

Majestic Equality

*"The law, in its majestic equality, forbids
the rich as well as the poor to sleep
under bridges, to beg in the streets, and
to steal bread."*

Dear Philosophers, You Can Trust the Feminist Consensus: Gender-Critical Radical Feminism is Bogus

Posted on July 25, 2019

Dear philosophers,

Every few weeks now it seems like the philosophy blogosphere has a big argument about trans rights. You are, perhaps, unsure what to think. You think of yourself, maybe, as a feminist, but both sides are calling themselves feminists: on the one side, the 'gender-critical' feminists, who say there are important conflicts of interest between trans and non-trans women; on the other side, a less cohesive but much larger group of feminists insisting that these conflicts are invented as a pretext for hate against trans people. Statistically, dear philosophers, there's a good chance that you are, like me, a cis man, and not an expert on any of this. You're wondering how to react.

Judging by my facebook feed, many of you are looking at the conflict and deciding that gender-critical feminism is a respectable view that is being unfairly vilified in an attempt to silence its proponents. You say things like the following (anonymous quotes from a few different people):

- "I'm NOT defending the Gender Critical view (or whatever one should call it). I'm defending discussion of it, and setting out why I think that certain considerations should be legitimate fodder for discussion, contrary to the way they have been – in some spheres at least – ruled out."
- "[He] isn't defending her position, he's defending the concept of open discourse."
- "I should also point out that I'm NOT arguing that the new gender legislation IS problematic. I'm defending the legitimacy of its being questioned. Which at least some people have denied."
- "[all she said was] that hormones/surgery do not make an actual 'woman' by her definition. Ok, that's an opinion, maybe some have a different one... Outrage is fine, but I should be able to identify the 'outrageous' in the rhetoric..."
- "let's ALL join together and say that we reject the too-frequent threats of deplatforming that are circulating in the profession, and oppose the vilification of our colleagues over their philosophical views..."
- "Let's stand together against attempts to deplatform and shout down and delegitimize opposing viewpoints... as 'bigotry' etc."
- "We condemn the too frequently cruel and abusive rhetoric, including accusations of hatred or transphobia, directed at these philosophers in response to their arguments and advocacy."

Dear philosophers, this post is my attempt to persuade you that actually, gender-critical feminism is not worth engaging with. It really is as valueless as people are telling you.

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motive just by itself, and so is other-defenders-of-this-view-supported-me-so-now-I-feel-defensive-of-them. I also am not speaking to what practical steps can or should be taken, where to draw the line between protest and harassment, or anything like that. I'm specifically talking about whether the view itself deserves intellectual respect.)

(I'm using the term 'gender-critical', and the abbreviations GC and GCRF ('gender-critical radical feminists/ism') because those are the terms they apply to themselves. Using this term here is not meant to imply a rejection or criticism of other more contested terms, it's just an attempt to follow the saying "never offend people with style when you can offend them with substance." I'll call the other side 'pro-trans', for lack of a better term.)

Back to the difficult situation in which you find yourselves, dear philosophers. What's hard for you, I suspect, is how extreme the claims of the pro-trans side's seem. They're not just saying that GCRF is *false* – that would be par for the course after all, most philosophical ideas turn out to be false. They're not even just saying that GCRF is wrong in important ways that have negative practical consequences – you're a philosopher, after all, so your general stance is that even importantly wrong and bad views should be openly debated and thereby shown to be wrong.

The pro-trans side seems to be claiming something very strong: that the GC side is, as I will put it, '**bogus**': both intellectually valueless and hateful. They're saying that rather than gaining something from engaging with it critically, we'll actually lose something: debates about gender are made worse by having this perspective represented. That it obscures more than it illuminates and distorts more than it clarifies, because the intellectual arguments it brings forwards are not actually its driving force, but cloaks for the real driving force, which is antagonism towards trans people.

(Note: I'm here going to use the terms 'hate', 'hateful', and 'transphobic' in line with my discussion [here](#). It's not an emotion, it's a failure to fully incorporate other people's humanity into your view of the world.)

And maybe, dear philosophers, you just... you don't **see** it. You've read those long comment threads on Daily Nous, you've read some duelling articles on Medium, you've looked at the things the GC side is saying and to you they all seem, if not true, at least reasonable enough to be within the arena of respectful debate. The denunciations from the pro-trans side seem so out of sync with the measured, careful, tone and modest, plausible-sounding claims of the GC side. It doesn't feel like you're reading the writings of a hate group. Indeed, it feels like you're watching people being unfairly shouted down – and you're used to identifying with whoever looks like they're asking questions, and you can't help but feel empathically defensive when it looks like the GC side are just asking questions and being attacked for it.

So what do you do, when you keep hearing that these ideas are bogus, but you can't see the bogusness in what they're saying yourself?

Dear philosophers, I was once in your position. I knew I wanted to support my trans friends and colleagues, and I saw little appeal in GC conclusions, but I'm a sucker for 'just asking legitimate questions'. I wanted to be able to

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But virtually everyone I regarded as an authority on feminism, from famous philosophers to well-informed friends, was saying the opposite: that GC feminism is not actually something worth seeking synthesis or common ground with.

I decided to believe what seemed like the consensus among feminists, that GCRF is bogus, even though I had trouble articulating why clearly to myself. I trusted the judgement that seemed to be held by the great majority of people I knew and respected for their views on this sort of topic.

I could have thought to myself ‘all these feminists whose opinions I normally respect are actually too zealous and dogmatic; but I, a middle-class white man, have a proper appreciation of the importance of open debate.’ Maybe that’s what you, dear philosophers, are inclined to do. Fortunately, I didn’t: instead I thought ‘there is probably a forest here I’m not seeing, despite my scrutiny of these trees.’



But I did want to understand better, so I tried to read and listen and reflect before taking a big public stance, and the more I did that, the more I came to see that forest, and came to think that ‘gender-critical’ feminism is, just like everyone was telling me, a net negative influence on the quality of debates about gender, and better understood as intellectual cover for antagonism to trans people than as a philosophical school of thought.

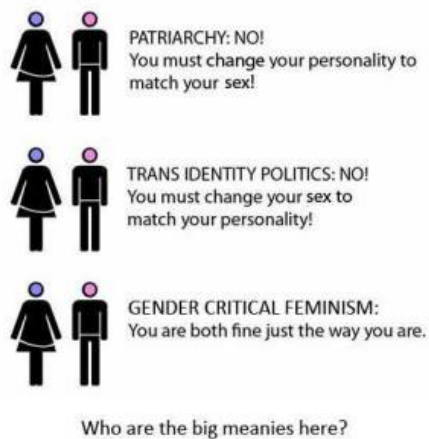
In this post I’m going to try to convey some of why I’ve come to think that – or rather, why I’ve come to feel like I can ‘see’ that directly, rather than taking it on trust. I’m going to try to do that by analysing what I think it’s fair to call three central themes of GCRF:

- that trans people reinforce gender stereotypes;
- that gender-nonconforming (‘GNC’) young people are being pressured or rushed into unwise transitions;
- that including trans women in women’s spaces like bathrooms and changing rooms exposes cis women to risk.

I’m going to try to show not just that these are wrong, but that they are baseless, rooted in some combination of conceptual confusion and factual error, and hold together as an ideology only because of the organising power of anxiety, confusion, or hostility to trans people.

Part 1: Do Trans People Reinforce Gender Stereotypes? (No)

The first two ideas I want to criticise are both nicely illustrated by this popular image, which is the header pic on the popular ‘gendercritical’ subreddit (hopefully getting it from this source serves to ensure that I’m not picking on isolated or unrepresentative examples):



(The image shows two figures, one a stylised male with a ‘feminine’ pink circle over their head, one a stylised female with a ‘masculine’ blue circle over their head, to represent a person who is AMAB (assigned male at birth, what would often be called ‘born biologically male’) but has ‘feminine’ interests, personality, or whatever, and a person who is AFAB (assigned female at birth, or ‘born biologically female’) but has ‘masculine’ style, or temperament, or whatever.)

The image suggests that sexist society and ‘trans identity politics’ are mirror images of each other: one tells people that they ‘must’ change their personality to match their sex, the other tells people that they ‘must’ change their sex to match their personality. Gender-critical feminism alone tells both these people that they are fine as they are.

This is a really neat and effective image, which brilliantly encapsulates the GCRF view of the debate.

Unfortunately, it is completely wrong in its characterisation of the ‘trans identity politics’ position. Like, ‘wildly out of touch with reality’ wrong.

We can distinguish two concerns conveyed by the image: 1) that gender transitions, even when voluntary, serve to ‘reinforce gender stereotypes by making sure everyone with ‘feminine’ interests is a woman and making sure everyone with ‘masculine’ interests is a man, and 2) that GNC (gender-nonconforming) people are being ‘pushed’ into transitioning. I’ll discuss those in this and the next section, respectively.

The idea that people transition in order to better fit gender stereotypes is, as best I can tell, just false. It just isn’t what happens. Conformity to stereotypes and gender identity are two things, they can come apart, and trans people know this. Having gender-nonconforming tastes and interests is not a good reason to transition, and having gender-conforming tastes and interests (relative to one’s assigned gender) is not a good reason not to.

I mean, I can’t speak from personal experience here so it’s always possible that I’m wrong. But I have lost count of how many trans people I’ve read saying, from personal experience, ‘people are only diagnosed with gender dysphoria when they go to a clinic and say ‘I am/want to be a boy/girl’, whether or not they have gender nonconforming interests’. Indeed, it’s often listed in a ‘Trans 101’ or ‘cheat notes for cis people’ type list. And I have yet to see any trans people contradict this. And the [current DSM diagnostic criteria](#) fit with this claim.

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And I have yet to find a single trans person or pro-trans feminist suggesting that being a stereotypically feminine man or stereotypically masculine woman is necessary or sufficient for being a trans woman or trans man. (Probably *someone* out there has said this, but on the internet that's true of any idea.) There are lots of trans men with feminine-coded interests and so many trans women with masculine-coded interests. If you want to make space for masculine women and feminine men, transfeminism is on your side.

Now, I don't think that GCRFs made up this idea up all by themselves. My understanding is that the idea of gender transition as a way to 'cure' gender-nonconformity is out there, but it's not trans advocates pushing it – it's medical gatekeepers they've been campaigning against for decades.

That is, half the things trans people have said about being trans reflect what medical professionals have required them to say in order to begin medical transition. If the only way to access medical transition is to say 'I've always known I was an A born in a B's body, ever since my parents gave me dolls/trucks but I wanted to play with the trucks/dolls', then people will say that. And, of course, sometimes trans people accentuate features that fit the stereotypes of their gender, because they want to pass and doing so helps with that. So do lots of cis people! We shouldn't read an ideology into what people do to manage challenges in their lives.

GCRFs especially shouldn't do that if they're among the people also pointing out or mocking occasions when trans people fail to pass, or occasions in which trans people supposedly display traits associated with their birth-assigned gender. GCRFs, for example, sometimes accuse trans women of displaying 'male energy', and thereby making cis women uncomfortable when they enter women-only spaces. If you were worried that any masculine-seeming traits would be taken as evidence of your 'male energy', wouldn't you try to act in a more stereotypically feminine way? Wouldn't you then find it galling to be accused of reinforcing gender stereotypes? Wouldn't that seem like a cruel way of putting you in a double-bind?

I feel like the simple falsity of the 'reinforcing gender stereotypes' claim needs to be emphasised, because I don't think it's absurd *a priori*. If I had never met any trans people, or read anything they wrote, I might have sort of expected that the people who transition would be those who most fit the stereotypes of their chosen gender and least fit the stereotypes of their assigned gender. That would fit with a fairly parsimonious theory of gender: there's just sexed bodies and social stereotypes, and transition happens when these clash sharply.

That parsimonious theory might have turned out to be true; but in fact it didn't. Everything trans people say about their own lives and experiences shows this model to be false. Unless they are systematically lying or deluded about their own motivations, gender psychology is more complicated than that. An AMAB person can desire deeply to be a woman who violates multiple stereotypes about womanhood. An AFAB person can desire deeply to be a man who violates multiple stereotypes about manhood.

I don't have a theory that explains this, but it's the data we have to work with, and letting go of a bad explanatory theory which conflicts with that data is the first step towards explaining it better. Moreover, letting go of the stereotype-based model is the first step towards showing that you're serious about understanding reality, and that you take what trans people say seriously.

worldview more neatly. That's why I'd call it 'hateful' and 'transphobic': it's a particularly epistemic form of failing to properly respect trans people's humanity, a refusal to listen or believe, a refusal to treat people as the best sources about their own feelings and experiences.

And that's compatible with it being a banal, 'understandable' sort of hate, in the sense that it doesn't require some rare and abnormal sort of personal evil, or even a powerful feeling of dislike. It just requires a very mundane sort of 'stickiness' in your opinions: you start trying to understand someone else, you generate an explanation which is intelligible to you, and then you sort of stick with it in spite of contradictory evidence. Maybe you don't bother looking seriously at the contradictory evidence, maybe you look at it with a selectively skeptical eye. By whatever the mechanism, you stick with the explanation that resonates, that feels simple and logical, in spite of the evidence against it. This is on some level just intellectual laziness, but what makes it hateful is the selectivity of whose testimony you're lazy about taking on.

Consider a tweet thread which I will quote anonymously:

"What makes me slightly uncomfortable about transgender culture, is the fact that I see a lot of transgender people reinforcing gender stereotypes... I am not a typically 'feminine' woman for a multitude of reasons I won't get into... So when I see transgender women getting surgery to raise their voice I think 'but it's not supposed to be about that'... I see transgender women doing all these feminine things and I think – it's not supposed to be about that. And yes cisgender women do it more. But when I see transgender women do it it feels like that are saying – this is how women should be. And it kinda hurts."

This is a good example of what it feels like to not fully take on someone else's humanity, without malice or active antipathy. To see someone making decisions about their own bodies and presentations which, as is admitted, lots of other people do, and *feel as though they are making a general statement about all women*, and be hurt by that. It's reading someone else's personal life in terms of how it might imply things about you, and how that makes you feel, rather than as something they do for themselves, likely with complex ideas and complicated motivations, based on the specifics of their life and situation.

It's leaving no space in your worldview for someone to be bigger than how they make you feel, and doing so specifically because they are part of an unfamiliar minority. Although it's [hate](#) in the technical sense I've argued for, it's not something that only bad people, or angry people, are prone to. It's not even a positive something there, so much as it's an absence – a failure to correct the natural human tendency to self-centredness, a failure to say 'wait, this isn't about me, I don't know this person or their story, I shouldn't assume they're saying something that applies to me.'

To be clear – it is fine and normal to have complicated weird feelings about gender, and sometimes about how other people navigate it. (God knows I do.) Just don't take them as a good guide to what other people mean or intend or want – in part because, you know, everyone else probably has their own weird complicated feelings about gender as well, which their actions come out of. Ascribing other people simple motivations while recognizing complexity and nuance only in your own is not respecting their humanity.

individuals can transition from one gender to the other, one in which individuals of either gender embrace GNC traits. Maybe they note at the end, in passing, that there might perhaps be some way to combine the two. But framing these as alternatives in the first place is already flying in the face of the reality that trans and GNC cis people are natural allies and that respecting one goes hand-in-hand with respecting the other. The policy to follow is ‘respect people’s choices about how they navigate gender’, and that benefits both equally.

Another way that the big lie about stereotypes sneaks into philosophy is through the ambiguity of the question ‘what is a gender identity?’, or ‘what is gender?’ You may have noticed that GCRFs love posing these questions to their opponents, and criticising whatever answers are given. You might have thought, ‘well, that is a fair question – I’d like to know!’

And one of the things that struck me, the more I read trans people’s writing, is that they are also really interested in this question! Lots of them discuss it and express their puzzlement over it, but mostly far away from GCRFs. And lots of non-GCRF feminist philosophers are writing about this, having conferences on this, etc. Because this question can be asked in two very different ways.

One way to ask ‘what is gender identity’ is as a question about the nature of something whose existence is clear and uncontroversial. It says: ‘wow, a lot of people have strong preferences about how they present and how they are embodied and how they are gendered, often in defiance of gender stereotypes. Where’s that coming from? What are the psychological roots and structure of this fascinating phenomenon?’ It’s an investigative sort of question. If we can’t come up with a good answer, we just have to work harder.

There is, however, a different, transphobic, way of asking this question: as a challenge. It says: ‘well, trans people may *claim* that their preferences about presentation, embodiment, and gendering come from this mysterious inner thing called a ‘gender identity’. But what is that? I can’t work out what it’s meant to be, so probably they’re wrong.’

That is, the transphobic sense of the question poses it as a test: if a good definition of gender identity can’t be offered, then trans people’s self-descriptions of their motives and feelings shouldn’t be believed. Call this the skeptical version of the question.

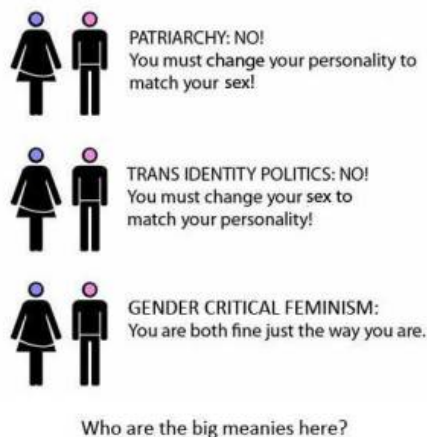
This kind of ambiguity in questions is actually quite common in philosophy: a philosopher asking ‘but what *are* hylomorphic forms?’ implies the possibility that there is no such thing – and if the person they ask can’t give a good answer, that’s the natural conclusion. But a philosopher asking ‘what is cooperation?’ is asking a different sort of question, because they take for granted that there is such a thing as cooperation. If no good answer is given, then cooperation will remain mysterious but won’t be doubted to exist.

If someone asks ‘what is gender identity?’, that could sound more like ‘what are hylomorphic forms?’ or more like ‘what is cooperation?’ And asking it in the first way is powerful, since most cis people are all too ready to dismiss a motivation for transition that they can’t relate to, and substitute something more familiar or more satisfying (like ‘they want to conform to stereotypes’, or ‘they’re deluded’ or ‘it’s a sexual thing’ or something even worse). You don’t need to make explicit the idea that trans people are lying in order for readers to have that sense of distrust

that space. And it's a way of using selective and carefully maintained skepticism to suppress truth and indirectly help falsehoods spread.

Part 2: Are People Being Pressured to Transition? (No)

Look back at this image.



Look at the form of the second statement, attributed to 'trans identity politics':

'No! You must change your sex to match your personality!'

