideas comport with material reality, it is not the fault of the speaker if the listener takes offence. Having one's closely held beliefs contradicted can feel bad, but it can often lead to personal growth. If your belief is on solid ground, then fending off criticism strengthens your ability to defend it. If your belief is shown to be flawed, then your personal knowledge is thereby increased.
5. Affirm that everyone has the right to believe whatever they like about the world and themselves so long as those beliefs do not impinge on the rights of others. No one has the right to impose their belief system on others.

6. Affirm that disagreeing with gender ideology is not denying the existence of trans or nonbinary people any more than not believing in Catholicism denies the existence of Catholics.
7. Affirm Eliot's commitment that gender critical campers at Eliot will not be shunned, harassed or otherwise treated with disrespect by others who hold different opinions.
8. Reverse your finding that Bruce and Carol caused harm. The following is a suggested replacement.

*Some campers said that they felt hurt by words you have expressed. However, when a civil discussion leads to a difference of opinion about how someone's ideas comport with material reality, it is not the fault of the speaker if the listener takes offence. Having one's closely held beliefs contradicted can feel bad, but it can often lead to personal growth. If your belief is on solid ground, then fending off criticism strengthens your ability to defend it. If your belief is shown to be flawed, then your personal knowledge is thereby increased.*

*Everyone has the right to believe whatever they like about the world and themself so long as those beliefs do not impinge on the rights of others. And no one has the right to impose their belief system on others. This applies to all beliefs including those that can and cannot be tested against material reality. Sex self-ID, like someone's belief about their height or weight, can be tested against material reality. Someone's belief that green is the best all round color cannot.*

In a nutshell, the evidence that we, Bruce and Carol, did anything other than engage in respectful speech is nonexistent. The anecdotes presented on this matter are of the kangaroo court variety: vague complaints filed by mostly anonymous individuals who wouldn't even agree to a facilitated conversation with us; obvious errors in what these anonymous individuals claimed we said and wrote; a bizarre recasting of our appropriate outreach to Elioteers as somehow shameful; and Bruce accidentally using a non-sanctioned pronoun in a discussion where the referenced individual was not present.

There is no basis for your finding that "campers have been hurt by [our] behaviors and...words". If it's made clear that gender critics are as welcome in the Eliot community as anybody else, and that gender critical ideas and speech are subject to the same rules and restrictions, no more, no less, than all other speech at camp, then we're confident an updated draft—one which incorporates the essential principles above and the corrections described below—can be produced that we would be proud to sign.

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## Errors in Your Draft That Need to be Corrected.

1. You wrote,

Based on the information received, the Executive Committee of the Board determined that the alleged concerns **implicated** substantial individual and community safety, and therefore called for the formation of a Safe Community Team (SCT) pursuant to our Restoring Right Relations Policy. [Emphasis added.]

This paragraph explains the predicate for convening the SCT before any evidence or arguments were heard from us and before any conclusions were drawn. Therefore, the word “possibly” should be added before “implicated”. (Is *implicated* the word you meant to use here?) Without this change, it appears that a judgment was rendered before any investigation or hearing; it assumes guilty until proven innocent.

2. You wrote,

Concern: You both spoke directly to people and in a way **where your words were overheard** by others where you expressed **your beliefs that there are only two genders and that gender continuum does not exist**. These **words were hurtful** to these campers and led them to feel that Eliot was not a safe place for queer & trans/LGBTQ+ people. [Emphasis added.]

This excerpt contains three problems.

First, a great many discussions occur at Eliot camps which are overheard by third parties. The crux of your concern appears to be the *content* of what we were discussing, not whether it was overheard. Many controversial issues come up and are discussed over the course of a typical Eliot camp. At the August 2024 camp there are likely to be civil discussions, and perhaps deep disagreements, about Israel/Palestine, the Ukraine war, the 2024 elections, Covid policy, whether China is a threat, and more. Unless you are suggesting that every discussion of a controversial topic must be shielded from passersby and eavesdroppers—a view we do not share and would not encourage—by what rationale are discussions about gender ideology singled out for the “cone of silence”? Clearly there are many topics that could challenge deeply held beliefs and surface keenly felt emotions. For these reasons, we suggest removing “where your words were overheard by others” from the above and wherever else it occurs.

Second, the phrase, “you expressed your beliefs that there are only two genders and that gender continuum does not exist,” is inaccurate and attributes beliefs to us that we do not hold. We believe in science, biology and evolution. As such we understand that, for humans, there are only two, discrete sexes and that sex does not exist on a spectrum. We

consider the term “gender” to be poorly defined, mired in sexist stereotypes, and often used as a smokescreen to gut sex-based words and rights. Thus, we never use it in the way your draft describes. (We have yet to see a believer in gender ideology who is able to define the word “gender” non-circularly and without resorting to sexist stereotypes.)

