Last week, MDI posted a brief [Twitter thread](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23StopFundingHate&src=hash) in reaction to online harassment of our partner [Stop Funding Hate UK](https://www.stopfundinghate.org.uk/). Stop Funding Hate recently launched a campaign asking Nationwide UK to divest from the Mail on Sunday, after the paper published an op-ed claiming that “trans trolls are a threat to our democracy” after Oxford University Professor Selina Todd reported that she needed to be accompanied by security, due to comments she made about transgender people on her website and social media profiles.
However, this op-ed did not tell the full story. In our thread, we mentioned that Selina Todd has been called out for retweeting transphobic tweets on Twitter—which, seeing as how she is a public figure, has been interpreted as a form of bullying by a number of Oxford university students. We also tweeted several articles about how much the way the media reports on trans* people matters—like any minority group, the media can have a huge impact on public perception and mental health.

Nevertheless, we received an unexpected response on Twitter—many claiming that we were not adequately listening to Todd’s side of the story, and had been too quick to accuse her of bullying. We decided to dig into it. Could Todd’s tweets be construed as bullying? What are her words’ impact on her students and her following? On one hand, it is her right to publish what she wishes within the law—on the other hand, anyone in a position of power and influence must be responsible with how their words can impact others.

Were we too quick to judge? It matters to us that academics have the freedom of expression to say what they wish—but it also matters that what they say does not offend, discriminate or otherwise harm others, particularly students.

Most of all, it matters to us to provide a space to have a healthy and civil debate about something which is clearly an important—and very sensitive—issue.

First, who is Selina Todd? Professor Selina Todd is a Professor of Modern History at St Hilda’s College, University of Oxford. On her website, Todd claims to be a “gender critical feminist”—but she elaborates that this means that in her opinion, “men and women are defined by their sex, not by culturally constructed gender norms. You can’t change sex – biologically, that is impossible.”

Naturally, this has raised the ire of many—some found that she is blatantly denying the existence of transgender individuals. According to the BBC, Todd heard about the threats from transgender activists from two students that warned her they had seen threats made against her on email networks that they were a part of. A few days later, The Telegraph reported that Todd “has been given security guards to accompany her to lectures after receiving threats from transgender activists.”
In the original thread, we provided links to two pieces where trans people explain how it feels to be excluded from media conversations. These are Paris Lees' 'In Your Eyes' and Owl Fischer's 'In the Garden'. All too often, mainstream British media and self-described feminists ignore the voices of trans people. In the spring of last year, Todd retweeted two British Gay Eugenics Tweets. One is a sinister attempt to silence trans people, the other is a deliberately transphobic message. These are not isolated incidents. There are countless examples of media transphobia, sometimes unfair and other times targeted at specific individuals. It is thus difficult to verify whether she actually re-posted these Tweets. We regret jumping to any conclusion.

The Telegraph emphasises that Womans Place UK “is not transphobic.” However, the most recent report from The Oxford Mail would lead readers to believe. Todd herself said as much, while explaining that she would rather be safe than sorry. If the threats are minor, why would the Daily Mail blow them out of proportion? Their language couched as the claim that cis women are “silenced” by these groups. The Telegraph breaks the story of the (unnamed) threats she faces, there was an institutional (racial, socio-economic, religious) privilege rather than genuine concern for her safety. The Telegraph breaks the story of the (unnamed) threats she faces, there was an institutional (racial, socio-economic, religious) privilege rather than genuine concern for her safety.

Given that we also have no proof of threats made against her by trans activists, MDI believe it was appropriate to reference these allegations to rebalance the debate. Of course, any conclusion must be drawn with caution. It could be argued that these tweets are “bullying”—they deny the very existence of trans people and undermine their dignity. The hashtag “#transawaythegay” is itself discriminatory, as it means to exclude trans people from conversations. University students have lodged complaints against Todd for allegedly re-Tweeting transphobic tweets. While it is her right to express her academic work, and personal opinions, she also needs to understand her position as an influencer in the world of gender, and her right to silence. 

Professor Todd has had the chance to speak at a variety of academic events, give an interview on BBC Radio, the Telegraph and The Daily Beast, and her experiences have been discussed in The Consequences of the Daily Mail’s "Trans Trolls" and Other Transphobic Media Coverage. However, she does frequently retweet the other transphobic organisations mentioned in The Telegraph. In her first Tweet, she emphasises that Womans Place UK “is not transphobic.” However, the Telegraph breaks the story of the (unnamed) threats she faces, there was an institutional (racial, socio-economic, religious) privilege rather than genuine concern for her safety.