It's an imperative (with an exclamation mark no less), saying what someone 'must' do. The clear implication is that people are being told to transition, pressured to transition, forced to transition even though they would rather not. This idea comes out most clearly in the recurrent panics about children and teenagers being 'rushed into surgery'.

It also comes out nicely in these tweets, where Robert Webb, one of my previously-favourite comedians just went and ruined Peep Show for me:

"I was different, as was my wife. I was a 'queer,' she was a 'tomboy.' It turned out we were non-gender-conforming children. Many kids like us turn out to be gay. Others don't. A tiny minority have dysphoria...

telling all kids like me & Abbie that we were born into the wrong body & therefore need a lifetime of medication... that's just wrong."

Yes, it would be wrong to tell a child, just because they're GNC, that they need to transition. But nobody is doing that. It's just a lie.

Maybe it's possible that I could be wrong about what's going on in various country's health systems. But all the medical guidelines, diagnostic criteria, and first-person accounts I've read tell a consistent story: you can only be

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of time living as your chosen gender first. A phrase used repeatedly is '[consistent, insistent, persistent](#)': that's what you have to be to get trans healthcare.

I do recognise that there are trade offs to make when providing treatment to young people. People can change their minds as they get older, and the younger someone is, the more we should prefer reversible measures (like social transition) over irreversible ones (like surgery). But both providing and withholding treatment can have irreversible long-term effects – in particular, providing HRT to give someone the puberty associated with their chosen gender is neither more or less invasive or irreversible than having them go through a standard puberty driven by their endogenous hormones. Puberty is a lifelong change to one's body, and we shouldn't treat someone enduring an unwanted 'wrong-gender' puberty as a 'safe' no-risk fallback option.

So the right policy has to be one which balances what a maturing person wants now with what they might want later, in light of how reversible or not a given treatment is, and which strives to help people make their own decisions and takes those decisions seriously when made.

I think most people are inclined to want a policy like that, right? And GCRFs exploit that desire by framing the issue as being between a mad, dogmatic, pill-happy, scalpel-waving pro-trans side, who want to transition all GNC children as early as possible, and a careful, sober, cautious GC side, who don't want to rush children into things without sufficient consideration and time. So then even if an onlooker doesn't agree with the GC position, their desire for a nuanced approach that balances conflicting considerations will dispose them to think the right answer must be somewhere in between the two sides, some kind of optimum synthesis.

The thing is, the careful, nuanced, balancing approach is what the pro-trans side is pushing and what we actually have in a lot of cases. It's the thing being attacked. And it will be attacked however careful and nuanced it is, because some people see *anyone* transitioning as a bad outcome, and will always be able to find some pretext for saying that a system which allows and supports any transitions is irresponsible and dangerous.

Here's some things you would want to do if you wanted to help young people make the best decisions for them. First off, you'd want them to have as much accurate medical information as possible about all the available options. I think you'd also want them to have the kind of 'information' that comes from seeing people living the kinds of lives they might be considering – trans peers, trans elders, trans role models in public life. Telling them that doctors are going to try to make them transition against their will does the opposite of that, and saying or insinuating that 12-year-olds are waltzing into a clinic one day and going under the knife the next does the opposite of that.

You'd also want them to have as many good options available as possible. In particular, this would mean decoupling different options as much as possible: letting people transition socially but not medically, letting people transition medically but not socially, supporting people who want to change their pronouns but not go on HRT, or want to go on HRT but not get surgery, and so on. What you'd want to absolutely avoid is bundling all aspects of transition together and telling people that they'll never count as a real man/woman until they've 'Had The Surgery'. If you worry about people getting surgery they don't really want, step 1 should be emphatically defending their ability to live the life they want socially without any surgery.

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the idea that having a penis is a really big deal, and that people with penises being in women's spaces is a big issue, and indeed with heckling trans woman speakers by yelling the word 'penis' from the audience. And the movement is also, I get the impression, somewhat associated with disdain and suspicion of non-binary identities, of 'queer' as an umbrella term, of 'all these new gender categories'. Meaning that the underlying message is precisely: either you can live in your assigned gender, or you can get the whole package of HRT, surgery, social transition, and do your best to live as a binary person of your chosen gender. This reduces the options available to young people and pushes them towards getting surgery they might not otherwise want.

Finally, if I wanted to help young people make the best decisions for themselves, I would act like the difference between someone choosing to do something and something being forced on them by others is a really important one. Not always a simple distinction, to be sure, but an important one. And here again, it seems to me that GCRFs do the exact opposite: run together people choosing to seek something out because they want it with someone telling them they have to do it.

Indeed, Kathleen Stock has made a point of arguing that supporting someone's transition is a form of 'conversion therapy', i.e. is in the same category as torture camps that homophobic parents send their gay children to in hopes of hurting the gayness out of them. That is precisely running together people's free choice with coercion. Which, it is worth noting, is a fantastic way to then legitimise actual coercion. If the psychologists who your child keeps asking to see are actually 'forcing' something on them against their will, then protecting your child means doing whatever is necessary to keep those psychologists away from your child. Again, the GCRF position makes it systematically harder for young people to make choices for themselves.

The GCRF position presents itself as a form of radical acceptance: as the image says, "you are both fine just the way you are." But in practice it doesn't want people to transition – or if they do, they should at least have the decency to have surgery, not just declare themselves a woman/man. There's a sort of impossible dream here: to be radically accepting of however people want to be, but they always do what you want. One could only maintain this dream by finding an external source for every desire you disapprove of. That's a bad but easy mode of thinking, and it's something one could slip into without meaning to. All you have to do is make sure that for every desire you disagree with, your suspicion about its origins (a suspicion felt from the inside as just responsible vigilance about your child's vulnerability, of course) is strong enough to find you something external to blame. If this succeeds, then the other person's actual wishes and actual choices manage to vanish behind your ideas of what's being forced on them... which is, again, a form of 'hate', a way of not recognising someone's humanity by refusing to see their agency.

Part 3: Does Admitting Trans Women Make Women's Spaces Less Safe? (No).

The third issue I want to talk about is bathrooms, changing rooms, locker rooms, and other spaces that are usually separated into 'women's' and 'men's'. GCRFs often bring this up as an example of the 'conflict of interests' between trans and cis women, on the basis that:

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2. Having bathrooms separated based on self-identification is vulnerable to abuse by opportunistic cis men (who could cynically self-identify as women for as long as needed to get in), and so undo that mitigation of risk.

I'm making a point here of engaging with the most respectable-sounding version of this argument, the one that GCRFs in philosophy explicitly make – which is about opportunistic cis men claiming to be trans in order to enter the women's bathrooms. Philosophy GCRFs emphasise that they are not claiming that trans women themselves are likely to assault or otherwise endanger cis women in bathrooms. That argument is more obviously transphobic, in that it positions a tiny minority of marginalised people as posing a major sexual threat to vulnerable women and children, validating the kind of mentality that gets trans women murdered.

And there are plenty of people out there making that crude and obviously transphobic argument! Which might by itself be enough to make us suspicious of this sanitised variant, on which we're assured that the worry is only about whether some opportunistic predatory cis man might abuse the system. But let's presume good faith, and evaluate the argument on its own merits, in isolation.

Focusing specifically on this worry about opportunistic cis men helpfully brings out that the real issue here isn't actually the criterion of entry to women's bathrooms, but how that criterion is enforced. Of course, the favoured criterion of the pro-trans side – that people use the bathrooms that matches how they see themselves – doesn't really allow for enforcement.

(That doesn't mean, as GCRFs claim, that it would make all bathrooms "effectively unisex": most people want to follow the rules, and will use the bathroom matching their identification. And there is a sort of light social enforcement – if I'm with a group of friends and I use the women's washroom, I have to explain to them that I identified as a woman for those five minutes, which maybe exposes me to whatever degree of incredulity, awkwardness, or shift in their view of me happens to result from this. It's just that this isn't likely to stop the imagined opportunistic predators who this argument revolves around.)

But the alternative criterion endlessly advocated by GCRFs, of separating bathrooms etc. by 'biological sex' (however they specify that – chromosomal, surgical, hormonal, assigned at birth, whatever) does not by itself specify an enforcement scheme. Which allows them to preserve a sort of beneficial ambiguity among **three** seriously different proposals, each of which is in a different way utterly incompatible with their stated commitments. Those three options are:

- sex-segregation with no enforcement,
- sex-segregation with official enforcement,
- sex-segregation with unofficial enforcement.

So firstly, there's a version of sex-separation which is unenforceable, and which is actually **more** vulnerable to abuse than a self-identification-based criterion. After all, some 'biologically female' people (whether that's AFAB people or whatever criterion anyone wants to use) look masculine, for whatever reasons – because of their clothes, because of their genes, because they've taken HRT, or for some other reason. By a strictly sex-based criterion, they should be using the women's bathroom, but when they go in there's a decent chance that one or more people there

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The no-enforcement option is that the asker accepts this, and says ‘oh I’m terribly sorry, I didn’t realise’ and everyone gets on with their lives. Great. But then by this policy, any cis man who wants to be be where women pee can do the same: stroll into the women’s bathroom and, if challenged, claim to be biologically female by whatever criterion is being used (claim to be AFAB, claim to be a trans man post-hormones but pre-surgery, whatever). And that claim has to be accepted, and this man’s nefarious antics can proceed.

The point I’m emphasising here is that just going from a self-identification criterion to a biological-sex criterion does *absolutely nothing* to obstruct the opportunistic predators GCRFs are supposedly so worried about. To stop those predators, there needs to be some sort of enforcement – some way that the cis man who responds to ‘hey! this is the *female* washroom!’ with ‘I know, I *am* female’ can be found out.

One option is what I’m calling ‘official enforcement’: absolutely everyone needs I.D. with them at all times to use the washroom, which displays their legal sex. Or, if you don’t have I.D., someone stands at the bathroom door and checks your anatomy, or your chromosomes, or whatever, before letting you in. But both of these are absurd, and constitute such obviously unacceptable reductions in overall liberty that nobody seriously does or could advocate for them. Show your name and age to every suspicious stranger who asks, every time you want to piss?

I’m not accusing GCRFs of advocating official enforcement. Rather, I’m saying that if they refuse to advocate that, and don’t want sex-separation to be *more* vulnerable to opportunistic abuse than self-identification, then what they are necessarily advocating is unofficial enforcement.

By unofficial enforcement I mean that nobody stands at the women’s bathroom door to check your I.D. (or whatever) as you go in, but if someone inside thinks you are really a man/male, they don’t just accept your claims about it. They say ‘prove it’, and demand that you show them something to satisfy their suspicions. And if you refuse to comply, either they assault you, or they corner you until you do, or they call security, and then security decides to either throw you out or not.

This is the enforcement mechanism in the status quo, after all. This is the thin line of defence which, according to GCRFs, currently protects women from male predators. And, let’s be clear, it’s the line of defence which is liable to become more active, more vigilant, more prone to seize upon some stray feature of someone’s body as revealing the secret maleness they’re trying to hide, the more widely accepted GCRF ideology becomes.

And this enforcement mechanism is terrible for gender-nonconforming women – for any women who might be judged ‘not sufficiently female-looking’ by one or more angry bigoted strangers in a bathroom. It incentivises any AFAB person who wants to use the women’s washroom to make sure they are presenting in a way that unambiguously displays their femaleness – that accentuates their female-typical features and plays down any ‘male-looking’ features. It very literally reinforces the gender binary, the thing which GCRFs claim to oppose ‘transgender identity politics’ for doing.

It’s also extremely open to abuse, if we think the key question about a policy is whether opportunistic predators can exploit it. Nothing stops someone with a complex, a fetish, or an axe to grind from just accusing people in the women’s room of being a trans woman who almost passes except that they’re given away by whatever ‘masculine’

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accentuate their femaleness and make sure they look ‘enough like a woman’. So it doesn’t feel charitable to think that they want to support the intensification of practices and norms which do the opposite. But that really is, it seems to me, the only position we can attribute to them – since they are very clear that they want something enforceable, and since they also insist they don’t want the genital-checking police state.

This gets almost-addressed-but-not in a recent online essay entitled [“Doing better in arguments about sex and gender”](#), written by six GCRF philosophers. The authors address what they claim is a fallacy, that:

“The only way to maintain a social norm of sex-separated spaces is via the checking of genitalia.”

(But as we’ve just seen, this is not a fallacy, just a dramatic way of pointing out that they cannot oppose self-ID policies for being unenforceable, unless they are willing to support some enforcement method, all of which amount to intrusive and burdensome policing of women’s gender expression.)

Here’s what the authors say:

“Human beings generally, including children, have the capacity to pick out the biological sex of others from visual appearances alone, most of the time. The capacity to correctly sex other people most of the time is grounded in a cognitive heuristic, and obviously not infallible. This heuristic fails in the case of “passing” trans people and cases of missexing, but overall, these cases are relatively rare...

Given the occasional fallibility of our capacity to sex others, arguing for same-sex spaces for females, such as bathrooms, dormitories, and changing rooms, means that sometimes, females in those spaces will be missexed; and sometimes, males in those spaces will not be perceived as such. We see the former as a regrettable cost that has to be balanced against, and is nonetheless smaller than, the greater harms to females, should women-only space effectively become unisex via a policy of self-ID. We see the latter as something that no open society can do anything about, and which it would be illiberal to try to prevent...”

Let me pull out the specific passage where, I think, the authors walk right up to the key issue and then stop:

“sometimes, females in those spaces will be missexed... [this is] a regrettable cost that has to be balanced against, and is nonetheless smaller than, the greater harms to females, should women-only space effectively become unisex via a policy of self-ID.”

Missexed... and then what? A masculine-presenting AFAB person goes to the women’s bathroom, gets challenged because they ‘look male’, respond that they are ‘biologically female’, and then...?

‘Missexed’ here is an innocuous word covering up a dilemma. It calls to mind cases of casual everyday misgendering, where a cashier calls you ‘sir’ instead of ‘ma’am’, or vice versa – cases which can be hurtful and distressing, but still remain on the level of a non-threatening person using the wrong polite language. And this would be a fair thing to have in mind, if the authors were advocating a no-enforcement version of sex-segregation, where the response to ‘but I *am* biologically female’ were simply ‘oh, I’m sorry, please continue.’

your genitals, or whatever it is that is supposed to keep out the opportunistic cis men who are the focus of this discussion.

(I genuinely don't know which of these two options – throwing cis women out of the bathroom, or accepting claims of femaleness at face value – GCRFs in general would endorse. I've seen them go both ways when pressed.)

Maybe there's an intermediate option: cis people can look however they like in the bathroom, but trans people need to bring their paperwork. I think maybe this is what a lot of people assume to be the natural solution. I've seen someone say, for instance, "instead of self-ID, a medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria can establish your legal sex. And then if you are legally a woman, you can use the women's restroom."

This solves nothing, because it doesn't address the question of enforcement. If someone is in the women's bathroom and I think they look suspiciously male, but they claim to be legally female, what do I do? Demand paperwork (in the UK, a GRC, gender-recognition certificate)? But then they can say 'look, I'm not only *legally* female, I was *born* female, so obviously I never got a GRC, and I don't carry my passport with me everywhere.' If I accept this, then our imagined predatory cis man can sneak in without trouble, by claiming to be AFAB. If I don't, then... what? Any woman who someone might deem suspiciously-male-looking needs to carry their passport at all times, and show it to any stranger who asks? Having different enforcement rules for trans and cis people only works if there's an enforceable way to tell who's trans and who's cis in the first place.

Or what about third spaces – a women's bathroom, a men's bathroom, and a unisex bathroom, open to anyone who doesn't feel comfortable in the other two? That just makes things worse, if there's still policing of entry to the woman's bathroom. If the third spaces are meant to be for GNC women and AFAB non-binary people (among others), who are precisely as vulnerable as any other AFAB people to male violence, then pushing them into a unisex bathroom exposes them to the serious danger that we are supposedly doing all this to protect AFAB people from. Moreover, the existence of a unisex bathroom will only encourage and strengthen the people in the women's bathroom who want to police gender – now they don't even have to say 'I think you're a man, go to the men's bathroom', because they can say 'I think you're ambiguous, you should go to the unisex washroom.'

I think the GCRF side reaps an advantage here from their small-c-conservative posture of 'this is just the status quo, we're just worried about this huge looming change.' I've had people say to me in discussion that "the status quo... seems to work out well enough much of the time... [the enforcement issue] has to be worked out in some way, but we seem to manage it".

This lets the GCRF side paint the pro-trans side as pushing a new, radical, change, which should therefore be carefully scrutinised for any possible unforeseen risks. And it lets them bask in the unscrutinised fuzziness of wanting to just keep things as they are.

But trans people have been using their preferred bathrooms for years, in many countries (including the UK) with legal backing for doing so. If 'the status quo seems to work out well enough', then we should drop this entire discussion and treat the bathroom argument as scare-mongering.

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relative invisibility – not absence, invisibility – of trans people. The status quo is largely a matter of cis people who've never really thought about trans issues, and when they see someone in the bathroom who looks strange to them, they work out what to do on the fly.

This status quo is bad in a lot of ways: it's unpredictable, it's confusing, it makes going to the bathroom as a trans person into a sort of nerve-wracking gamble. But what GCRFs are calling for, when they say that bathrooms should be separated strictly by birth sex, is not simply a continuation of the status quo. It's one way of developing the status quo in response to the newfound visibility of trans people.

The status quo says 'the women's bathroom is for women', and it knows that this includes cis women and excludes cis men, but it hasn't really thought about trans women or trans men. The pro-trans proposal is that this should definitely include trans women (and unenforceably exclude trans men, I think?), while the GCRF proposal is that it should definitely and explicitly exclude them. Both of these are proposals for new directions.

Let me also note a couple of things about numbers and frequency. The authors of the piece quoted above suggest that harassment of GNC cis women isn't a big issue because people are missexed very rarely. But how often people get missexed isn't a fixed natural fact, it's a product of how people present themselves, which in turn is a product of how much social stigma and policing people can expect from presenting in a non-standard way.

It looks like people are going to become, in the future, more likely to present in non-standard ways. I hope so! And GCRFs claim to want to dismantle gender, so I take it they also want this to become more common. But then it's completely bizarre to say 'oh, people who get mis-sexed are few in number, so legitimising and intensifying their harassment is an acceptable cost'. If we succeed in our supposedly shared aim of freeing people from gender, that number will rise; if we subject anyone who presents ambiguously to bathroom harassment, we'll dissuade people from taking that risk.

Moreover, how often people are missexed is also a product of how eager the sex-ers are to 'sniff out' hidden impostors. If everyone is on the lookout for these sneaky trans women (or, in the sanitised version of the argument, cis men pretending to be trans women) sneaking into women's bathrooms, that will affect their perceptions, make them more likely to missex someone AFAB and challenge them. Since GCRF rhetoric constructs trans people and 'trans ideology' as important threats to women and children, it seems inevitable that the more people accept it, the more often anyone remotely ambiguous-looking will be missexed.