Third, you claim “These words were hurtful to these campers...” Here you are asserting that a reasoned opinion, calmly and respectfully expressed, automatically inflicts hurt if the hearer disagrees. In truth, all that can be said is that “These campers *felt* these words were hurtful...” If someone expresses an opinion on the Israel/Palestine conflict, the listener may feel hurt by it, but that doesn’t mean the opinion was intrinsically hurtful.

3. You wrote,

You expressed the view that “gender ideology” (the belief that gender is something other than the identity that corresponds to one’s anatomy at birth)...

This is an inaccurate paraphrase of our position. Far better to quote what we actually wrote in our proposed resolution to this conflict:

Gender Ideology is the belief that a person’s sex is determined, not by biology, but by feelings and self ID.

4. You wrote,

Concern: You sent emails to campers which were **unsolicited** and contained information the campers **did not want to receive**, including links to a video which many described as **harmful and transphobic**... [Emphasis added.]

You claim “many described”. How many exactly?

The first email in a conversation is *always* unsolicited. Applying this adjective to our email is gratuitously pejorative and prejudicial. Moreover, the simplest way to know if someone wants to receive information we wish to share is to send it to them; the recipient is free to engage or ignore as they see fit. Rosters are provided for each Eliot camp which include campers’ contact information. Implying that making use of this Eliot-supplied information is somehow sinister strains credibility. Moreover, it is entirely appropriate for members of the Eliot community to share concerns about its direction with leaders and others.

You report that “many described [our video] as harmful and transphobic”. But you offer no concrete examples of harmful or transphobic content in the video. For such a serious accusation to have merit, you are obligated to support your claim with facts. Absent concrete, factual claims that stand up to rebuttal, assertions of harm and transphobia are

slanderous. Did the committee or the board ever consider the possibility that our video was well sourced and based on facts, and that some who dislike those facts, being unable to refute them, resorted to name-calling?

5. You wrote,

We find:

That other campers have been **hurt by your behaviors** and **the words you have expressed.**

That **suggesting that a particular group of people (gender diverse individuals) are wrong about who they understand themselves to be** does not fully respect the worth and dignity of these individuals and **may legitimately be considered harmful**, both to the gender diverse individuals themselves and to the community at large.

...

We do not believe that respectful dialogue can occur between two people when one's starting point is to invalidate the expressed identity of the other. [Emphasis added.]

You mention “behaviors” and “words”. To what behaviors are you referring besides calm, respectful speech? Absent proof of problematic non-speech behaviors, the reference to other “behaviors” should be removed.

As mentioned above, we dispute that “other campers have been hurt by [our] behaviors and the words [we] have expressed.” You offer no evidence that we engaged in anything but calm, respectful speech. To conclude that protected speech alone resulted in harm is to indict free speech itself.

You claim that we hold “that a particular group of people (gender diverse individuals) are wrong about who they understand themselves to be” and that this may “legitimately be considered harmful”. We accept that the beliefs of “gender diverse individuals” are sincerely held. But what one *understands* or *believes* is subject to measurement against material reality. Most of our lesbian friends insist that homosexuality means choosing partners based on biology, not gender self ID. They do not agree that trans-identifying males are women. By your standard, they are causing harm. By your standard, incarcerated women who object to sharing cells with trans-identifying males are harming those males by failing to validate their “female” identity. By your standard, any student of biology who understands that sex in mammals is binary and immutable is causing harm.

Meanwhile, the very real harm—to women, gays, lesbians and children—caused by imposing gender ideology on everyone else is ignored.

Clearly, someone disbelieving in the Holy Trinity does not cause harm to devout Christians. For the same reason, Bruce and Carol disbelieving that a biological man who thinks he's a woman actually *is* a woman (or vice versa), is not harmful to “gender diverse individuals”.

Besides, we have said repeatedly that we support the right of others to believe differently from us. But as we noted in our meeting with the SCT,

It is a crucial principle, in human rights law, that only the right of people to hold a belief is protected, not the belief itself. Human rights law does not impose on individuals the duty to respect any particular set of beliefs, but only to respect the right of people to hold them.

Most likely the Eliot board shares our skepticism when it comes to *some* gender identities. A forty-year-old man who identifies as a thirteen-year-old girl, for example. Would such a person be allowed to join the MAGS program? What about self-described minor-attracted persons (MAPs, commonly known as pedophiles)? What about individuals who identify as cats, dogs or other animals? All of these gender identities exist and actively proselytize. What about an anorexic girl who identifies as fat? Must we validate that identity? If some of these cases would be labeled extreme and okay to respectfully disagree with, how exactly do you draw the line separating where “respectful dialogue can occur”? How do you justify ignoring international human rights law by imposing on people not only the duty to respect a controversial belief, but also the obligation to pretend to embrace that belief as well?

