

Response from Jackie Turner, Director of the Trans Justice Project:

1. What do you think of this opinion piece and what are the reasons you think The Age might have been reluctant to publish it?

https://open.substack.com/pub/szegounplugged/p/a-question-of-transition?r=1qlet2&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web

Gender affirming care helps trans people to thrive, live their best lives, and gives them the freedom to be themselves. This article is full of discredited science, fringe conspiracy theories, and omits relevant context that would provide more fairness and balance.

This article is not an accurate representation of the wealth of legitimate medical research in this space. The consensus is that trans health care is life-changing treatment, it improves people's lives, and that more needs to be done to make it more affordable and accessible.

For example, much of the argument in this article rests on an anti-trans conspiracy theory about a so-called 'social contagion'. This is simply a repackaged version of 'gay panic' from the 80's. There is no evidence to say this exists and the myth is not supported by any major Australian medical organisation. Yet it is regularly peddled out by anti-trans organisations as a way to pathologize and deny health care to our community.

2. The Age says it effectively sacked Julie because of disparaging remarks she made about the publication. Some appear to have suggested she was sacked for writing the column that's now been published on Substack. If that's the case- do you think columnists like Julie who write pieces like that should be sacked or do you welcome the airing of their views?

A diversity of opinions should be encouraged but this is about truth, accuracy, and integrity. Journalists have a responsibility to engage with the facts and the reality of a situation. What worries me is that many of the sources that Szego references in this piece are ideological, misleading, or explicitly anti-LGBTQIA+.

One of the organisations referenced has recently been reviewed in an article published in the Yale School of Medicine Journal:

“Despite SEGM’s statement, the group appears to be nothing more than a website; it does not appear to hold meetings, screen its members, or publish a journal.”

“A contextual examination reveals that SEGM is an ideological organization without apparent ties to mainstream scientific or professional organizations. Its 14 core members are a small group of repeat players in anti-trans activities – a fact that the SEGM website does not disclose.”

3. I understand trans people have publicly criticised Julie and The Age because some of her trans-related opinion pieces were seen as transphobic or offensive etc. Are you able to sum up any patterns or themes you've observed in this regard and why you and others in the community may be concerned?

Many in the trans community are concerned with the frequency with which targeted disinformation is being platformed by Australian news outlets.

Much like what we saw with the mainstreaming of climate denial and covid conspiracies, anti-trans lobbyists are exploiting the public's lack of knowledge about trans and gender diverse people to spread lies about our lives, erode our rights, and restrict our access to health care.

4. What would your response be to people who might say people like Julie are entitled to their views and there's nothing wrong with them or what she wrote?

Journalists are always going to have their own views, but media outlets have a responsibility to ensure that they treat all issues with the same basic standards of accuracy, integrity, and balance.