GCRFs are always saying they just want us to recognise the 'conflict of interests' between cis and trans women. But even if we thought women's interest in 'making it hard for opportunistic cis men to sneak into their bathroom' was really so compelling and vital, the conflict is in practice between women-who-might-be-mistaken-for-men and more unambiguously feminine-looking women. And GCRF says the former should be penalised to protect the latter. The principle of supporting people whatever their gender presentation, of 'you are both fine just the way you are', which was previously used to criticize trans women, is now sacrificed to exclude them. Note the common factor.

I apologize to readers for the length of this post. There are two things it would have been easy to do in a much shorter space, which I didn't want to do. One would be to engage in some respectful constructive debate according to the usual norms of academic philosophy, addressing some specific claim, considering some specific objection, and so on. But my aim isn't to argue that GCRF is mistaken, it's to help people see the bogus forest and get why the individual trees aren't worth engaging with. And the other thing I didn't want to do was to convey that message concisely through the more conventional genre of emotive denunciation and expletive-ridden castigation. That wouldn't be as convincing to you, dear philosophers, who are generally reluctant to form opinions based on simply being told something is really really bad. And it's not something I'm very good at, or comfortable doing. That's not meant as a criticism of others doing so – I'm not the tone police. But I wanted to convey the big-picture 'this whole thing is bogus' message in the sort of careful way that philosophers like. And so here we are, 10,000 words later.

Obviously I still haven't addressed all of the topics I could, but I hope the three I have discussed are representative. I've tried to select issues of practical substance, since so much of the discussion involves wrangling over definitions and labels, on which I think it's easier to create a false appearance of comparative seriousness. I wanted to push past the smokescreen of tricky questions like 'what is gender?' and 'how do you stop sexual predators from lying about their identity?', and dog-whistle truisms like 'humans are sexually dimorphic' (my current count of times I've seen GCRFs assert this vs. times I've seen their opponents deny it stands at 'umpteen vs. zero'). Because when you push past that and ask what GCRF actually amounts to, I think it becomes clear that it's an edifice of factual untruths and ideological contradictions.

In a sense, a lot of GCRF positions don't actually exist. The GCRF position on bathrooms can't really be located in logical space, because it's the combination of two incompatible positions: a socially-conservative one (anyone who doesn't look unambiguously female is at risk of exclusion) and a radical-feminist one (women's bathrooms are open to anyone born female, however they look). The socially-conservative one has enforceable anti-male mechanisms to keep at least most cis men out of women's bathrooms, but does so at the expense of GNC cis women, and thereby makes bathrooms part of the reinforcement of gender roles. The radical-feminist one allows a space where all AFAB people can feel secure and accepted, without the enforcement of patriarchal norms, but doesn't have a mechanism to exclude men/AMAB people who are willing to lie, and so has no safety advantage over a self-identification policy.

GC feminism waves a feminist figleaf in front of social conservatism. It pretends that there can be a policy which extends feminist solidarity to all AFAB people regardless of appearance, while enforceably excluding all AMAB people. There might be such a policy if all AFAB people looked unmistakably female, and all AMAB people looked unmistakably male, but they don't.

I'm slightly embarrassed that I didn't grasp quite how thoroughly not-there the GCRF position is. I heard people say things like 'policing gender in bathrooms will hurt GNC women', and I thought 'well, my GCRF colleagues are obviously against gender roles, so presumably they're against that kind of policing of gender'. I heard people say things like 'what, you want someone at the bathroom door who checks your genitals before letting you in?' and I thought 'well, that's clearly a straw-man, my GCRF colleagues are smart philosophers and must have a more nuanced policy in mind'. And it was only fairly recently that I realised there wasn't a more nuanced policy, there

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Part of what stopped me seeing this clearly was that it's easy to not scrutinise the status quo. 'Only female-born people in the women's bathroom' seems so boring and obvious that it's easy not to realise that there are two very different versions of it – one that punishes AFAB people who don't fit society's expectations of how they should look, and one that is all radical-feminist and opposed to that, but consequently can't enforce its norm of keeping out AMAB people.

That's also why I can't say that I know GCRFs are being knowingly insincere in pushing this argument about the dangers of letting trans women in the women's bathroom. It's quite possible they haven't noticed the sharp opposition between two versions of how 'single-sex spaces' works. It's also possible they have, as we might say, 'managed to avoid noticing it', in an effort of what might be called self-deception or might just be called 'it's easy to slide one's mind quickly past uncomfortable ideas'.

But why would you find these particular ideas uncomfortable enough to slide your mind quickly past them? What's the motivation for this sort of motivated failing-to-notice? Well, one key thing that the two versions of sex-separation have in common is excluding trans women. The socially-conservative one says that's because trans women are men, and should buck up, stop acting like women, and conform to the masculine gender role more fully. The radical-feminist one says that's because trans women are biologically male, and shouldn't worry about gender roles at all. But if what really matters to you is excluding trans women, those differences might be something you can glance past.

More charitably, maybe what started you thinking about the topic was some feeling of confusion or anxiety about trans women – you don't like how they look, you don't like how they make you feel, you find them unattractive or maybe too attractive, they unsettle the way you think about women's oppression and male privilege, or whatever. That's fine, you're allowed to have feelings. But you have to own those feelings, recognise them as your own rather than trans women's responsibility. Otherwise those feelings will make any idea that validates them (like the idea that letting trans women into the women's bathroom is dangerous to cis women) feel so right that you accept it enthusiastically, look past its problems, and devote all your ingenuity to rebutting people arguing against it.

But if GCRFs have 'managed not to notice' that defending sex-separated spaces can mean either anti-male enforcement or radical feminist solidarity but not both, that still makes their position 'hateful' in the relevant explanatory sense. It means that **neither** enforceable exclusion of males, **nor** stereotype-free sisterhood for all AFAB people, was an important enough principle to actually dictate what views they defend and which they oppose. What did the driving, organising, work was anxiety (or some other feeling) about trans women in the bathroom. If the primary explanation for why you endorse a position is that it validates your anxiety about trans people, the position is transphobic, whatever the further details of your emotional and intellectual life.

The same goes for the idea that GCRF is 'gender-critical', 'gender abolitionist', seeking to somehow dismantle the gender system. This ought to mean supporting people of whatever sex in living however they want, regardless of what gender roles and stereotypes say. But then supporting trans people should be a central plank – they are, after all, living lives which by definition violate pretty basic rules of the gender system.

But then in practice GCRF talking points systematically accomplish the opposite. By painting trans women as

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emphasizing the inherent threat posed by anyone with a penis, they reinforce the social significance of anatomy. And so on.

So in practice, ‘gender-critical’ doctrines just provide rationales for policing gender nonconformity. And the big lie at the heart of it, that people are seeking transition to better fit gender stereotypes, justifies this by painting the nonconforming people being policed as the *real* gender police.

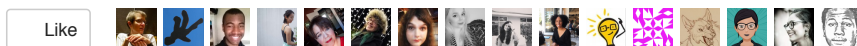
Just like with bathrooms, the whole GC discourse about gender roles ultimately functions to obscure the real stakes and the real options. You can police people’s gender expression, or you can dismantle the prison of gender, but you can’t do both. GCRF is a feminist fig leaf waved in front of social conservatism. The more of it we hear, the less clearly we’ll understand things.

(And I think most people intuitively get this: feminists and LGBT people are natural allies on one side, and defenders of ‘traditional family values’ are on the other. And the GCRF message, that actually some sorts of LGBT people are a major threat to feminist aims, is intuitively recognized by most feminist and LGBT organizations as a destructive, obfuscatory, lie.)

If all the above is right, then hopefully it’s clear why GCRF is, as I’ve been putting it, bogus. Engaging with it, spreading it, discussing it, is likely to make people’s ideas on the topic more confused, and less well-grounded, than before. It’s likely to give people a worse understanding of the actual stakes and the actual options. It’s perfectly designed, in fact, to make it seem like social conservative goals and radical feminist goals align, like the way to be *really* feminist is to defend the status quo, while obscuring the fact that trans people and GNC cis people have the same interest in fighting gender-policing, not opposed interests.

In sum: gender-critical radical feminism is transphobic and intellectually valueless, i.e. bogus.

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171 Responses to *Dear Philosophers, You Can Trust the Feminist Consensus: Gender-Critical Radical Feminism is Boaus*

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This essay is bad and you should feel bad

[Reply](#)



Hannah Rossiter says:

July 26, 2019 at 5:03 pm

No, it isn't

[Reply](#)



Lauren says:

July 27, 2019 at 4:25 pm

Except it's very good. Then again, seems the people disagreeing are the sort that would never actually get to know a trans person as just a person. Which sort of proves the point doesn't it?

[Reply](#)



Dave says:

September 2, 2019 at 9:17 am

Gems like this are "very good"?

"Engaging with it, spreading it, discussing it, is likely to make people's ideas on the topic more confused, and less well-grounded"

The only thing that makes people more confused is gender identity ideology. There isn't even a coherent definition of it...



ramendik says:

September 2, 2019 at 12:21 pm

"Gender identity ideology" is not a thing, it's a slight modification of the right-wing dog whistle "gender ideology". <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/mar/30/gender-ideology-big-bogus-and-coming-to-a-fear-campaign-near-you>

So of course there is no definition of it!

And there is, of course, a definition of gender identity.

"Gender identity is understood to refer to each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not be correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms" Yogyakarta Principles, p.6. http://yogyakartaprinciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/principles_en.pdf



baselfasel says:

August 4, 2019 at 12:10 pm

Audio: <https://youtu.be/xLRn8U8mcD4>

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Toddle on elsewhere then. This essay is amazing/

[Reply](#)



Kathleen Stock says:

July 26, 2019 at 11:20 am

Here is a response from me. As someone directly described in highly critical terms in the text above, I hope you will publish it. <https://medium.com/@kathleenstock/response-to-roelofs-part-two-e3296e790581>

[Reply](#)



granvilleey says:

July 27, 2019 at 2:53 am

I feel that Luke has attempted to “mirror” the musings of gender critical debate in the manner he highlight right at the beginning: GCFs present their views in a rational argument which is appealing to the intellect and debate where as transideology seems a bit “shouty” (misquote from Dame Penelope Wilton – you quoted Robert Webb so I think that is a legitimate to use that term here)

However, though dressed up in legitimate “clothes” of debate what he sought to do in this lengthy argument is give transideology a legitimate appearance of a philosophical basis that can be used to yet again “shout down” GCF. Very clever but morally vacuous and also a tad disingenuous. He never intended to really engage with the argument or acknowledge legitimate point points of view since his tone was like some professor of maths teaching those with dyscalcula to do algebra with “dear philosophers” over used somewhat.

I am disappointed that someone chooses to use genuine intellectual gifts to undermine others in such a deliberate and blatant fashion to support a point of view which has been used to shut down intellectual rather than an ideological debate. Shame on him

Ps it us quite boring to read too!

[Reply](#)



Lauren says:

July 27, 2019 at 4:25 pm

Where GCs fail, is the inability to treat not just trans people but anyone who disagrees with them as equally human. It's why GCs never know anything about trans people outside of a bunch of made up rubbish. The GC position explicitly commands that trans people are not to actually be talked to as actual people with authentic experiences of life. And if you can't accept an experience of life different from your own as being equally authentic to your own, your position is ethically horrid.

Using one's own experience to judge the veracity of another's experience is also just really, really lazy. And also how prejudices get carried along.

There are no normative lives, only typical ones and not so typical ones.



christinolini says:

July 29, 2019 at 12:26 am

You are correct, it is quite boring to read. Besides being “morally vacuous and disingenuous.” Also a “feminist consensus”????? How would we know? The trans lobby has shut down and de-platformed and otherwise silenced not just feminists, but, all of society. There has never been any subject in my life that has been shut

“Never offend people with style when yoh can offend them with substance” — you clearly failed to take that on-board.



lukeroelofs says:

July 31, 2019 at 10:24 pm

Hi Granvilley,

I'm sorry you found it boring and patronising: I know those are the failure modes of the stylistic choices I made, but I stand by those choices.

“what he sought to do in this lengthy argument is give transideology a legitimate appearance of a philosophical basis that can be used to ‘shout down’ GCF. Very clever but morally vacuous and a tad disingenuous.”

I'm not giving pro-trans feminism anything it didn't already have (like a philosophical basis), but I am trying to exhibit its intellectual superiority for people (those ‘dear philosophers’) who don't listen to those they consider too ‘shouty’. And yes, that is intended to be a contribution to supporting activism.



Angie says:

August 8, 2019 at 9:02 am

Lauren, “Where GCs fail, is the inability to treat not just trans people but anyone who disagrees with them as equally human”

Currently the top thread on r/MTF is one where people celebrate physical violence against a woman:

Throwback to that time my friend legit slapped a girl in the face because she was about to tell everyone my deadname

r/MtF • [deleted] • 1y ago
548 points • 105 comments

Could you please review <https://reddit.com/r/terfisaslur> and then tell me more about how trans activists do not dehumanize the people who disagree with them?



lukeroelofs says:

August 10, 2019 at 12:17 pm

Hi Angie,

I made a point of not talking about how activists or people from either side conduct themselves, because I think that sort of argument is too easy to make whether or not one's side is in the right. I'm inclined to agree with what I. Rohl says here:

(((I. Rohl)))
@dr_i_rohl



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drinking tea and reading epistemology. But here we fucking are...

(1/n)

2:48 PM · Sep 1, 2018



196 90 people are Tweeting about this



Jonah Swersey says:

July 27, 2019 at 11:44 am

One of the nasty things about being part of a hate group is that you never get to know that many people from the group you hate. This probably explains why you know so very little about trans people. I'd advise you to spend time around them more often so that you can learn how backwards and insane your ideas are, but honestly I wouldn't even wish needing to spend time around you on Caitlyn Jenner, so maybe best give it a miss.

[Reply](#)



lukeroelofs says:

July 28, 2019 at 1:25 pm

I'm going to post my responses both here and as a comment on Stock's piece.

I don't really know what to say about part 1 (which presents a search-and-replace parody of my introduction, with the references to trans issues replaced with references to eating animals, in order "to expose — if it isn't already obvious — how deeply weird [Roelofs'] sort of approach is." Considered as parody, I just don't see the deep weirdness that is supposed to become obvious. But maybe it's to be expected that I wouldn't, since I wrote the original.

(I do feel like replacing references to trans rights with references to animal rights, replacing 'pro-trans' with 'pro-animals', etc. is... not a decision I would have made. Stock says she chose it at random and could have chosen any other ongoing philosophical dispute. It seems like choosing one that doesn't implicitly compare trans people to animals would have perhaps been better.)

[Reply](#)



lukeroelofs says:

July 28, 2019 at 1:29 pm

Regarding part 1:

Stock says all she's ever claimed is (A) that traits perceived as masculine/feminine may be taken as symptomatic of gender identity in "a personal narrative [that] can emerge for some, over time", and (B) that "in the public consciousness, a dominant explanation" for trans people's gender is conformity to stereotypes.

If (B) is true (and I'll accept that to some extent it is), that's a problem, and the solution is more acceptance and visibility for gender-nonconforming trans people, and less scaremongering about the threats posed by 'someone who claims to be a woman but doesn't even make any effort to look feminine and still has a penis'. Trans feminists are pushing for the former, gender critics are prominent in spreading the latter.

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instructions, a faithful internalisation of a message society has sent, or more like a subconscious remixing of social motifs and ideas into a novel synthesis that defies the society that produced it more than it conforms?

But really the point is: if all Stock thinks is that it's *possible* that someone's gender identity might reflect gender stereotypes, then she should agree with me in rejecting the idea that 'trans people reinforce gender stereotypes'. If she thinks something stronger, which would imply that overall, accepting trans people is a way to strengthen rather than a way to undermine traditional ideas about gender, then she's wrong.

Stocks also points out the presence, as a diagnostic criterion of gender dysphoria, of "A strong conviction that one has the typical reactions and feelings of a gender other than one's assigned gender". But the DSM says gender dysphoria is to be diagnosed when there are at least two of the six criteria, and all the other criteria are about desire to be a certain way (well, one is "incongruence between one's experienced or expressed gender and one's sexual characteristics"). I think my point stands: gender dysphoria is about what a person *wants to be*, not what stereotypes they fit, and facts about which stereotypes you fit are neither necessary nor sufficient for it.

(Stock cites a reader who points out the slightly different criteria for a diagnosis in children; but again, the single mandatory characteristic is "Strong desire to be or insistence one is the other gender".)

(Let me also say that I don't mean to position the DSM as an authority here, just as one of many social phenomena that gives us an impression of what's going on. Some trans people say they don't want being trans to be necessarily a disorder, or something medicalised at all; they want it to be a matter of personal choice, that each person has the right to choose their gender for themselves. I'm very drawn to that approach but won't assume it here because it's not essential to criticising GCRF.)

[Reply](#)



lukeroelofs says:

July 28, 2019 at 1:32 pm

Regarding part 2:

Stock objects that I'm strawmanning GCRFs' claims about people being pressured to transition, and says that:

"The more charitable claim to examine would be that in a society where messages about 'being born in the wrong body' are prevalent... where teachers and parents and clinicians are told... that this is a natural phenomenon which should not be questioned ... gender non-conforming and gay or pre-gay children are even more likely to come to a conclusion about their being trans than they otherwise would have done. If we can legitimately talk of 'pressure' on young girls to be thin without implying they are being starved by their parents, so too can we talk of pressure here."

This passage seems to me to vindicate my original point. Firstly, in that the only 'pressure' to be found is 1) visibility of trans narratives, and 2) authority figures being accepting of children's own decisions. I think the contrast between this and fatphobia is striking: there is pressure on young girls to be thin because they are actively shamed for being fat, because references to fatness are routinely used as insults, because they are shown mostly very thin role models, because the fat women they see in public life are often presented as unloveable punchlines, because the government pushes initiatives to 'fight obesity' and charities run fucking adverts comparing being fat to cigarette smoking, as though a body type is a behaviour. None of this is remotely paralleled by the social status of gender transition. Is the media so saturated with trans role models that cis characters are only included as

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Also note what the supposed problem is meant to be: children are “more likely to [decide they’re trans] than they otherwise would have done.” That is, the supposed problem is that children are more likely to decide they’re trans than in the counterfactual where 1) authority figures are sceptical, gatekeepy, or dismissive of such decisions, and 2) trans narratives are less visible in public culture. The supposed problem is that there are more trans kids than there would be if we were less accepting of young people’s choices and had less visibility for trans people in the public culture, i.e. if our society was more transphobic. I think this is part of what some trans people mean when they say that GCRFs ‘would rather trans people didn’t exist’.

