

A Group Tried To Dupe Transgender People Into Giving Interviews For An Apparent Anti-Trans Film Project

by Nicole Fallert

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It started with an email from an associated producer: Would she be up for an interview for a film “exploring the real lives of people in the LGBTQIA+ communities”? But Eli Erlick, a 26-year-old trans activist with over a decade of advocacy experience, soon noticed small warning signs that the film by a group called Gender Unity Project wasn’t genuine.

Her intuition turned out to be correct, and Erlick went public with her findings in [a Twitter thread](#) exposing what appears to be an effort by far-right author and podcaster Matt Walsh to trick transgender people and medical professionals into appearing in an anti-trans documentary.

Walsh, who has been [publicly critical](#) of trans people and promised an “assault on gender ideology,” did not respond to BuzzFeed News’ request for comment.

“I have never in almost 20 years seen a hoax documentary this elaborate before,” Erlick, who researches far-right movements, told BuzzFeed News.

A current PhD student who researches the far right, Erlick has participated in documentaries before and said she didn’t see any red flags at first. She exchanged emails with Gender Unity Project’s associate producer, Makenna Lynn, who mentioned she was flying back from Africa and suggested it would work with the team’s budget and timeline for Erlick to fly to Chicago for the interview.

It struck Erlick as “odd” that Lynn, who also did not respond to a request for comment, said a group of 10 people was working on the documentary, which was supposedly self-funded.

“She had mentioned she just finished film school — and having that big of a budget for a self-funded film, that’s unusual,” Erlick said. “I figured she was just rich at first.”

Erlick didn’t know the exact budget of the film but estimated the crew, equipment, and travel would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. On Feb. 3, she said she and Lynn spoke on the phone, but the producer was “fumbling” over her words and sounding like a [“sympathetic cisgender person.”](#)

On the roughly 12-minute call, Lynn said Erlick would be asked what she considers to be “standard documentary questions” but didn’t go into detail about what, exactly, the conversation would involve. They talked about both being from California, and Lynn mentioned she attended California State University, Northridge.

“When she mentioned it, it was strange because [the school] has a prominent trans resource center,” Erlick said. “She had never heard of it before. ... Anyone I have ever talked to there had heard of it.”

On the phone, Lynn wavered on whether the film would shoot in Flagstaff, Arizona, or Chicago, where the person they were interviewing had canceled. According to Erlick, the producer said the surgeon the team was trying to talk to in Arizona also wasn’t responding. But at this point, Erlick, who lives in New York, wasn’t too suspicious; it wasn’t the first time she had to change locations for an interview shoot or someone had backed out of a film project.

Then a few days later, Lynn emailed Erlick that the filming would happen in Nashville the weekend of Feb. 12. Erlick then looked up the Gender Unity Project. She found the organization was formed in August 2021 and has no named owner. It's a [registered agent in Colorado](#), which shields the creators from revealing their names or addresses.

Then Erlick received the media release form, which didn't have the company's name on it. The email associated with the DocuSign for the form wasn't Lynn's — it belonged to someone Erlick did not know.

Erlick decided to look up Lynn and found out that "Lynn" was actually her middle name — her real surname was "Waters." [IMDb revealed that Waters was Walsh's producer](#) and that she had worked on over 200 episodes for his television show. Her Twitter [account](#) featured posts related to Walsh, who also lives in Nashville. Erlick dug deeper into the Gender Unity Project and found on the Colorado secretary of state's website that it is registered under the name of another one of Walsh's employees.

She also realized from Walsh's page that [he had also recently returned from Africa](#).

"This isn't just another red flag. That's just giving it away," Erlick said. "They hid their allegiances well."

Gender Unity Project's [Twitter account](#) was suspended as of Tuesday morning.

"This is much bigger than the documentary," said Erlick, who, since posting a viral Twitter thread about her experience, has been connecting with about 10 other people who claim they had also been duped. She said her conversations with them have revealed Waters had "improved" her language every time she reached out to recruit a participant, trying harder to make her words appeal to the trans community.

"Matt Walsh knows what he's doing," Erlick said. "Now we are giving him a bunch of free press."

The public exposure is inevitable, though — either in the form of the documentary or her work revealing the truth, she added.

"It's really a win-win situation for him," she said. "That's why we should absolutely avoid engaging with far-right media ... but we can continue to report his social media accounts and maybe there'll be enough outrage that he will finally be banned from the platform."