

# United Socialists of State College lead discussion on fighting transphobia with Marxist feminism

BY ALEXIS COLLINS ON NOVEMBER 15, 2017

Due to current political attitudes towards transgender people, such as the proposed transgender military ban and the bathroom ban, members of the transgender community are fighting back more than ever to be accepted and recognized by their peers.

Kelli Knipe, a Penn State graduate student in sociology and demography, hosted a discussion on fighting transphobia with Marxist feminism in the Sackett building Tuesday night in honor of Trans Visibility Week, according to Knipe.

Knipe, who identifies as a transgender woman, spoke about transgender issues during her lecture. Knipe said that prejudice will continue to exist.

“You can’t get rid of all repression,” she said. “You can’t get rid of the ideas of racism, the ideas of sexism, because they’re going to reappear as independent thoughts from people. What you can get rid of is systematic repression.”

Knipe, who is also a member of the United Socialists of Penn State, said that the solution to eliminating systemic barriers is liberation, specifically trans liberation, which is the freedom for people to express their gender identity without certain institutions limiting that expression. According to Knipe, these limits include legal and medical obstacles that the transgender community faces every day.

Knipe said that transphobia, or the fear of transgender people, is endorsed by those in power and the mainstream media. She showed the audience articles from the past week that targeted trans people by using inflammatory headlines and promoting what she called “the transgender agenda.” She then mentioned North Carolina’s House bill, which said that people’s ability to use public restrooms should be based on their assigned gender rather than their gender identity.

According to Knipe, transgender people are being inaccurately portrayed in the media due to unfair representation.

“There’s this pattern coming about,” she said. “You don’t see people interviewed who are actual trans women on news networks. You hear about cisgender people who are experts in trans issues and trans mental states, and this happens because it’s easy.”

Knipe said that one can apply Marxist feminism to transgender issues because it’s “easier to divide and conquer the working class,” which is one of the main points of the ideology. Knipe said that different identities are used to separate the working class and distract

people from real issues, briefly referring to Penn State College Republicans allegedly choosing to ignore transgender politics.

Knipe said that capitalism relies on the idea of the nuclear family, where one family member is the breadwinner and the other is the homemaker. She said that this concept is the root of the hostilities against the LGBTQ community.

“This gender division of labor not only leads to transphobia, but it also leads to homophobia and to sexism in general,” she said. “Feminists, queer people, trans people, are all seen as destroying traditional values.”

Knipe said that Marxist feminists practice the politics of solidarity, which not only analyzes identity and socioeconomic class, but focuses on engaging people in direct action against their oppressors.

“Trans liberation, like all liberation, comes from below,” she said. “All forms of equality come from people who organize in mass struggle together. Solidarity isn’t just burning trash cans and throwing bricks through governmental buildings; you can practice solidarity with trans people through your normal everyday life.”

Knipe said that language helps with transphobia and homophobia, such as asking transgender people what their pronouns are.

“You don’t really have to understand someone’s life to accept them,” she said. “This is led through conversation. It’s acceptable to be accepting.”

Knipe’s lecture was part of Transgender Awareness Week, an annual event in which individuals and organizations all across the country help raise the visibility of transgender and gender nonconforming people, and address the issues that the community faces. The event lasts from Nov. 13-17 this year.

Knipe’s talk was organized by the United Socialists organization, which hosts discussions every week. Leslie Johnson, a member of the organization, said that the United Socialists are a left-wing political group that believes the capitalist system can’t be reformed. She said that one of the main goals of the group is to educate and engage with the community.

“Our goal is to learn. None of us are experts; we’re all learning together,” the junior biology major said. “We bring different ideas and different thoughts and different backgrounds to the table. We learn and talk about what we can do to solve problems of not just economic inequality, but social inequality as well.”

People who attended the event enjoyed Knipe’s lecture.

Melissa, who asked not to be identified by her last name, said that she experiences emotional anxiety while on campus because she feels like she has to pass as male. However, she said that she felt like she was in a safe environment while attending the lecture.

“At first I was a little nervous because I wasn’t dressed,” the biology major said. “I wasn’t feeling like I was presenting [myself] in how I want to present because I have a part-time job, but I kind of felt very safe, a lot safer than a lot of places I go to on campus.”

Hannah Lane, a senior, said that she attended the lecture to gain a new perspective.

“It was different,” she said. “I wanted to get a different viewpoint than things I’m usually exposed to which is why I came here. And I definitely did.”

The United Socialists meet every Tuesday at 8 p.m. in 112 Sackett. More information about their organization can be found on their [Facebook page](#).

*[Editor’s Note: A quote from Knipe on solidarity has been updated to reflect the speaker’s actual intent.]*