Stock links to a couple of news articles, whose content amounts to ‘six people who worked for or at the NHS’s gender clinic disagree with its policies.’ Given that we already know that lots of people disagree about these matters, I don’t see this as decisive new evidence.

Stock also says that I’m mischaracterising her claim about conversion therapy: whereas I described her as saying that “supporting someone’s transition is a form of ‘conversion therapy’”, what she actually said was that supporting someone’s transition is ‘akin to’ conversion therapy, if they are a child, gay, and not trans. I think my original criticism stands.

But let me add a brief note also about the ‘affirming’ approach to people wanting to transition, what Stock describes as “not questioning” it. It’s easy to make unconditional affirmation sound dogmatic and credulous, like a sort of mindless nodding along that drains a conversation of any potential for growth and reflection. Certainly there are contexts where questioning and challenging are called for.

But my experience has been that affirming someone’s decision, whatever they decide, is usually the best way to make them think about it carefully – because it gives them the confidence that their thinking about it matters and will be taken seriously. That allows for asking questions: indeed asking questions supports the affirmation, supports the idea that what they think matters and that their thought process is important. But if you challenge their decision, you turn the conversation into a contest, into them defending against you and trying to convince you (or giving up and accepting what you say while you pat yourself on the back for ‘persuading’ them). If you express a preference, you make them think not about themselves but about you; if you don’t express a preference but allow the impression that you have one, you make them try to guess it, again making it about you. You have to not only not express an opinion, but work hard to make your neutrality feel real and solid and trustworthy. And the best way to do that is to support and accept whatever the other person decides.

[Reply](#)



lukeroelofs says:

July 28, 2019 at 1:42 pm

Regarding part 3:

Stock says “This section is largely based on the idea that sex-separated spaces means a world where you might be ‘missexed and then forced out of the bathroom...”

But actually, I made a point of saying that there are consistent ways to have sex-separated spaces without that risk, namely for us to take people at their word about their sex/gender/whatever (what I called ‘no enforcement’). I also emphasised that the status quo – in which lots of trans women use, and are legally entitled to use, the women’s bathroom, is probably not a perfect implementation of either no-enforcement, or of the kind of unofficial

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(I'm here using the language of male, female, missexing, etc. just because that's the language my opponents are using, though I think the application of these terms here is actually sort of tricky and complicated.)

Stock writes as though I'm suggesting a bizarre and implausible "fantasy": she asks "Has anyone heard of this regularly happening in the entire history of sex-separated spaces in the UK and US?" I have heard of a few cases; googling quickly generates this case, for example:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/14/nyregion/14gender.html> We could look to compile more cases if we really wanted to go there. It's natural to think that it happens more often than it is successfully sued against. I don't know what would count as 'regular' for Stock but I'd think any indication that it happens might be enough to dampen the mocking tone.

Stock also says that there's clear evidence of a risk from not policing bathrooms. She links to this article:

<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/women/sexual-assault-unisex-changing-rooms-sunday-times-women-risk-a8519086.html> This is a bit of research I have seen discussed before, and I don't think it's worthless or not valuable evidence, but there are two important things to say about it.

The first thing is that it's not directly relevant, because it presents data about reports of misconduct in unisex spaces, not about women's spaces which you can enter if you claim to be a woman. GCRFs claim that the latter become 'effectively unisex' because nothing reliably forces men out. But there is a difference! Having to claim to be a woman is a barrier to some men. Some incidents in unisex changing rooms aren't about a man seeking out women but about a man happening to notice women already there. Whatever their equivalence through the eyes of a determined and wily sexual predator, they are two different sorts of space and we can't take figures regarding one to apply to the other. Most strikingly – in the data themselves, that Stock is presenting, there seems to be a large difference between unisex and single-sex spaces! Even though those single-sex spaces are ones which trans people can use and are using.

The second thing to say is that the article doesn't say exactly what Stock says it does. She links it while saying "women are regularly assaulted in unisex spaces". The data finds 180 complaints of some kind of "harassment, voyeurism, assault, etc" made by swimming pool users in 2018, and finds that 120 of them (2/3) were about incidents in unisex changing rooms, 14 were about incidents in single-sex changing rooms, and 46 were about incidents elsewhere in the building.

We don't know what amount of that is assaults, we don't know how much of that involves an increase in incidents when unisex facilities are present vs. incidents happening in unisex facilities which would otherwise have happened in single-sex facilities if unisex hadn't been available, and most of all we don't get a rate figure from this to let us gauge 'regularly'. 180 in a year across the whole country isn't a striking number.

Moreover, we don't know how many of these incidents have men or women (cis or trans) as victims or perpetrators or victims: indeed, we don't know how many of them are things like transphobic staring or invasive questions about someone's gender (i.e. the sort of problem Stock is here trying to *minimise*).

As I say, this does seem like the beginning of evidence that we might want to be careful about unisex changing rooms. But it is very incomplete evidence, it doesn't show a causal link, and it doesn't show us the actual rate at which incidents happen.

Stock also says, as though to call me out, "A further question is what this has to do with trans people. If it is a genuine worry at all, it is about people who look like the opposite sex (e.g. butch women) and it is being used by

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has prompted GCRFs to say 'we're feminists, that means we're committed to the liberation of female people, stop

demanding that female people sacrifice their safety for the benefit of this other group (trans women).’ Which is, like, not a move I like or respect, but I thought the bogusness of GCRF could be shown better by focusing on ways that it harms cis women, the constituency they are supposedly all about protecting.

Stock also says that “the vast majority of trans people can be recognized as such on sight.” I’ve seen GCRFs make this claim a few times, and others dispute it. I am distinctly sceptical. But I don’t know a way to address this rigorously without the conversation going in some weird directions so I’ll just flag it as a questionable claim.

[Reply](#).



Avoa says:

July 29, 2019 at 10:33 am

The whole force of arguments for transwomen’s claims rests upon oppression: that certain males are at risk in males’ spaces. Without that it is merely about wanting/wishing/preference — and if it is only want, then women do **not** want and that is the end of the matter.

The question then is: how do men know who the transwomen are, so as to oppress them? And **that** is the decider in this whole dispute. That is the criteria for deciding where transwomen should and should not be.

First, one can see it sure as heck is not self-ID: do the oppressors ask how everyone identifies to find who to attack? Of course not — and even if they did, any potential targets could simply deny it: problem solved.

Second, if it is clothing style (and such like), the solution is very easy: do not dress that way. Because if you think you can make substantial claims on others merely to assuage wishes to dress a certain way, you must be joking.

So we are left with bodily modification. A transwoman must be sufficiently modified (in body alone, since the clothing argument is gone) to clearly diverge from the normal range of maleness. Otherwise the grounds of oppression will fail, and there is no need for them to be elsewhere than with other men.



lukeroelofs says:

July 31, 2019 at 10:31 pm

Hi Avoa,

“The whole force of arguments for transwomen’s claims rests upon oppression... Without that it is merely about wanting/wishing/preference...”

I think a lot of the issue – not all, but a lot – is precisely about wanting/wishing/preference. And the pro-trans side has, I think, a consistent and compelling position in favour of respecting and supporting people living the lives they want/wish/prefer. Which is not to say that oppression isn’t important, but I don’t want to dismiss the importance of the politics of individual autonomy.

But also – I made a point, as I say in my response to XX, of **not** relying on the point that trans women are oppressed, or at risk, because it tends to elicit this anti-intersectional response: ‘I only care about AFAB people, what happens to trans women isn’t feminists’ problem.’ I focused, instead, on the impact that transphobia has on cis women and other AFAB people.

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Even if this were the right question to ask, it's hopelessly simplistic, since lots of different people oppress

trans women for lots of different reasons. Most obviously, passing trans women might be targetted for sexual assault and harassment by men who just think they're cis women, while non-passing trans women might be targetted by homophobic men who just think they're queer men. But even that is too simplistic, since people aren't simply passing and non-passing, and the same person might face both kinds of oppression, even from the same man.

"If it is clothing style... the solution is very easy: do not dress that way."

This is victim-blaming, and it's as objectionable in this instance as it is in any other. Fuck saying that people's clothing choices should be constrained by the expectation of violence.

"A transwoman must be sufficiently modified (in body alone...) to clearly diverge from the normal range of maleness."

Thanks for saying this out loud, to illustrate my remark in the post that it is the GCRF side, not the pro-trans side, who think people should be required to get surgery if they want to live in the social role they prefer.



Avoa says:

August 1, 2019 at 11:33 am

(further/second response)

Merely having an individual want/wish does not suffice for a moral proposition. There is no logical structure, nothing universalises — nothing overrides anyone else's want, it expresses contention not resolution.

Society has decided, politically/legislatively, that women do want these segregations.

The criterion for transwomen entering women's spaces is the criterion for them leaving men's spaces. If they are not recognisable targets, in this relevant characteristic, they do not need, so do not qualify for, this provision.

Dressing so as not to provoke trouble is just an immediate tactic. The proper solution is to liberalise popular norms — if you want to attribute the blame, it is there. Society's restrictions on presentation are not women's responsibility to compensate for.

Adoption of social role, by definition, requires no surgery.



K. B. T. Twitter says:

September 12, 2019 at 9:20 am

Again, I cannot reply to Avoa directly.

"Society has decided, politically/legislatively, that women do want these segregations."

This is actually debatable, and debated. A case has been made that sex-segregation is yet another instance of benevolent sexism — or sexism *claiming* to be benevolent but really just being oppressive —, and historically, women's wishes were not the primary driver of sex segregation, but men's wishes to be separate from them.

And to address Stock's claim, "the vast majority of trans people can be recognized as such on sight":

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“Clocking” trans women is not as easy as people think, especially when you’re not only concerned about false negatives, but also false positives. Cis women being suspected of being trans women is not exactly rare, especially as awareness about trans women rises. I cannot reliably tell trans women out of a random, mixed crowd, and I consider myself very experienced in “clocking” trans women, compared to most people. I would actually *love* to have this ability because it would make me feel less alone in daily life. And moreover, “recognized as such on sight” remains undefined, ambiguous and vague. What does it actually mean in practice? Who can recognize them, and how reliably? Everyone, no matter how unexperienced? My experience is that even trans women that I can “clock” with high certainty are regularly not “clocked” by others – especially people who do not think about trans people all the time, and do not expect to encounter them in random places. And even I have made embarrassing blunders like assuming a woman is trans who turned out to be cis, such as one who turned up in a self-help group for trans people. “Misclocking” is not a rare event even for the most skilled “clockers”. In reality, “clocking” does not refer to a magic ability to know immediately, without doubt, but at best something more like “managing to tell after careful examination” (and even then, usually with a certain room for error).



ramendik says:

September 12, 2019 at 7:49 pm

“Society has decided, politically/legislatively, that women do want these segregations.”

Er, what society?

US? Well, remember the fate of HB2 in North Carolina? Remember Proposition 3, which passed in Massachussets, and I-1515, which failed to gather any steam in Washington State?

UK? While exactly what that place has decided politically is hotly contested right now, the fact is that in most daily cases sex-segregated places in the UK are trans-inclusive, and there are some court cases about it. Notably this one: <http://www.lawcentres.org.uk/policy/news/news/kirklees-law-centre-wins-landmark-transgender-discrimination-case>



Tom says:

July 26, 2019 at 11:36 am

> I wanted to push past the smokescreen of tricky questions like ‘what is gender?’

But what IS gender? It’s a genuine question, not a smokescreen. What does it mean to be trans- or cis-gender if you can’t explain what gender is? How can we even have a conversation about transgender people and their rights if, when the question is asked, the response is “you’re asking this question in a mean way, and it’s transphobic”?

> dog-whistle truisms like ‘humans are sexually dimorphic’ (my current count of times I’ve seen GCRFs assert this vs. times I’ve seen their opponents deny it stands at ‘umpteen vs. zero’)

If you’ve never seen anyone claim that sex is a spectrum then I don’t know what to tell you, apart from maybe do a bit more research?

[Reply](#).



2damntrans says:

July 26, 2019 at 5:10 pm

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**Lauren** says:

July 27, 2019 at 4:21 pm

Gender and gender identity have zip to do with each other. Gender is about roles, presentations, stereotypes etc. Gender identity is just part of who you are, it's what tells you if you're a girl/woman, boy/man, in between, other etc. It has zip to do with gender roles, stereotypes and all that.

[Reply](#)**Tom** says:

July 28, 2019 at 10:13 am

... or maybe the clue is in the name? gender has nothing to do with gender identity in the same way that ice has nothing to do with ice cubes and bats have nothing to do with batshit.

**Avoa** says:

July 28, 2019 at 10:21 am

If gender-identity is knowledge of which sex-class one falls into, then with trans people it is just wrong. If it tells someone they are female when they are male, well, it obviously is **not** telling them what they are. The rule you give is disproven in exactly cases you intend it for.

**K. B. T. Twitter** says:

September 12, 2019 at 9:00 am

For some reason I cannot respond to Avoa directly, but here it goes:

“If gender-identity is knowledge of which sex-class one falls into, then with trans people it is just wrong.”

That depends on the definition of “sex-class”. Evidently, “sex” is a contested concept, and not everyone finds it obvious and unquestionable that a trans woman (let alone every trans woman) is and will always be of the male sex (let alone unambiguously).

Also, “gender identity” is usually defined as knowledge of being a woman, a man, or some non-binary option, with “woman” or “man” in this case not falling neatly into a dichotomy between “gender” and “sex”, and more usually being a holistic combination of aspects of both. It's ultimately a semantic debate because “gender” and “sex” are not these crystal-clear concepts that GCRFs insist they are (reality is complicated and weird; truly stranger than fiction, even), and that's why transactivists prefer more specific terms whose definitions are more precise and less contested, such as “gender identity”, “gender/sex assigned at birth”, “gender expression”, “gender presentation”, “gender role”, etc.

**lukeroelofs** says:

July 31, 2019 at 10:29 pm

Hi Tom, Lauren, 2DamnTrans, Avoa

I think ‘what is gender?’ can be a great question to pursue, but it's not what I was looking at here. Moreover (like ‘what is life?’ in biology) it's not something we have to settle at the outset before we can proceed, it's something we can work towards understanding as we go along. The starting point is people's lives and experiences.

Part of the complexity is, as Lauren says, the relationship between gender, gender roles, and gender identity (heck,

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are used and contested in practice is better than starting with a definition that's attractive and consistent in the abstract but obscures people's concrete lives.

I know that's not an answer; maybe when I have time I will write something more positive about how I think about gender. But it would be my own, relatively speculative, reflections, and that's not what I'm about here.

2DamnTrans is absolutely right that 'dimorphic' isn't in conflict with 'on a spectrum'.

[Reply](#)



Alice says:

July 26, 2019 at 11:54 am

Who gains from the idea that females are inherently non competitive, kind, nurturing, empathetic, irrational and submissive? Who gains from the idea that males are inherently competitive cruel, aggressive, predatory, logical and dominant? Who gains from the idea that sex is on a spectrum? Who gains from the upside down lie that the taller the female the more testosterone she had at puberty? Who gains when people can hide their born sex? Who gains from transwomen pretending they were born female? Who gains when no one can tell if an isolated woman of integrity is a victim of malicious slander or a closet transwoman?

[Reply](#)



sillyolyou says:

July 26, 2019 at 6:59 pm

"Who gains from the idea that females are inherently non competitive, kind, nurturing, empathetic, irrational and submissive? Who gains from the idea that males are inherently competitive cruel, aggressive, predatory, logical and dominant?" None of these claims are made by pro-trans feminists.

"Who gains from the idea that sex is on a spectrum?" Intersex people.

"Who gains from the upside down lie that the taller the female the more testosterone she had at puberty?" Who is making this claim?

"Who gains when people can hide their born sex?" What does it mean to "hide their born sex [sic]"?

"Who gains from transwomen pretending they were born female?" That's question-begging

I'm not even going to respond to the last red herring

[Reply](#)



Alice says:

July 27, 2019 at 12:16 pm

Transwomen shouldn't stay in the closet by pretending they were born the sex they now present as. It doesn't help to eliminate transphobia and is a gift to malicious rumour mongers too. You say this is a red herring, it's not, it's a real world consequence of what this pretence can enable.



lukeroelofs says:

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Regarding Alice's second comment, I think it's useful to consider trans people choosing to be out or not on the same terms we consider that choice for gay, bi, pan, or otherwise queer people.

Namely that

1. It is a very personal decision, that has to reflect a personal appraisal of the burdens and risks of each option. As I say in other comments here, I think the pro-trans side has a compelling and consistent stance of supporting individuals in making personal choices for themselves.
2. Saying 'it's a gift to malicious rumour mongers', because 'no one can tell if someone who others are calling trans (/gay) is a 'victim of malicious slander' is victim-blaming. Closeted gay people are not responsible for homophobes speculating about someone's sexuality, stealth trans people are not responsible for transphobes speculating about someone's ASAB. What we should do is be clear that 1. It's not bad to be trans (it's not inherently 'slanderous'), 2. It doesn't matter whether someone is trans, so who cares, and 3. It is not our business to speculate about or discuss people's private medical history.
3. It is destructive to police when and whether people come out and how they express themselves, and will likely push *more* people to remain stealth, since it tells them that whenever they come out, they will be judged for not coming out sooner, putting them in a double-bind where any attempt to feel out what the consequences of coming out will be makes the consequences worse.



christinolini says:

July 29, 2019 at 12:33 am

Critical questions: Who gains and who loses in transgender ideology and laws? The answer is what one would expect. Men win and women lose. Every time.

[Reply](#)



Dan says:

July 26, 2019 at 2:15 pm

Thank you for writing this!

[Reply](#)



jennysaul says:

July 26, 2019 at 3:17 pm

What a great article– thank you for writing it.

[Reply](#)



Bob says:

July 26, 2019 at 4:41 pm

“Dear Philosophers, You Can Trust the Capitalist Consensus: Capitalism is Bogus”

“Dear Philosophers, You Can Trust the Analytic Consensus: Continental Philosophy is Bogus”

[Reply](#)



Dan says:

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**sillyolyou** says:

July 28, 2019 at 11:55 pm

Capitalism is bogus, but I doubt that capitalists agree with that.

[Reply](#)**Kelli Potter** says:

July 26, 2019 at 4:43 pm

This is excellent! Thank you.

[Reply](#)**Gers** says:

July 26, 2019 at 6:50 pm

An *exceptional* piece. Probably one of the best blog posts written on the topic of this debate. Cutting but very measured. Congratulations

[Reply](#)**naomi** says:

July 26, 2019 at 9:19 pm

“It pretends that there can be a policy which extends feminist solidarity to all AFAB people regardless of appearance, while enforceably excluding all AMAB people. There might be such a policy if all AFAB people looked unmistakably female, and all AMAB people looked unmistakably male, but they don’t.”