6. You wrote,

Our expectations listed below are grounded both in our recognition that **denying the experience of marginalized members of our community does harm**, and our interest in creating conditions that support respectful disagreement about sensitive topics. [Emphasis added.]

Here you erroneously imply that to disagree with someone’s personal philosophy is to deny their experience. Does declining to believe in Christianity deny the experience of Christians? It’s irrational and the height of injustice that such a conflation between “disbelief” and “denial of experience” should be assumed for gender ideology while for every other belief system “lack of belief” never implies “denial of experience”.

7. Now we come to a critical contradiction within your document. On the one hand you wrote,

We do not believe that respectful dialogue can occur between two people when one's starting point is to invalidate the expressed identity of the other.

Was the above sentence meant to pertain to gender critical beliefs and speech, suggesting that these cannot be part of a “respectful dialogue”? It appears so. But a little further down you wrote,

You ensure that the people with whom you are sharing your theory of gender ideology and its dangers are consenting to be in such conversation with you...

This sentence assumes gender critical views can and will be shared. So, it clearly implies that raising gender critical views *does* fall within the range of “respectful dialogue.” You can’t have it both ways. Something needs to be changed to eliminate this contradiction and respect the essential principles we outlined above. One suggestion is to add the following language at an appropriate point:

Gender critical views are welcome and respected at Eliot camps. Civil, respectful elucidation of these views is not grounds for someone to claim that they were harmed or made unsafe.

8. Under “Findings” point 2 you wrote,

You use the name and pronouns that each person requests for themselves...

The word “and” should be changed to “or”.

For the record, we consider this compelled speech and a violation of the rights of the person speaking. It’s akin to being forced to say  $2 + 2 = 5$ . However, in the interest of moving forward, we are willing to give our best effort to using the name or description of the person being referenced (ex., “The speaker said...”) If we fail in this on occasion it is due to cognitive dissonance, and we would expect people to be understanding. (To put this into perspective, see the [Stroop Effect](#).)

9. Under “Findings point 3 you wrote,

You openly acknowledge that it is the right of each person to define who they are.

For clarity and consistency with the rest of the document add,

Such acknowledgement does not mean that all must agree with their definition.

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## Harm Caused by Gender Ideology

We would be remiss if we didn't take a moment to reflect on the reaction of the SCT and the Eliot Board to our assertion that gender ideology is causing serious harm. We have presented evidence of this in our video and offered to provide much more. In the zoom meeting we referred to important new developments since that video was made, including the Cass Report and the WPATH Files. We noted in particular that the Cass Report explicitly discourages the social transition/affirmation of children, while the Board's current policy mandates affirmation for all ages.

You note in your draft,

You expressed the view that “gender ideology”...poses a grave harm to the rights of women, gay[s] and lesbians, and children’s health. You shared that you speak out on this issue out of a sense of duty to inform about this harm and reduce it.

Apart from acknowledging our concern about the harms associated with gender ideology, the SCT and Eliot board appear to have no interest in hearing from gender critics and learning more. Despite what is at stake here, the Eliot leadership is willfully ignorant about one of the defining issues of our day—an issue that dramatically affects gay rights, women’s rights, freedom of thought and expression, and the health and safety of children. Sadly, it appears that the SCT and the Eliot board intend to ignore our warning on this matter, like a 911 dispatcher hanging up on an incoming call. You have never made it clear whether this means that you judge our evidence of harm to be false or whether you feel the harms, though real, are not worth bothering about.

Everyone wonders how so many Germans in the 30s and 40s could have looked the other way while trains hauled their neighbors to the death camps. Many wonder how the Satanic Panic of the 80s and 90s—a mania that held that vulnerable children’s “repressed memories” pointed to an epidemic of abuse by devil worshipers—could have ruined so many lives and been endorsed by so many medical professionals and journalists before it was completely discredited and crumbled beneath a mountain of lawsuits. Today, gender ideology poses a similar challenge. If you wonder how you might have responded to the abuses of the past, you might begin by examining your response to the women’s-rights-destroying, child-harming gender ideology of today. It can be hard to stand up against the herd, even when the evidence is overwhelming. But stand up we must.

As we noted in the zoom meeting,

In the parable of The Emperor’s New Clothes, the little boy who tells the truth is supposed to be the hero. Sadly, the Eliot Board’s current trajectory on gender ideology would cast that boy as the villain.