Comedian Mary Bourke sparks outrage by mocking trans-inclusive language for cheap laughs

VIC PARSONS JANUARY 11, 2021

Comedian Mary Bourke is facing backlash over a set pillorying trans-inclusive language around cervical smear tests that also sees her cracking jokes at the expense of poor people.

Bourke, an Irish stand-up comedian, performed her show Don’t You Dare Call Me a TERF at London’s “free-thinking” Unleashed Comedy club in September 2020.

A short video clip was published last week to widespread criticism. It begins with Bourke saying that she was recently sent a letter by the NHS informing her that it’s time for her routine smear test.

Anyone who has a cervix – including some trans men and non-binary people – and is between the ages of 25 and 64 should get regular smear tests (cervical screenings) on the NHS.

Smear tests save lives by preventing cancer, but they are also the focus of anti-trans campaigners (and elected politicians) who wrongly insist that “only women get cervical cancer”. When this error is pointed out, those campaigners like to respond by saying that including trans men and non-binary people in language around smear tests is “erasing women”.

Which is exactly what Bourke’s set was about.

“I got invited to have a smear test,” she begins. “I call my vagina ‘the Jerusalem artichoke’ because not many people know how to eat it properly.

“If you didn’t get that joke it’s because you’re very poor. You need to vary your diet, it can’t all be Pringles.”

She continues: “The reason they invited me for a smear test was because according to their medical records, I, Mary J Bourke, was the owner of a vagina and/or a cervix.”

This is in line with NHS guidance on smear tests, which states: “All women and people with a cervix aged 25 to 64 should be invited by letter.”

However, Bourke was displeased by receiving her letter. “Dear NHS Trust,” she says, “here’s a list of all the things I’m not.”

This list of things she’s not includes “a vulva, a vagina, a cervix, a menstruator, lactator, incubator, child curator”.

“The word you are looking for is ‘woman’,” Bourke says. “I am an adult biological woman.”

“How dare you reduce me to a biological function or body part,” she adds. “How dare you!”

Bourke then says that she is “obviously once, twice and three times a lady”.

She then admits: “The thing is, when you say something like that, you instantly get called a TERF, which stands for Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist.

“Whenever someone calls me a TERF, I just call them a SMURF. We can all make up our own insult words.”
Adding that “SMURF” stands for “sexist misogyny undermining real feminism”, Bourke delivered her punchline: “And I’m going to keep on calling them SMURFS until I’m blue in the face.”

Criticism online of Bourke “punching down” at transgender people was matched in severity by the number of people who thought the jokes were bad in and of themselves.

“If this counts as comedy these days I should become a comedian,” one person said.

James Acaster stands up to anti-trans jokes.

As comedian James Acaster has pointed out, many stand-ups rely on cheap, anti-trans jokes for laughs.

“If people on the internet get upset about it,” Acaster adds in a recently resurfaced set, “the comedian’s always like, ‘Bad luck! That’s my job. I’m a stand-up comedian, I’m meant to challenge people. If you don’t like being challenged, don’t watch my shows. What’s the matter guys, too challenging for you?’

“Because you know who’s long been overdue a challenge? The trans community!”

Leading UK charities Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust and The Eve Appeal both advise that everyone with a cervix should have access to support and information about cervical cancer and smear tests.

More information about smear tests for trans men and non-binary people can be found here.

Mary Bourke has been contacted for comment.

https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2021/01/11/mary-bourke-terf-comedian-stand-up-smear-tests-transgender/