This is the core of the GC argument though: all AFAB people look unmistakably female, and all AMAB people look unmistakably male. It’s impossible to “pass” as the opposite sex. When you actually talk to any GC person, this is something they truly believe on some level. This is kind of a “no true scotsman”—i.e. if someone says “i’m a trans woman and i pass as AFAB”, the answer is either “you’re lying”, or “you might believe that, but actually women know you’re AMAB and just don’t want to tell you because they are afraid of you or want to be polite”. if someone says “i’m a cis man and i have been mistaken for an AFAB person” they may also get a third answer, “people don’t actually think you’re AFAB they’re just insulting you by comparing you to a woman, due to their homophobia/racism/etc”. But if you go to any radfem forum, blog, critical treatise (Gender Hurts), etc, their mantra is “women can ALWAYS tell”.

Are they right? I have no idea. I’ve certainly got people’s sex wrong before but my people recognition skills are generally below average. But counterexamples of women who can’t “always tell” don’t falsify their position, because they just go back to “that woman is lying because she’s a handmaiden for Big Trans, in private she would admit that she can in fact always tell”.

Notably, while feminists and LGBT people are indeed natural allies on one side, GCRFs come down on the other side with the defenders of ‘traditional family values’—from Janice Raymond’s brief for the Reagan administration to get sex reassignment surgery defunded in the 1980s to Heritage Foundation projects like “Hands Across The Aisle” and “#JustWantPrivacy”.

[Reply](#)**K. B. T. Twitter** says:

September 10, 2019 at 8:40 am

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sex reassignment surgery defunded in the 1980s to Heritage Foundation projects like “Hands Across The Aisle” and “#JustWantPrivacy”.

Knowing the background of people like Raymond and Daly, that’s actually not surprising. TERFs usually claim to be left-wing, but not only do they ally and closely associate with conservatives and the Religious Right, they also act like conservatives (at best), which makes one think of the duck test. I’m just gonna leave this here:

<https://threadreaderapp.com/thread/971395790936690688.html>

[Reply](#)



naomi says:

July 26, 2019 at 9:35 pm

“The GCRF position presents itself as a form of radical acceptance: as the image says, “you are both fine just the way you are.” But in practice it doesn’t want people to transition – or if they do, they should at least have the decency to have surgery, not just declare themselves a woman/man”

Their position is, AFAIK, the opposite of this. GCRFs are at least **rhetorically** fine with people taking hormones, getting surgeries, etc, **as long as** they do not declare themselves a man/woman when they were born a woman/man, and continue to use spaces designated for their birth sex, and openly identify with their birth sex whenever there is any confusion (e.g. if an AMAB person who has taken hormones, gotten sex reassignment surgery, etc, is accidentally put in the women’s section of a psychiatric hospital, that person should demand to be moved to the men’s section).

This position obviously derives entirely from the position that a person’s birth sex is always instantly recognisable.

[Reply](#)



lukeroelofs says:

July 31, 2019 at 10:38 pm

Thanks Naomi, I think you’re absolutely right about the way that GCRFs make and support the ‘can always tell’ claim. Just to support my description as saying “if they do [transition], they should at least have the decency to have surgery”, I note that Avoa, upthread, says that to justify using the women’s bathroom, “A transwoman must be sufficiently modified... to clearly diverge from the normal range of maleness”. I think this sort of attitude co-exists with the stance you describe.

[Reply](#)



K. B. T. Twitter says:

September 12, 2019 at 10:07 am

So trans women should have some kind of body modification that makes it impossible to either confuse them with cis men or cis women.

Funny enough, there are people who would love for a body modification like this to exist: they call themselves non-binary. Unfortunately, experience reveals that “passing” as neither woman nor man in a culture which does not recognize anything else proves utterly impossible.

Trans women, in particular, but more generally speaking any people classified as gender variant, are often

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K. B. T. Twitter says:

September 12, 2019 at 9:53 am

But how can there ever be confusion when people's "birth sex" is always instantly recognizable? The twists in logic here are truly astounding.

[Reply](#)



Still a Gender Critical Radical Feminist after reading this rubbish says:

July 26, 2019 at 11:43 pm

Yeah, right.

[Reply](#)



Sara L. Uckelman says:

July 27, 2019 at 7:28 am

Thank you for this. It's very good.

[Reply](#)



Donna Burton says:

July 27, 2019 at 10:53 am

GC people often deny the existence of "gender identity" because they say they don't have one. Part of the problem is trans people talk about GI without being able to point at what it is.

There's a chain of logic, based on natural selection, that can be followed that shows gender identity is a plausible result of evolution.

An organism that reproduces sexually will tend to have an advantage if it can distinguish male and female members of its own species. So organisms will tend to evolve an ability to recognise male and female of their own species.

This ability will be innate. Non sentient and non social organisms can develop this ability.

Humans, I hypothesise, have inherited this ability from non sentient ancestors.

Organisms also gain advantage by being able to distinguish the effects of their own actions from the actions of others and from things going on in their environment.

(See efference copying)

From the above, it's plausible that organisms have an innate knowledge of their own sex. This innate knowledge matches what we call "gender identity".

Gender identity derived this way would not be learned, nor would it be conscious or subjective. It's inherited from non sentient ancestors, so it must be unconscious. This actually matches the cis argument that they don't have one....it's not conscious knowledge, and it matches the trans experience of knowing something is odd, but not being sure what.

Nor is it something we learn. It is nothing to do with what GC people call gender.



July 28, 2019 at 2:59 pm

It's like how someone who grew up in a pre-medicine world could deny that they have an appendix, and just say that anyone with appendicitis was "making it up" even though both of them do indeed have an appendix, it's just one of them has no means of perceiving its existence and therefore has a deficit when it comes to conceptualising it in relation to everything else.

[Reply](#)



lukeroelofs says:

July 31, 2019 at 10:38 pm

Hi Donna,

That's an interesting theory, but let me say where I feel like the analogy to efference-copy mechanisms might break down. To determine that an action is mine, it seems like the brain subconsciously determines whether two things match: the sensory input that is predicted from the efference-copy and present sensory input, and the actual input we then get. This involves two major computations: generating expected sensory inputs from present sensory inputs and the efference-copy, and then comparing two sets of sensory input (actual and expected) to see if they match. The second is a simple comparison, and while the former is a hard task, it's something that the brain can be constantly training to do better every time it acts, and when it gets it wrong it can detect that and use the feedback to improve. All of this makes it plausible to me that it could be done by very simple organisms, and could be accomplished very early in development.

So how would an innate sex-recognition mechanism compare? Suppose it is set to 'male': that is, it should say 'SAME' when the person sees male humans. This requires it to compare something detected about oneself with something detected about the other – presumably visually – and get a match. I have trouble seeing what the former thing could be. Some things are easy to detect from the brain's own body, and reliably correlate with sex – e.g. blood testosterone levels. But to do a comparison with the visual image of another person, the brain needs to compute, or have encoded in it, what a high blood testosterone level looks like in an adult human... which is very hard? Like, some male people are bald, some aren't, some have beards, some don't, their height will vary wildly with diet, age, etc. Penises maybe get a good high percentage correlation, but they're not usually perceived.

I don't deny that we can very readily learn to distinguish out sex categories based on noticing the particular ways that testosterone (or whatever) manifests in people in my social world, what correlates and what doesn't (e.g my brain can notice that although not all bald people have beards, and not all bearded people are bald, neither groups ever wear dresses or lipstick), but that's learnt, not innate. It relies on my brain getting training and feedback from my surroundings about who belongs to what gender. And even setting aside that it's learnt, not innate, how does the brain tell which of these two categories it learns to discriminate matches its own body? The child doesn't yet have a beard, isn't bald, certainly isn't tall, and while it may have (so to speak) a switch in the brain set to a certain setting by foetal testosterone, that still doesn't tell it which of the two categories it's observing is the one that got more foetal testosterone.

I hope I'm doing an ok job conveying why I'm skeptical about the sort of mechanism you describe.

[Reply](#)



K. B. T. Twitter says:

September 12, 2019 at 11:25 am

I agree that the concept of "gender identity" is puzzling, and the fact that a minority of humans have the conviction that their body should be radically different from the way it actually is – even though it seems

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not a delusion either, at least not in the typical way: after all, it involves *recognizing* the facts before declaring them unacceptable, and to be changed. There's also the perennial question if this insistence that one's body is wrong would also occur in a radically different culture, one that does not put any particular emphasis on gender/sex divisions at all, where declarations of gender/sex membership are never questioned, or other hypothetical scenarios. But even so, a profound mystery appears to lie here: how is it possible to be so radically at variance with one's body? There are conditions which display some similarities with this situation, but also important points of difference.

The inscrutability of gender identity, at least, is not unique. Matters of personal identity are usually not conducive to empirical explanation, and have no material basis. When trans children are asked how they know what they are, they are at a loss, and can only adduce gendered stereotypes that are profoundly culture-specific ("I'm a girl because I like pink and wearing dresses and playing with dolls") – their perplexity is comparable to a situation in which you are expected to explain why your favorite color is your favorite, where you will not be able to give a remotely compelling reason, either. (Political ideologies, at least, are explainable by values, even though the origin of these values themselves is not necessarily obvious.) Trans adults are no less able to pinpoint an ultimate reason, despite various hypotheses existing, and may point out instead that it is unfair that it is expected of them to explain the way they are, but not of those who are considered to fit the norm.

The most obvious analogy is found in sexual orientation: there is no evident reason why children grow up to have different sexual orientations as adults, but they simply do. The search for a "gay gene" has proven futile. Yet GCRFs do not therefore argue that sexual orientation is as bogus as they claim gender identity is; they simply accept it as a real phenomenon. Generally speaking, it is not questioned by them. Even differing gendered preferences are accepted by them, at least in theory. Of course, personal preferences are not usually connected to such radical and deep-reaching consequences as a variant gender identity, and especially, dysphoria about sex characteristics. Still, it's worth pointing out that many things that deeply matter to us do not have a clear explanation and seem arbitrary, random and lack an evident material substrate. Demanding of trans people to justify the way they are *is* unfair – especially when the way they are confers far more disadvantages than advantages in real life. The problem of gender identity may look like an interesting philosophical question when there are no personal stakes involved, but to trans people it tends to be a painful topic. They should not be expected to solve it.



Avoa says:

July 27, 2019 at 11:53 am

I do not understand why trans-identifying men have any claim on women here. They are men, not women, in any credible sense. The criterion of access to women's designated rights is nothing else than to be a woman; men are not; the end.

[Reply](#)



Lauren says:

July 27, 2019 at 4:30 pm

Have you ever actually talked to trans people as just people? You're invoking a category with the only possible support for it being your own biases and experiences. Also no one is trans-identifying. Trans is just an adjective, like tall, thin or any other.

[Reply](#)



sillyolyou says:

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[Reply](#)**Avoa** says:

July 29, 2019 at 8:32 am

Since the facts are really quite plain, and the article gave no counterargument, it appears the question-begging here has been going in rather the opposite direction.

**sillyolyou** says:

August 8, 2019 at 3:45 pm

I'm not sure you know what question-begging is

**Rebecca Kukla** says:

July 27, 2019 at 11:55 am

Wonderful, thoughtful, thorough essay – thanks!

[Reply](#)**cmkeegan** says:

July 27, 2019 at 12:44 pm

This is perhaps the best summation of the vacuousness/disingenuousness of “gender critical” positions I have ever seen produced by a cis author. Bookmarked and shared. Thank you!

Also, much credit due to the generations of trans people (mostly trans women) who have been pointing all of this out, in writing and activism, with little to no recognition from the more privileged areas of academia or from establishment feminism.

[Reply](#)**lukeroelofs** says:

July 29, 2019 at 2:44 pm

Absolutely! Everything I say here is just repeating and compiling things said by lots of trans philosophers and others. I should especially credit Samantha Hancox-Li (<https://www.sjshancoxli.com/>) for her advice and suggestions on earlier versions, and I've learnt a great deal also from reading, in no particular order, Rachel McKinnon, R. A. Briggs, I. Rohl, Zinnia Jones, Mallory Moore, Talia Mae Bettcher, Julia Serano, Katharine Jenkins, Serene Khader, among many many others!

[Reply](#)

Pingback: [Roll-on, Roelofs – Excel Pope](#)

**Alice** says:

July 27, 2019 at 4:17 pm

Gender-critical people are not driven by hatred or phobia of trans people. We wish them to live openly and authentically as

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the attempts by genderists to redefine the words that all adults put a tiny minority identity as and man.

Children are currently being indoctrinated with the false belief that they can choose their sex and being given puberty blocking drugs which may damage their health for life and certainly put them on the path to sterility, major surgeries and life long dependency on drugs. Women are concerned about losing all their sex based rights, including sex segregated sport and that rogue males will abuse self id for nefarious purposes. People who don't fit current genderist stereotypes of what a male /female should look like are concerned that they (and children who don't fit too) are at risk of being defeminised and emasculated by the peculiar notion that sex itself is on a spectrum and intersex groups have expressed strongly that they are all (bar a minisucle number) unambiguously either male (reproductive sex class that contributes small gametes) or female (reproductive sex class that contributes large gametes) and don't like being recategorised as a mythical third sex. Sex matters when it comes to sexual relations and physical combat including sport but it doesn't tell you anything about how a person thinks or feels and shouldn't constrain how a person wishes to dress or behave . It's genderism (men are from mars, women from venus type mythology) that encourages such constriction upon the sexes , any further entrenchment should be resisted not embraced. Transwomen are transwomen not women.

[Reply](#)



[sillyolyou](#) says:

July 28, 2019 at 11:57 pm

You see, if you'd read the piece, you might learn how all of those beliefs are false.

[Reply](#)



Alice says:

July 29, 2019 at 11:45 am

What's false is that gender critical feminism is driven by phobia or hatred for anyone. Hatred of the sexist, divisive, constricting ,regressive, ancient ideology of genderism, maybe.



[sillyolyou](#) says:

July 29, 2019 at 11:30 pm

Trans people oppose what you call 'genderism' too



[lukeroelofs](#) says:

July 31, 2019 at 10:44 pm

Hi Alice

"We don't accept that women/men all share some innate feeling of being female/male/have female/male minds/emotions"

I think this is straw-doll. I don't accept that idea either. I'm a social constructionist, so are a lot of trans people. Donna, above in the thread, seems to think of gender identity as having an innate biological basis, but she still doesn't claim that it's an innate "feeling", indeed she specifically says it's unconscious. I think the idea that trans people accept, or are somehow committed to, certain claims about what psychologically unites all women or all men is a version of the claim I was criticising in my first section here.

"Children are currently being indoctrinated with the false belief that they can choose their sex"

Children are being informed about the, somewhat complex, truth. Sex is a cluster concept (at least as applied to humans – I guess cross-species it's like a multiply-realised sort of thing, in that different species have different ways that sex division manifests?) which includes the interaction among chromosomes, hormones, genitals, and other factors. While chromosomes can't be changed, many of those things can. If someone is out there saying there's gene therapy that can give you a 'y' chromosome, I haven't heard of it.

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Puberty blockers are as safe as any regularly-taken medication, and all the available evidence suggests that they are beneficial to psychological health. (More to the point, people have the right to control their own bodies.)

The language of ‘putting someone on the path to’ surgery, HRT, etc. is a way to say ‘people who do X usually then choose to do Y’ that obscures the person’s own agency and blames their choices on something external. I think this is a version of the idea I was criticising in my second section here.

“People who don’t fit current genderist stereotypes of what a male /female should look like are concerned that they (and children who don’t fit too) are at risk of being defeminised and emasculated by the peculiar notion that sex itself is on a spectrum”

I have no idea what this means.

“Sex matters when it comes to sexual relations and physical combat including sport...”

Yes, and reproduction, healthcare, and other things. It matters in complex ways, and for trans people the ways it matters are often even more complex. Things can matter enormously and yet not be a good basis for denying or policing someone’s membership in a social category like ‘man’ or ‘woman’. I think ‘sex matters’ is one of the ‘dog-whistle truisms’ I described above as forming a smokescreen: trans people don’t deny it, but GCRFs say it in ways that insinuate they do.

“...but it doesn’t tell you anything about how a person thinks or feels and shouldn’t constrain how a person wishes to dress or behave. It’s genderism (men are from mars, women from venus type mythology) that encourages such constriction upon the sexes , any further entrenchment should be resisted not embraced.”

I think, as Silly Ol’ You says, that most trans people also oppose ‘genderism’, often very strongly.

[Reply](#)



Stephen Frug says:

July 27, 2019 at 5:59 pm

So far as I can tell, the replies to this article engage mostly on the substance, either pro or con. But this essay is making a much stronger claim: not only that its positions are correct, but that they are so obviously and unquestionably correct that the other side is not a real position at all.

The problem is that this is what arguments about controversial topics look like. (Stock, I think, tries to get at this point in her analogy with vegetarianism/”benign carnivorousness”). Certainly claims like these — “Promoting the stereotype-based model, by contrast, is falsifying the data to save a theory”, or “ask what GCRF actually amounts to, I think it becomes clear that it’s an edifice of factual untruths and ideological contradictions. In a sense, a lot of GCRF positions don’t actually exist. The GCRF position on bathrooms can’t really be located in logical space, because it’s the combination of two incompatible positions” — seem to me to be true of libertarianism. Every time I look into that, it strikes me that the contradictions are so thorough, so deep, so ludicrously obvious that there is no possible good-faith position there. And that might be true! But if so it is best shown by debate with it (Susan Moller Okin’s critique of Robert Nozick was the sort of one that made me wonder how he’d ever look himself in the mirror again), not by banning it.

All of which is to say: I think you underestimate how strongly the qualities you give to GCRF arguments — vacuity, dishonesty, manipulation of facts, contradictions in their core position — is how all ideas which we are both strongly opposed to and feel strongly about appear to us. And, therefore, you have fallen far short of your aim: to show, not just that these positions are wrong, but that they are so clearly and obviously wrong that there is nothing to debate there.

I will go further and suggest a criterion for the latter: if a significantly large percentage of people believe something, it can’t

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sciences, only scientists count (hence we don't debate climate change), but in political and moral issues, everyone gets a voice.

[Reply](#)



lukeroelofs says:

July 31, 2019 at 10:54 pm

Hi Stephen

I don't think I'm making a claim to *obviousness*. After all, I opened by talking about how a lot of this stuff *wasn't obvious to me*, based partly on my social position. I also stopped short of saying anything about what, in practice, we as a discipline should *do* about the bogusness of this set of ideas. That's partly because those questions have a lot of their own trickiness, and partly because they turn on a bunch of further issues beyond intellectual quality and hatefulness. I think one relevant issue is about vulnerability and marginalisation: there is a specific marginalised group in the discipline who are the targets of transphobic ideology (in a way that isn't similarly true of libertarianism). I think something else, related, is standpoint-epistemological: not all common-sense is available to everyone. E.g. when we write about 'knowledge' we draw on an extremely rich and detailed background knowledge of when people do and don't apply the term 'know'. That's not something you could, like, cite or assign as reading, but it's really important info that you'll probably rely on at multiple points in each argument. But similar bodies of background knowledge are available from living in a specific community, whether that's a particular place or a particular subculture or people sharing a particular identity. Someone working on areas where that background knowledge is relevant will be like an epidemiologist with no experience using the word 'know'. I think part of the concern trans philosophers have expressed is that cis philosophers don't have this background knowledge, don't recognise that this limits them, and don't have any interest in acquiring it, and that this is a large part of why GCRF ideology has the traction that it does.

Anyway, I know I still haven't really given a practical policy program. I think the above are some of the relevant issues (particularly for thinking about the comparison with libertarianism), and I don't think that statistical popularity or obviousness are the only, and perhaps not good, criteria.

[Reply](#)



S says:

July 28, 2019 at 12:27 am

The first quote is from me and the view in question (that I was saying there is room for rational disagreement about) was about whether to continue defining sexual orientation terms in the standard way or change them. It was about sexual orientation, not directly about gender or trans people, and was part of a larger statement that was not about gender critical feminism (which I myself do not agree with).

Please do not misleadingly quote people, thanks.

[Reply](#)



lukeroelofs says:

July 28, 2019 at 1:01 pm

Hi S, I'm sorry you felt the quote was misleading. I saw it as being in the context of Stock's talk about sexual orientation at the Aristotelian society, and I take that talk to be part of the pattern being discussed here. I've removed the quote though.

[Reply](#)

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July 29, 2019 at 6:09 pm

Reblogged this on [Culture Werewolf](#).

[Reply](#).



[sillyolyou](#) says:

July 29, 2019 at 11:51 pm

Have you seen Molly Gardner's satire of this piece? <https://twitter.com/Mgardner2000/status/1155534660316913665>

[Reply](#).



[lukeroelofs](#) says:

July 31, 2019 at 10:55 pm

I did! It's the standard effort to position GCRFs as representative of women as a whole, even though they're a small minority and most of their most prominent critics are women.

[Reply](#).



[sillyolyou](#) says:

August 8, 2019 at 3:45 pm

Yeah, and I asked her on twitter & she somehow denied this lol



[S](#) says:

July 30, 2019 at 1:54 am

Now onto a more substantive comment:

What you've addressed are the weakest positions of GCF: the first is blatantly transphobic, the second is a speculative claim that is empirically disprovable, and the third is a policy proposal. Additionally, none of these are philosophically substantive/interesting, so by focusing on these you're attacking a straw doll.

The general controversy, silencing, de-platforming, etc. around gender issues in philosophy isn't limited to these positions or even to GCF. E.g. the open letter written by some MAP chapter calling for Stock to be de-platformed (the one to which I wrote a response from which you selected a quote, which you then removed) was about a paper by Stock that did not claim any of those three positions, but just said that sexual orientation terms ought to be defined as they standardly have been, i.e. in terms of sex. Yet transactivists within academic philosophy still called for Stock to be de-platformed just for that. I've also faced discrimination in the abstracts I've submitted to conferences that are about gender issues, even though none of them have been about any of the three topics you mentioned, and despite the fact that I myself am trans, AFAB, and non-binary (thus being a gender minority in multiple ways). And so on.

If you want to address the issue of debate, rational disagreement, and silencing around these issues in academic philosophy, you have to first admit there's a problem and realize the controversy is not only around women only spaces.

[Reply](#).



[M](#) says:

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with these points doesn't qualify as substantive. But nevermind that, I doubt philosophers will ever agree on about what "really matters" in philosophy. However, even if your claim about a straw doll were true, it seems that this is kind of Roloefs' point, namely that GCFs "[wave] a feminist figleaf in front of social conservatism".

"The general controversy" Then you shift the focus of the topic to norms of engagement and away from substantive engagement, which, insofar as GCFs ask to not be silenced and to be taken seriously, they are asking precisely for substantive engagement. Yes, the appeal does end with a call for ignoring/dismissal (norms of engagement), which might amount to a form of silencing. However, there is a difference to be made between silencing pernicious versus non-pernicious voices. The GCF response might be that we're not in a position to know yet which of the voices are pernicious non-pernicious, hence we shouldn't silence dismiss. But this response entirely misses Luke's point, which is to argue precisely for the idea that they are pernicious, in order to justify the claim of silencing. If you want to deny his conclusion, engage with the argument on the substantive level, not the one about norms of engagement.

"transactivists within academic philosophy still called for Stock to be de-platformed just for that." – false, there are more reasons than simply one paper by Stock.

"I've also faced discrimination in the abstracts I've submitted to conferences that are about gender issues" I'd be curious how you know this, did the organizers tell you? Maybe the abstracts just weren't of sufficient quality to justify their admission. I can't answer this, and perhaps you are better positioned to know what is actually happening here.

Finally, I'm not sure what the identifiers at the end are doing, though they seem to be invoked to establish your credibility in this discussion; correct me if I'm wrong. If so, it is like an inverted ad hominem/appeal to authority. Many of us (on both sides of the debate) are GNC, non-binary, non-cishet-normies (myself included). Some of us are. And, often, we can't know who is sitting behind a keyboard and screen at the other terminal of the internet. Even if I go in for a standpoint epistemology sometimes, the fact that there are conflicting standpoints within groups means that we have to decide which voices in a given group are said to have privileged epistemic access and why, over their opponents/detractors. I haven't yet settled on a method or criteria for deciding how to do this in ways that won't be oppressive or silencing on some level – maybe you have some ideas.

[Reply](#)



lukeroelofs says:

July 31, 2019 at 10:59 pm

So I think there's sort of a forest/trees issue here, that I think is brought out quite well in this passage of what you say:

"a paper by Stock that did not claim any of those three positions, but just said that sexual orientation terms ought to be defined as they standardly have been, i.e. in terms of sex. Yet transactivists within academic philosophy still called for Stock to be de-platformed just for that."

As M says, I don't think "just for that" is right here. People can, do, and should recognise patterns, and don't have to re-evaluate a person anew for every single action they take. If someone is pushing bigoted positions, then in a crowded intellectual marketplace, it makes sense to think they shouldn't be listened to any more.

Also, you say that the issues I've addressed are "the weakest... [not] philosophically substantive/interesting". I think I said fairly explicitly why I picked these, and noted that there are a whole bunch of things I didn't address (and I mean, twitter is still full of people making fun of it for being too long, so...).

But on the issue of sexual orientation: I think for people plugged into wider debates about trans issues, it's immediately recognisable how saying 'orientation terms should be defined in terms of sex' fits directly into a

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trans women attractive – something that Illmadeknight, below, also expresses) and an objectionable sort of activity, debating and delegitimising people's self-described orientations (let lesbians decide individually what that 'lesbian' means for them!). But of course, the average cis philosopher may not have any of that context, so it will seem like just an interesting abstract point.

[Reply](#).



S says:

August 8, 2019 at 6:45 am

About 'policing': I already responded to that in my response to the MAP open letter. I've since made my blog private, but I'll paste what I said about that here:

"The closest thing to a consideration brought in favour of the proposed de-platforming is the following: "We also condemn the questioning and policing of the sexualities of gay and lesbian people attracted to, and in relationships with, trans people." This – clearly referring to opposite-sex attraction and opposite-sex relationships involving at least one self-identifying gay or lesbian person – simply begs the question against Stock (and me, etc.) by assuming that such individuals are appropriately called 'gay' or 'lesbian'. In any case, this sort of 'policing' is not dehumanizing or wrong in principle, and is something that the authors of the MAP statement, and those who share their views, do too. They police the sexualities of self-identifying lesbians who date trans men, or indeed who are trans men, as well as self-identifying straight women who are married to trans women who used to be their husbands, self-identifying straight men who are attracted to trans men, etc. 'Policing' is not wrong: it is when concepts are misapplied that there is a problem. I assume that the authors of the MAP statement would agree with me in denying that a cis woman who is exclusively attracted to cis men is a lesbian, etc. So in addition to using the words 'gay' and 'lesbian' to denote opposite-sex attracted individuals, the condemnation of the 'policing' of such individuals' identities, i.e. the denial that they are gay or lesbian, is also begging the question against Stock et al."



lukeroelofs says:

August 10, 2019 at 12:34 pm

"...the authors of the MAP statement, and those who share their views, [police sexuality] too. They police the sexualities of self-identifying lesbians who date trans men, or indeed who are trans men, as well as self-identifying straight women who are married to trans women who used to be their husbands, self-identifying straight men who are attracted to trans men, etc.... they routinely police – often very rudely and abusively – self-identified lesbians who date trans men, as I mentioned above. Sometimes trans men pressure their lesbian partners not to identify as lesbians, which is a form of abusive behaviour. Do you oppose this as well[?]"

Yeah, I actually think I would oppose that. Like, I do think people should generally be ok with other people choosing their self-identifications for themselves. But I can also see how your partner identifying a particular way could be hurtful if it seems to carry implications about your own gender. I can see asking them to reconsider if they're your partner, but I think that's different from a philosopher, or a movement, doing so from on high without knowing you or talking to you, or making out like it's a simple matter.

And, like, something I've seen a lot in these debates is someone saying 'you should reflect on why you X (feel this way/say this/want this/prefer this form of language)', and opponents responding with 'you're saying I can't do X?' Which is not what is being said. And I think the position I'd like to defend is that sometimes, yes, people 'should reflect on why they X', but that's very much their reflection to do, and the

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said with the implicit message that only certain outcomes of reflection will be accepted. That's bad. I don't

think there's any ideological grouping such that all of its supporters consistently do this sort of thing in the right way. But the people who do it in what I think of as the right way do seem to be pretty much all on the pro-trans side.

But, yeah, my position is that if someone who sees themselves as a lesbian is attracted to some men, trans or cis, they get to decide whether to see themselves as lesbians with an exception, as bi, as pan, as previously-lesbian-but-currently-not, or something else. Likewise for lesbians who have relationships with men in their past. Likewise for people who prefer 'bi' over 'pan' or vice versa, or for people who might call themselves 'grey ace' vs. just thinking they have a low libido, or for anything else. Likewise for people who call themselves nonbinary lesbians, etc. These labels are tools for making sense of and communicating a very complex and fluid reality of attraction, and I think it's absolutely the right policy to let them be fluid and contextual in their meaning.

"I assume that the authors of the MAP statement would agree with me in denying that a cis woman who is exclusively attracted to cis men is a lesbian, etc."

If someone is expressing themselves that way, I think it makes sense for people to be confused, and to wonder what they mean by it and why they choose that label. But presumably they do mean something, and have some reasons! If I was their friend, or otherwise in a position to ask them personal questions, I might ask them why they use that label. And maybe at the end of the day I find their answer unsatisfying or even feel like it expresses something objectionable (e.g. if they say something bizarre like it's because they think being straight is boring and bisexuals are untrustworthy). But I don't think I should go into that conversation assuming that they're wrong, or assuming that whatever they say will be misguided. And I shouldn't jump from 'I wouldn't use this term for this' to 'you shouldn't use this term for this.'

(Like, for example, there is this history of 'political lesbians', who defined themselves as rejecting heterosexuality, rejecting men, rejecting patriarchal society, rather than by feelings of attraction. That's something that the word 'lesbian' can mean to a lot of people. And whatever my attitude is to the political project that expresses, I think an individual who uses the term that way for themselves deserves a presumption that they have their reasons and I'm not the adjudicator of how good those reasons are.)

(For what it's worth, my thoughts on this sort of matter have been formed a lot by reading the following posts by nonbinary folks:

<https://valprehension.com/2016/10/12/if-youre-into-me-then-youre-not-straight-orientations-and-attractions-to-non-binary-people/>

<https://valprehension.com/2017/07/19/question-from-the-search-terms-if-i-love-a-nonbinary-am-i-straight/>

<https://thingofthings.wordpress.com/2016/08/22/1688/>)



S says:

August 8, 2019 at 7:10 am

"... it's immediately recognisable how saying 'orientation terms should be defined in terms of sex' fits directly into a distinctive GCRF agenda..."

Guilt by association fallacy. Also, according to this, everyone throughout history and in every culture until transactivism started has been furthering a GCF agenda, including before GCF existed.

"... which involves policing orientation terms in order to call trans lesbians 'straight', to call cis lesbians in relationships with trans lesbians 'bisexual'..."

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with it either: they routinely police — often very rudely and abusively — self-identified lesbians who date trans men, as I mentioned above. Sometimes trans men pressure their lesbian partners not to identify as lesbians, which is a form of abusive behaviour. Do you oppose this as well, or do you think it's always wrong to question someone's sexual self-identification?

The problem is not with policing, but with the incorrect application of concepts. So, it comes down to the question of how we ought to define sexual orientation terms, which is what Kathleen Stock wrote her paper on and was attemptedly de-platformed just for that.

"... to position themselves as speaking for the 'only true lesbians', who are those who categorically rule out in advance ever being with a trans woman..."

This is just a rhetorical framing that doesn't add anything of substance. We — both GCFs and non-GCFs (like myself) who are non-revisionists about sexual orientation concepts, i.e. who believe in continuing the sex-based definitions — do not frame ourselves as speaking for 'the only true lesbians' (or straight people, gay men, etc.), but take a position, like everyone does, on what the definition of 'lesbian' is. The point is not to speak for anyone, any more than any other instance of saying something doesn't fall under a concept is speaking for all the things that do fall under it (you can limit this to cases where the things are people, if you want, and my point still stands).

"Which I think is also factually misleading (in suggesting that it's unusual or atypical for people attracted to women to find trans women attractive..."

These factual matters don't settle the question. Until the normative question of how to define the terms is settled (i.e. one takes a position on it), it doesn't help to mention these factual matters. Also, as a matter of fact what you're saying is not correct, as typically people don't date trans people of the sex they're not normally attracted to. Here is some empirical data from a transactivist source that confirm what I already knew by anecdotal data/lived experience: <https://www.them.us/story/cis-trans-dating>

FYI my position is not that no monosexual ever finds people of their unpreferred sex attractive. They can, as long as it is a superficial and passing attraction. They may also engage in sexual acts out of curiosity, as indeed they may even with cis people of their unpreferred sex (e.g. straight women sometimes 'experiment' with other women).

"... and an objectionable sort of activity, debating and delegitimising people's self-described orientations (let lesbians decide individually what that 'lesbian' means for them!)."

I don't find it remotely objectionable, and you haven't made a case for why it is other than that some people don't like it (not good enough), but also your parenthetical remark is just begging the question.



lukeroelofs says:

August 10, 2019 at 12:35 pm

"Guilt by association fallacy."

This the 'That's a fallacy' fallacy.

(More seriously — judging one thing by its resemblance to or connection with other things is sometimes appropriate and sometimes inappropriate. Pattern recognition is often a good thing!)

transactivism started' has held a certain definition of homosexual and heterosexual? But... the words are 19th century inventions...?

And, yes, *of course* the people who introduced the terms (like Krafft-Ebing) understood them in super problematic (homophobic) ways – homosexuality appears in 'Psychopathia Sexualis', emphasis on the 'pathia'! That is not respectful of gay sexuality!

But, no, that doesn't mean I think they were 'furthering a GCRF agenda' (as far as I know that didn't really exist before second-wave feminism in the 60s and 70s?). I didn't say 'making this claim in any form in any context at any time is always a GCRF dogwhistle'. I said it was a GCRF dogwhistle *in the specific context it was made in.* Like, phrases and ideas change their significance and meaning over time and social context.

"By saying a bird is not a reptile, I am also 'policing'."

Birds don't talk about whether they're reptiles, and the term 'reptile' wasn't developed and used as a term for people to identify with. If the word's social significance and role were different, there would be different ethics bearing on how to discuss its usage.

"...which is what Kathleen Stock wrote her paper on and was attemptedly de-platformed just for that." It's not 'just for that'. Stock's got a whole big thing going on.

"...typically people don't date trans people of the sex they're not normally attracted to. Here is some empirical data from a transactivist source that confirm what I already knew by anecdotal data/lived experience: <https://www.them.us/story/cis-trans-dating>"

Thanks for that data, it is interesting, but whether someone tells a survey that they would date an X person isn't the same as whether they are attracted to X people. Partly because considering a survey question is a different experience from encountering a person, partly because people could want to avoid dating someone for reasons other than attraction – for one thing, a bunch of straight dudes are scared that being attracted to trans women makes them gay/bi, or will make people think them so, and are scared of that (because they expect people to define terms the way you do!). But I am happy to admit that I don't have good data on the percentages here, and probably shouldn't get into a fight over the empirical stats.



S says:

August 8, 2019 at 7:22 am

Sorry I forgot to complete one of the paragraphs in my previous comment. I meant to say this:

FYI my position is not that no monosexual ever finds people of their unpreferred sex attractive. They can, as long as it is a superficial and passing attraction. They may also engage in sexual acts out of curiosity, as indeed they may even with cis people of their unpreferred sex (e.g. straight women sometimes 'experiment' with other women). What I am claiming is that persistent sexual attraction, as well as romantic attraction of any kind, tracks the reality of someone's sex and not merely their appearance. While, for example, a straight man may feel attracted to a cis passing trans woman when he sees her walking down the street, and he may have sex with a trans woman out of curiosity or something, he cannot be in love with or seek out dating trans women. A man who does this is not in fact straight (if he was before he's not anymore), since such romantic bonds and persistent sexual attraction can only be to those of the sex one's sexual orientation normally involves attraction to. That's just what sexual orientation means in the first place. Maybe 'bisexual' isn't the best word for such a man: maybe we need new words, or no words. But such a person is not straight (and so on for other monosexual orientation).

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“But... the words are 19th century inventions...?”

It's not these specific words, but the concepts, and the fact that *there are some words* that matter. The concept of sexual orientation predates the concept of gender identity, and words for sexual orientations predate any notion of gender as distinct from sex. The sex/gender distinction comes out of 20th Century Anglophone academia (particularly sexology, psychology, and academic feminism), whereas the notion of being only attracted to the same sex, only attracted to the opposite sex, or attracted to both, goes back to ancient times and exists in many cultures/languages.

We don't agree on the importance of self-identification for the demarcation of concepts. I consider it to have basically no importance at all, and to not be relevant to how we ought to define words. OTOH I know that the being and significance (this includes in a spiritual way [I don't want to elaborate upon this]) of exclusive same-sex attraction is very different and importantly so from the being and significance of opposite-sex attraction. It is crucial that we continue to make this difference salient, and not redefine terms so that the thing that homosexuality very importantly does not include (i.e. opposite-sex attraction) comes to be included under the definitions of words that historically have been, and still mostly are, used to express homosexuality and homosexual people.

Additionally, there is no reason to change the definitions of those words. It cannot even be rationally validating to anyone's gender identity, even if you think bringing about validation is an acceptable reason to redefine important words (I don't). It cannot be rationally validating because a mere change in definition does not amount to a change in substantive position. So if we were to change the definition of, e.g. 'straight woman' to include women who are attracted to trans men, this cannot be rationally validating to the trans man's gender identity because the word 'straight' no longer means the thing it would have to mean to be validating. The validation is based on verbal sleight of hand or equivocation, and takes advantage of the very fact that it the word meaning-change has not been successful. If people truly internalized 'straight woman' as meaning nothing other than 'woman who is attracted either to people with female bodies and male gender identities, or people with male bodies and male gender identities', without any leftover connotation from its earlier meaning, then there is simply no reason it would validate anyone's identity. It would be a boring description of what we already know is happening. It's only because 'straight' has historically been used to denote exclusively opposite-sex attracted people that it feels validating to the trans man, since it is essentially telling him his sex is male though it is not. In fact the whole transactivist project of redefining gender and sexual orientation terms is precisely to achieve the goal of having trans people regarded as a sex other than what they are.



lukeroelofs says:

August 14, 2019 at 12:08 pm

“the notion of being only attracted to the same sex, only attracted to the opposite sex, or attracted to both, goes back to ancient times and exists in many cultures/languages.”

So this is really interesting to me, because I've often heard claims to the contrary – that many ancient Mediterranean cultures, for instance, had no such notions: they had some concepts around what we would call male homosexuality, but saw penetrative/receptive, and older/younger, as really big deals in a way that doesn't really map onto modern orientation notions. I may be uninformed though?

“We don't agree on the importance of self-identification for the demarcation of concepts. I consider it to have basically no importance at all...”

That does seem to be the root of our disagreement (at least on question 3 of the three I distinguish below).

I do want to emphasise though that I think it's relevant for a specific subset of concepts, roughly those

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“It cannot even be rationally validating to anyone’s gender identity... because a mere change in definition does not amount to a change in substantive position. So if we were to change the definition of, e.g. ‘straight woman’ to include women who are attracted to trans men, this cannot be rationally validating to the trans man’s gender identity because the word ‘straight’ no longer means the thing it would have to mean to be validating... If people truly internalized ‘straight woman’ as meaning nothing other than ‘woman who is attracted either to people with female bodies and male gender identities, or people with male bodies and male gender identities’, without any leftover connotation from its earlier meaning, then there is simply no reason it would validate anyone’s identity.”

So I disagree, but this convo is getting a bit unwieldy because I think we disagree about 1) some of the pertinent empirical/psychological facts, 2) the merits of different definitions of orientation terms, and 3) the methodological question of how to go about defining them. I think we started by discussing 3, and I don’t know if I can lay out positions on all three questions without the discussion becoming unmanageable.

But, just to proceed slowly and do my best, it looks like your argument for the inability of a trans-inclusive definition to validate a target’s gender identity is something like this:

1. A trans-inclusive definition of an orientation’s target must be about targeting gender as opposed to sex
2. According to pro-trans thinking, gender is gender identity
3. Therefore, a trans-inclusive definition of an orientation’s target must be about targeting gender identity.
4. A desire for someone’s gender identity is implausible, oddly disembodied, and unsatisfying.
5. Therefore any trans-inclusive definition of an orientation’s target must be implausible, oddly disembodied, and unsatisfying.

Is that a fair construal of the structure of your argument here? Because I think it’s worth noting that I’m sympathetic to 4, but would reject 2 (though I do think there’s room to reject 1, especially if one is using certain kinds of property-cluster account of sex on which some trans people do change sex). I’d reject 2 because I think it’s consistent to say ‘someone’s gender is determined by their gender identity’ (hence trans women are women, etc. all the standard implications) but to think that’s a synthetic claim, and that gender (a social category) isn’t simply identical with gender identity (a personal desire/feeling/affiliation to/identification with/probably-there’s-a-better-way-to-put-it such a category). But I do recognise that’s a somewhat subtle move there.



S says:

August 26, 2019 at 4:05 pm

“... they had some concepts around what we would call male homosexuality, but saw penetrative/receptive, and older/younger, as really big deals in a way that doesn’t really map onto modern orientation notions.”

They may have had those concepts too, but they also had sexual orientation concepts. Age and penetrative role may have been more salient in those contexts, but that doesn’t mean they didn’t have sexual orientation concepts also. E.g. Plato’s dialogues mention homosexuality and heterosexuality. Abrahamic scriptures also mention the men of Sodom and Gomorrah (or Qaum-e-Lut, in Urdu and in an Islamic context), who are described as directing their lusts toward men instead of women. Here’s an excerpt from my letter to MAP:

“While the sex/gender distinction may be a recent, Anglophone phenomenon, the concept of sexual orientation is not. In 1868–69 the Hungarian journalist and human-rights campaigner Karl-Maria Kartbeny coined the terms ‘homosexualität’ (translated most literally into English as ‘homosexuality’), ‘homosexualisten’ (homosexual male), and ‘homosexualistinnen’ (homosexual female), in a pamphlet calling for the repeal of Prussian sodomy laws and in private correspondence. The word has two roots: the Greek

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is associated with the adult male love of male youths who are not too young, and with a greater degree of commitment, cultivation of virtue, and love of the soul and not merely the body. Other terms refer to sexual acts between those of the same sex, such as 'sodomite' or 'tribad', referring to male-on-male anal sex and female-on-female tribadism respectively. As long ago as the 17th Century, the English expression 'the game of flats' was used as a euphemism for lesbian sex, referring to the relatively flat female genitalia."

In any case, what is important is that sexual orientation concepts are prior to the sex/gender distinction and the notion of gender identity. Even if it was only prior by one century or something, that is still important to my argument.



lukeroelofs says:

August 26, 2019 at 10:23 pm

So I feel like your references here are just reinforcing what I said.

Like, maybe I could put it like this: either we're working with a loose concept of 'homosexuality' or a specific one. A specific one would specify things like: is it about psychological attraction or about actions? Is it for anyone attracted to the same sex, or only for those exclusively attracted to the same sex? The loose concept doesn't specify those things.

If we're using a loose concept, then lots of things like 'Sodomite', 'Uranian', or Plato's 'higher love' seem to qualify, and it's fair to say things like 'Plato advocates male homosexuality'. But if the concept is that loose, it hardly seems like it can contain a detailed specification of what the category 'sex' means and who falls into it.

To make an argument that contemporary self-identified lesbians who date trans women or who date trans men are or are not 'homosexual', it seems to me you need 'homosexual' to be quite a specific concept. But then I don't think you can count all of these historical antecedents, because they either don't specify things in the same way that our contemporary talk of 'homosexuality' tends to, or they specify in a different direction. Like, references to Sodom and the supposed sins of its men are clearly focused on an act, the sinful act that God punished them for. You couldn't be a celibate sodomite. But clearly you can be a celibate homosexual. So if we're looking at fine-grained concepts, it really does seem to me like we don't have evidence of 'homosexual' as a historically prevalent concept.

But perhaps that isn't important to your argument, as you say. I just find it interesting.



S says:

August 26, 2019 at 4:07 pm

"Is that a fair construal of the structure of your argument here?"

No, it's wrong.



K. B. T. Twitter says:

September 12, 2019 at 12:30 pm

Again, I can't reply directly to the post I want to reply to. How annoying.

In fact, an attraction to some abstract notion of “biological sex” is just as “implausible, oddly disembodied, and unsatisfying” as to an abstract and quite possibly unstated gender identity, as people are not attracted to chromosomes and hidden identities – but mistaken attractions can happen in either direction, and to some people, gender identity actually deeply matters in their attraction (it just needs to be known first to have an effect, just like “biological sex” has for others). Again, the possibility of “stealth” is denied here, despite trans people’s (and their partners’) lived experiences; if sex were always obvious, it would make sense that it is so decisive, but it isn’t so obvious, and *even if it is*, it’s not necessarily decisive, as countless trans people can attest.

In fact, sexual attraction *is* often fleeting and superficial, and people experience sexual attraction even to people they *know* are trans and not of their “preferred sex”:

<https://drzhana.com/are-men-attracted-to-trans-women-with-penises-gay/>

The real point isn’t sex or attraction, but dating and long-term relationships – and that’s a cultural issue due to social dynamics such as peer pressure, bigotry and bias, not inherent attraction. That’s what the piece in them.us is showing, and that’s its point.

The argument that attraction to trans people as their gender identity is always fleeting and essentially mistaken is powered by confirmation bias: by accepting dubious GCRF premises in the first place.

The historical reality, rather, was completely different than claimed here: whether a person, especially a man, identified as the equivalent of straight or gay was more tied to gender expression and top/bottom role in sex, rather than “biological sex”, which was not a widely recognized category, even in Europe, before the 18th century – before the discovery of the ovum. Rather, in the Aristotelian tradition, women were essentially treated as “defective” men, not a completely separate category.

“Feminine men” and “masculine women” were not simply treated as men and women respectively, but varyingly, even as more or less separate genders, much like in various non-modern-Western cultures (even the femminielli of Naples and the travestis of South America forming a kind of “third gender”, as ethnography has put it), and much like many people still treat gender-variant people.

And besides, funny enough, if you define “reptile” in a way that is phylogenetically meaningful, as many scientists no do, it turns out that birds *are* reptiles. See Wikipedia.



Cathy D says:

July 30, 2019 at 7:52 am

Hi. I’m an actual gender-critical feminist. This means a feminist who considers gender and the theory that gender is innate (pink and blue brains), rather than a social construct which has been used to subjugate women, to be harmful nonsense. The only way it relates to transgender issues is that some transgender people consider themselves to have an innate sense of gender. This is absolutely fine. I don’t go around telling people how to live their lives, or how they experience a concept I have never encountered. It may even be that this strong feeling is the very thing that distinguishes transgender people from everyone else. The problem is when well-meaning people then try to extend this concept to me when I entirely reject it both personally, and as a classifier for the group I do belong to.

I don’t recognise your description of gender critical feminists at all – you are committing the very error of making assumptions about a group you don’t understand that you ascribe to GC feminists re transgender people! As you belong to neither group, how about talking to people who do? There are even GC transgender people you know, who you might be

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**Cathy D** says:

July 30, 2019 at 8:28 am

The problem isn't transition and all its various labels. There is one problem which is in a patriarchal society female people are discriminated against and abused by male people. While this exists, sex is material and socially relevant. And there is another problem which is lack of acceptance of people presenting in ways which do not conform with gender stereotypes. So as the first is rather difficult, how about we deal with the second first? Let's accept people however they want to behave and present themselves, regardless of their sex. I rather suspect that if we were to do that, all genuine and decent transgender people would accept the situations where it is necessary to distinguish by sex, which is not relevant to their personalities or inner selves and really not important on the scale of things, but only for fairness, safety or medical reasons. Then secondly we can continue to work on solving male violence and the inequalities inherent in a patriarchal society (which I suspect the first would go some way to resolving anyway). Once we've done that, sex becomes less relevant because women will be safe, they will have equity of opportunity from birth, there will be no need for women's shelters etc etc. So only relevant in medicine and sport. I think that's a future that both feminists and transgender people can support wholeheartedly.

[Reply](#)**sillyolyou** says:

July 31, 2019 at 5:16 pm

I'm a trans person who doesn't think gender is "innate". I don't think very many trans people do. You're getting your ideas of what trans people think from a distorted source.

[Reply](#)**lukeroelofs** says:

July 31, 2019 at 11:05 pm

Hi Cathy,

So I'm a bit uncertain how to take your comment. You say "I'm an actual gender-critical feminist. This means a feminist who considers gender... to be harmful nonsense... I don't recognise your description of gender critical feminists at all... I am an lgbt campaigner, I play football and go dancing weekly with transgender friends so enough of your stereotypes! We all get on perfectly well and respect the way we all are... Let's accept people however they want to behave and present themselves, regardless of their sex."

One possibility is that, in the sense I've been using the term here, 'gender-critical (radical) feminist' isn't actually applying to you, even though you are a feminist who is critical of gender. Just to be upfront: I am unsure whether I made the right decision, in using the term 'gender-critical radical feminism' here, precisely because I don't think it's a very good descriptor. I would have said 'TERFs' (trans-exclusionary radical feminists), which is shorter, more recognisable, and I think more descriptive. But the people in question have made a big deal about rejecting that term, and calling it a slur (in my view wrongly), precisely because it has come to have very negative associations (in my view deserved), and I didn't want to give people a way to dismiss my arguments as 'oh he's just hurling slurs and being abusive'.

So: maybe you're not the target of what I've written here, because you're not a "gender-critical" (a euphemism for TERF), but just critical of gender (just like lot of pro-trans feminists are)? In which case, I'm sorry for the confusion, and that's a data point for my 'don't bother using GCRF, just call them TERFs' file.

[Reply](#)

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Well that disgraceful term is a slur, and your opinion on that doesn't matter because it has been independently and legally agreed to be so, as well as being clearly observable to be so. It's also complete nonsense – I'm certainly not "trans-exclusive" (exclusive in what sense?) and most of the feminists I know are the most open-minded inclusionary people you could imagine. So if you still reject it's a slur, just don't use it because it's intellectually vacuous and makes me imagine you as being rather slack-jawed and glazed. Or don't use it because the vast majority of the people who do so are men who are full of glee at being able to slander women they aren't allowed to call "bitch" or "feminazi" in public. I certainly wouldn't have bothered replying if you I had thought you were one of the people who throws it around. Presumably you know this, and avoided it so you wouldn't be scorned.

But is it me who is confused? You very clearly attack the gender critical position above as being transphobic. It is transphobic, apparently, to reject that there is a universal "mysterious inner thing called gender identity". So given what I set out above, I am very clearly your main target.

And yes Silly you above, I absolutely agree that the vast majority of trans people don't agree with this mysterious gender essence. The majority just want to get on with their lives and not be discriminated against, not try to reshape the world in their own image and tell people that if they are not trans they confirm to their "gender". I'm very happy not doing so while not being trans, like most of my feminist and LGB friends 😊



lukeroelofs says:

August 1, 2019 at 3:31 pm

I'm confused. I write a post saying that there are these false and transphobic ideas out there being promoted and they're bad. You say you don't recognise yourself in any of those ideas. And yet instead of being angry that people are spreading transphobic lies around, you're angry that I'm criticising them. You don't seem to have any problem with TERFs but you seem to really have a problem with people who criticize them.

"It is transphobic, apparently, to reject that there is a universal "mysterious inner thing called gender identity". So given what I set out above, I am very clearly your main target."

Look, a lot is riding here on the phrase 'mysterious inner thing'. What I'm saying it's transphobic to deny is that many people experience feelings and desires to do with gender that seem to be independent of any obvious analysis in terms of conformity to stereotypes or factual delusions about genetics. In that this makes it hard to analyze, we could say it's mysterious; in that it clearly doesn't come from outside pressure in any straightforward sense, we could say it's inner. But that doesn't imply that everyone has one, or has one in the same way, or that it's innate. It doesn't yet imply any positive theory of it. It's a label that's come to be used for something observed.

(I think the term is also sometimes used as a synonym for 'gender identification', such that anyone who gives an answer to 'what gender are you?' is thereby expressing their gender identity. It seems to me at least a live option that these two usages are tracking slightly different things, and that some people have a gender identity in one sense but not another.)



K. B. T. Twitter says:

September 12, 2019 at 12:49 pm

I agree that TERF is an inappropriate term, but not because it is offensive, but because it is too mild. As you

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**Alice says:**

July 30, 2019 at 8:15 am

Thanks for writing this, dear author ❤️ I cannot believe the amount of transphobia in the comments (well, I can...this is British analytic philosophy afterall!) But thank you thank you thank you for sticking up for trans people as a cis person in the field. We need more people like you if analytic philosophy intends on being a place where minorities can feel safe to exist, whether they research on gender and feminism or some other field! More than that, we need to make sure analytic philosophy isn't the discipline providing underlying justification for an ideology that actively harms people! GCRFs are basically really harmful sophists, which I think you demonstrated very clearly in your essay! Much love ❤️ ❤️ ❤️

[Reply](#)**Cathy D says:**

August 1, 2019 at 6:02 pm

I've got it. So you don't actually take any issue with the philosophy / activism you pretend to be attacking, or at least if you do you're unable to explain why. It's just that a few women have said things in line with that world view and you don't like that. But though you're itching to call them bitches you have to pretend to be right on and intellectual. So you frame it as a philosophical dispute. Well done clever clogs! Yes I am calling out your criticism of people under false pretences. Not engaging any further for the reasons already explained above following your use of intellectually impoverished gendered hate speech

[Reply](#)**K. B. T. Twitter says:**

September 12, 2019 at 12:43 pm

It's not a philosophical dispute, true; it's GCRFs who pretend so in order to be taken seriously in academia. You did it yourself: you called GCRF a "philosophy". Nice self-own.

**IllMadeKnight says:**

July 30, 2019 at 2:55 pm

As someone who supports gender-critical feminism – as a man I don't think I can legitimately call myself "a feminist" so much as "a supporter of feminism" – I want to spend a few moments setting a few points in order. For the sake of argument, let's concede some ground – let's accept the trans-inclusive definition of gender, and say that "women" means anyone who identifies as a woman, regardless of their body or their past identifications. Let's retreat from that ground, and find an inclusive term to refer to the group of people that GCRFs would call "women." Just for the sake of argument, let's call them "OFABs," because they were Observed (not Assigned) Female At Birth. This group includes cis women, trans men, and female-bodied nonbinary people, but not trans women, cis men, or male nonbinary people.

(Another point of order – there are people with intersex conditions, but these conditions are always deformations of what is otherwise a male or female body. There are no cases where a person's biological sex is actually indeterminate. Planes are planes and cars are cars, but a car with no wheels and a plane with no wings aren't the same thing – and a wheelless car doesn't stop being a car. Intersex activism has clear roots in an older and more primitive era of science, where boys with deformed penises or testicles would be subject to surgery to make them like unto girls. Their suffering is real, but like the plight of thalidomide babies, the advancement of medical science has stopped this completely, and it's no longer worthy of discussion as an ongoing problem.)

We know that OFABs exist as a distinct class, and they have interests and circumstances that unify them as a class; they both require specialized health care (material) and face discrimination and violence (social). Moreover, much of this

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We could claim that “women” suffer from misogyny, but unless transwomen pass perfectly, I would not call their experience “misogyny” – people who are crude to women generally aren’t down with trans-inclusivity and aren’t regarding transwomen as women. If anything, I would compare male prejudice against transwomen with male homophobia and gay-panic scares, since both fears ultimately come from the same source (straight male fear of unknowingly or unwillingly performing gay sex, or being seduced into homosexuality). Resorting to the dictionary and saying “transwomen are women so prejudice against them is ipso-facto misogyny” isn’t helpful, because that’s denying the facts on the ground – maybe we can give ground on the name, but then we’d need a new one for the very similar experiences faced by OFABs of all genders, and once we’ve named it, I would argue that it’s what actually matters.

If we go by the claim that transwomen are also in danger from cis men, well, I can’t deny that this is true – but gay men and transmen are **also** at risk from them. We very well could divide intimate spaces between “predators” and “prey,” though obviously we’d need better names for them, but this wouldn’t be affirming (it denies transmen, or else it accepts them but asserts that it doesn’t matter) and it puts gay but unambiguously male men in the same presence as the women.

Furthermore, I think there’s a question of... I don’t like the word “impropriety,” but I think it fits. I don’t deny the fact that transwomen are often in danger from cismen, but I expect acknowledgment of the fact that ciswomen can be in real danger from transwomen (or people calling themselves transwomen). When we cross-reference reported crimes against transwomen with crimes committed **by** them... much is made of the murder of transwomen, but these numbers are inflated by race (African American transwomen are about as likely to suffer violence as African American men) and by nationality (most high-profile murders of transwomen take place in Brazil, which has one of the highest murder rates in the world for every sort of person.) In the United States, at least, transwomen are meaningfully more likely to assault ciswomen than vice-versa, and in the United Kingdom, half of all transwomen prisoners are sex criminals. Now, one could make the argument that in the UK, at least, most of those prisoners are just bad actors who just want a cushier sentence and/or access to more victims, but that position is untenable – under the self-ID regime, there’s no remedy against such people, and unless a more substantial criteria can be found, “transwomen” and “men who deceptively call themselves transwomen” are indistinguishable.

And so it goes. It all comes down to one thing – even if transwomen are saints, which I don’t believe they are, it makes no sense to strip one saint to clothe another. The consequences of trans affirmation are real and deadly for ciswomen, and the dangers transwomen face from cismen are fundamentally **not their problem to fix** – it is a problem for us OMABs to sort out among ourselves.

[Reply](#)



lukeroelofs says:

July 31, 2019 at 11:09 pm

Hi Illmadeknight

“unless transwomen pass perfectly, I would not call their experience “misogyny... maybe we can give ground on the name, but then we’d need a new one for the very similar experiences faced by OFABs of all genders, and once we’ve named it, I would argue that it’s what actually matters.”

I don’t want to get too into arguing semantics or ‘resorting to the dictionary’, but a lot of the discrimination, harassment, violence, and objectification that trans women face is absolutely coming from the same social and psychological causes, and working in the same way, as the similar treatment faced by cis women. Some isn’t (e.g. transphobic stuff). The same goes, in respect of different sorts of issues, for trans men. A trans man who is denied an abortion is suffering as a result of the same kind of misogyny as a cis woman who is denied an abortion, but a trans man who suddenly finds himself being paid more, promoted more, listened to more, isn’t. So there isn’t a homogeneous category of forms of oppression that targets only women, or that targets only AFAB people. That’s

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“people who are crude to women generally aren’t down with trans-inclusivity and aren’t regarding transwomen as women.”

My impression is that if you actually spend time in the trans community, it is well-known that actually, a lot of straight cis men, including a lot of creepy or predatory ones, are extremely into trans women (they are ‘chasers’). So I think this claim of yours reflects ignorance.

(Also – people who are crude to women can have any kind of ideological views, that is the unfortunate nature of society. There is no ideological litmus test for not being a creep or an abuser.)

“in the United Kingdom, half of all transwomen prisoners are sex criminals”

This is not true. The statistic you’re drawing on (60 out of 125, right?) only counts prisoners who have had a case conference to decide how to house them, which won’t include those who haven’t disclosed their trans status, won’t include many who are in prison only for short periods, and won’t include those who already have a GRC. It is not a representative sample. (I’m going by what’s reported here <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-42221629>).

I’m not going to trawl through all the other empirical claims you make, because I have better things to do than debunk them. I think spreading false claims that link a minority group with sexual crime is not good.

“under the self-ID regime, there’s no remedy against such people”

A female inmate judged to present an extreme threat to other women can be kept in the male estate.

“The consequences of trans affirmation are real and deadly for ciswomen...”

Affirming trans women is not dangerous to cis women.

“...and the dangers transwomen face from cis men are fundamentally *not their problem to fix* – it is a problem for us OMABs to sort out among ourselves.”

What does this mean, in practice? What political strategy is implied in saying ‘cis men’s abuse of trans women is not feminists’ problem, it’s something men need to sort of for themselves’. Like, I know I keep saying this, but intersectionality is actually a really good idea! Progressive activism should stand up for everybody, both as a moral stance as a practical matter of coalition-building.

[Reply](#)



Cathy D says:

August 1, 2019 at 8:26 am

Do you claim to be an academic? You need to start from a point of honesty with the data, whether it gives you what you would like to see or not. I totally agree that we need better data for a better understanding of this problem. However, we can still estimate using what we have. We know that only 4% of male prisoners are on sentences of less than 6 months. We know that only 1% of the transgender population has legally transitioned with a GRC. Therefore the number of uncounted trans prisoners is only likely to represent an additional 5% increasing the total to 132. This has no meaningful impact on the overall conclusions. If we were to believe that trans sex offending was more like the female figures (of 3%) then there would have to be an extra 1875 ‘hidden’ transgender prisoners. There is no evidence to suggest this is the case. And why do you expect anyone to continue reading when you decide you don’t like the data so you’re just going to reject it all with a cavalier brush of your arm?

But forget the transgender issue altogether. This is not a transgender problem. We have absolutely no idea how many of those prisoners are legitimately transgender, or indeed what transgender actually means. There is no data that suggests that males who identify as transgender, regardless of whether they are honest or not, are safer than any other males.

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have been raped and murdered by male sex offenders housed with them (I make no judgement on whether those males were transgender or not, because it is not possible to do so). So the issue here is, if females are at risk from male sex offenders, why would we house any of them with females? The numbers don't actually matter. Should we house one male sex offender with women?

And yes, this is a problem for males. (By the way intersectionality doesn't mean what you think it means – it means that people who are members of an oppressed group have a different experience of oppression based on their membership of other groups. It doesn't mean “cooperation” or “Feminists must be kind to everyone or we'll hit them with a big stick!!!”) Solutions to discrimination, oppression and violence BY MALES need to start coming from males. Why should feminists get involved when men aren't lifting a finger? And how, exactly, are we supposed to solve it without men getting on board? Nag them? If you haven't noticed, there is an imbalance of power and women are at the wrong end of it. Action needs to come from those who have the power please. Start now.



lukeroelofs says:

August 1, 2019 at 3:30 pm

“We know that only 4% of male prisoners are on sentences of less than 6 months. We know that only 1% of the transgender population has legally transitioned with a GRC. Therefore the number of uncounted trans prisoners is only likely to represent an additional 5%”

That doesn't follow.

“the issue here is, if females are at risk from male sex offenders, why would we house any of them with females?”

There are already provisions to house woman offenders who pose a risk to other women in the male estate. It is, I agree, important to be concerned for everyone's safety in prison, especially vulnerable prisoners, which many woman prisoners are. I think making risk to other prisoners an explicitly weighed factor is the obvious policy to do this.

Maybe you think this policy hasn't been well applied (as the Karen White case seems to suggest) or won't be well-applied in the future. Honestly, I wouldn't be surprised, because prisons are awful places that make most inmates more likely to reoffend and are rife with violence. There are a lot of ways that prison policy could be improved (starting with releasing most of the prisoners!) but agitating to replace a policy that says ‘consider the risk a prisoner poses to other prisoners’ with one that says ‘only consider the prisoner's assigned sex at birth’ is not one of them.

““intersectionality doesn't mean what you think it means – it means that people who are members of an oppressed group have a different experience of oppression based on their membership of other groups. It doesn't mean “cooperation” or “Feminists must be kind to everyone or we'll hit them with a big stick!!!””

It seems to me that the term is used to convey both the analytic claim you give here – which was what I thought Illmadeknight was neglecting in talking about a homogeneous category of oppression faced by all AFAB people – and a connected practical stance. I think someone saying they are an ‘intersectional feminist’ is expressing precisely that they aim to care about and support resistance to all forms of oppression. The connection is that, given the analytic claim, the alternative to the practical stance (caring only about one axis of oppression) is likely to mean, in practice, not just ignoring but actively reinforcing other forms of oppressions. E.g. anti-racism that isn't feminist is liable to be sexist because it's likely to centre and universalise the experiences and needs of non-white men over those of non-white women.

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Hi lukeroelofs

“I don’t want to get too into arguing semantics or ‘resorting to the dictionary’, but a lot of the discrimination, harassment, violence, and objectification that trans women face is absolutely coming from the same social and psychological causes, and working in the same way, as the similar treatment faced by cis women.”

What evidence or reasoning is there to support this assertion? I would assert, as I have, that marginalization faced by cis women (or trans men) is based fundamentally on the idea that they are “just women,” whereas the marginalization faced by trans men comes from the same place as that faced by gay men, that they are a threat to masculinity.

“The same goes, in respect of different sorts of issues, for trans men. A trans man who is denied an abortion is suffering as a result of the same kind of misogyny as a cis woman who is denied an abortion, but a trans man who suddenly finds himself being paid more, promoted more, listened to more, isn’t. So there isn’t a homogeneous category of forms of oppression that targets only women, or that targets only AFAB people. That’s intersectionality.”

If “misogyny” affects trans men, then what’s the common thread? Imagine if we were to construct a Venn diagram of marginalization experiences with four categories – cis women, trans men, trans women, and homosexual cis men. It is my assertion that if we place down incidences of marginalization, we will find that the majority of those targeting cis women will be in common with those targeting trans men – aka fellow OFABs – and relatively few in common with transwomen, especially in comparison to those in common with gay men. And we would never say that gay men suffer from misogyny.

“Honestly, I think it’s kind of fucked up to say ‘the oppression of AFAB people, regardless of gender, is what actually matters.’ Oppression matters, whoever it targets. Again, intersectionality.”

I beg your pardon for expressing my point crudely. Let me try to explain at a bit more length...

In any demographic binary structure – male and female, heterosexual and homosexual, native and foreigner, abled and disabled – it is 99% possible to identify which element is the privileged or oppressive element, and which element is the unprivileged or marginalized element. In the male-female binary, male is dominant and female is marginalized; in the abled-disabled binary, abled is dominant and female is dominant.

There are two measures used to equalize these binaries. The first is segregation – setting apart assets and resources for the exclusive use of the marginalized element. The second is quotas – guaranteeing the representation of the marginalized element in spaces that are otherwise dominated by the privileged element. If we just limit our demographic vision to men and women, and we’ve established that women are the marginalized element, then this gives way naturally to two responses – we set aside special assets (money, space, time) for things exclusively for women, and we establish quotas to ensure that women are represented among men because privilege and marginalization means that they’ll be over-represented in any space that’s a free-for-all.

When we add intersectionality to the mix – when we add multiple axes of marginalization – then things get slightly more complicated. The way everyone solves this knot is by making a diamond – people who are double-privileged are at the top and get no support, people who are half-privileged-half-marginalized each get a slot beneath and get one brand of support, and people who are double-marginalized get one at the bottom and get both, and may also get something unique just to them.

This, I think, makes intuitive sense to anyone plugged into the mindset. The idea of some asset or space or quota as being “Women’s Progress (whites only)” or “Advancement of African-Americans (no girls)” instinctively rubs people the wrong way, as well it should – the diamond model acknowledges the fact that demographics is a ladder, and most people who experience marginalization also enforce it in their own ways. Black men can be misogynist, white women can be racist, and black women can be homophobic. For that reason, these assets and quotas have to be enforced not only against the people at the very top, but also against the groups immediately above them.

(This model works no matter how many binary axes you apply. If you have three, then the 1-2-1 diamond becomes a 1-2-3-2-1 diamond.)

So back to the very heart of the matter. The current sex + transgender pyramid goes something like this – cis men at the top, cis women and trans men set laterally in the middle, and trans women at the bottom with access to all resources. Anything that is “for women” is open to ciswomen and transwomen, and anything that is “for trans” is open to transmen and transwomen, but ciswomen and transmen don’t have a class that they share.

My input on this is that it should be expressed as M/F + GNC, for gender (non)conformity. This model puts cismen at the top as they are currently, but puts ciswomen (as OFAB + conformity) in the second run *lateral* to transwomen (as OMAB + nonconformity), with transmen (as OFAB + nonconformity) at the bottom. My reasoning for this is that ciswomen+transwomen do not have a meaningful commonality of experience, compared to ciswomen+transmen, to constitute them as a “class” that can be reasonably supported with assets or quotas.

My basis for making this assertion is twofold – one, that a huge part of cisfemale marginalization is biological in nature (abortion, period poverty, etc), and two, that marginalization by cismen against transwomen is fundamentally centered around *a refusal to acknowledge them as women.*

Now, of course some transwomen can reliably pass, but in that case I would only call their experiences “misogyny” if the person subjecting them to it genuinely wasn’t aware that they were trans and it was a function of disguise. To postulate that transwomen receive “misogyny” as transwomen implies that someone has said something like, “I acknowledge your transition, but since you’re now a woman, it’s time for you to get in the kitchen and make a sandwich.”

“My impression is that if you actually spend time in the trans community, it is well-known that actually, a lot of straight cis men, including a lot of creepy or predatory ones, are extremely into trans women (they are ‘chasers’). So I think this claim of yours reflects ignorance.”

I’ve spent a bit of time *with* that community, before I realized I was gender-critical, and if there’s one thing I learned from them it’s that gay dating & gay hookup services are filled with men who definitely describe themselves as straight but, y’know, are just looking for a platonic j/o buddy. So I don’t think the sex stuff is necessarily on straight men.

A person is a collection of data-points, and just like a gerrymandered election, the way we choose to contextualize and group those data points can completely change our interpretation of them. I am a pretty straight dude, and I’m thirsty enough that I don’t mind how an OFAB potential partner dresses or presents herself, but I definitely don’t accept OMABs as potential partners. By re-grouping these data points, you could just as well say “here’s a pansexual toketophile.” It depends on the point we want to make. If we start from a position like, “transwomen are women, therefore a man who accepts them as a partner is a straight

“This is not true. The statistic you’re drawing on (60 out of 125, right?) only counts prisoners who have had a case conference to decide how to house them, which won’t include those who haven’t disclosed their trans status, won’t include many who are in prison only for short periods, and won’t include those who already have a GRC. It is not a representative sample.”

Here’s the relevant quote:

“A government survey has counted 125 transgender prisoners in England and Wales, but the Ministry of Justice says these figures are not yet a reliable reflection of the true numbers. The MoJ says 60 of them have been convicted of one or more sexual offences but it didn’t identify their gender.”

Unless we’re asserting that transmen are suddenly much more likely than their cis sisters to commit sex crimes, I think we can very safely assume that maybe 59 of these 60 are transwomen, which preserves the core point. The idea that the government can’t track how many inmates have GRCs is also absurd, and the fact that this data is missing suggests it paints a dirty picture.

A thought experiment – gay men who could be described as “swishy” are certainly in great danger in prison. Would you support them being moved to women’s prison, despite the fact that they are men?

“I’m not going to trawl through all the other empirical claims you make, because I have better things to do than debunk them. I think spreading false claims that link a minority group with sexual crime is not good.”

As it please ye.

“A female inmate judged to present an extreme threat to other women can be kept in the male estate.”

What evidence is there to support this assertion? It may be on the books, but if there are no examples of it then it’s specious.

“What does this mean, in practice? What political strategy is implied in saying ‘cis men’s abuse of trans women is not feminists’ problem, it’s something men need to sort of for themselves’. Like, I know I keep saying this, but intersectionality is actually a really good idea! Progressive activism should stand up for everybody, both as a moral stance as a practical matter of coalition-building.”

The political strategy implied by this statement is that assets for the benefit of transwomen should not be drawn from the pool already allotted to ciswomen, but should instead be drawn from the same pool that supports gay men. Assets – physical spaces, sports leagues, scholarships, Michfest, and the Zapatista women’s conference, as well as any quota on male-dominated spaces, such as university enrollment, employment, authority panels, or similar – that are reserved for women should be understood as being reserved for OFABs, regardless of their state of gender identity or gender conformity, and not made available to transwomen.

Intersectionality is grand, but only if it recognizes and positively addresses the elements of marginalization *within and between* intersectional groups. We already know this; people scoff at “white feminism” as refusing to acknowledge its own place within the larger hierarchy. All I’m saying, is this policy has to be applied universally.

We’ll talk more tomorrow, I’m sure.



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accept the idea that “the current sex + transgender pyramid goes something like this – cis men at the top, cis women and trans men set laterally in the middle, and trans women at the bottom”. I don’t see that as concrete enough to have a truth-value.

(I think the diamond model, in particular, rests on what seems to me like an over-simple ‘additive’ understanding of intersectionality, on which different oppressions only ever compound one another and don’t qualitatively change or mitigate each other.)

It’s also just not true that “There are two measures used to equalize these binaries. The first is segregation... The second is quotas” Where in this analysis do we fit things like fighting rape myths, demanding representation in media, passing anti-discrimination laws, replacing biased judges who refuse to enforce anti-discrimination laws, legalising abortion, etc. – there are all sorts of ways to ‘equalise binaries’, and they can’t be enumerated in the abstract. Heck, providing a better social safety net can be a major way of advancing women’s equality in contexts where women tend to be economically dependent on men, despite having in itself nothing to do with gender.

Even when looking at quotas and segregation specifically, talking about the allocation being all about ‘who is more oppressed’ ignores that the act of policing the distinction among different groups, or forcing them to reveal personal medical history, can be a cost in itself.

In general, your analytical framework here seems to me to be useful for only one thing, which is to relentlessly focus our attention specifically on those forms of progressive activism that might involve rivalrous distribution of scarce resources, i.e. to make us see things in zero-sum terms, so that we can bicker over who is more oppressed than who and deserves more. Like other GCRF talking-points, it seems to me to obscure more of social reality than it illuminates, and does so in a way that pushes us towards seeing conflicts between cis and trans women.

(I was especially baffled by “assets for the benefit of transwomen should not be drawn from the pool already allotted to ciswomen, but should instead be drawn from the same pool that supports gay men” Why on earth would we want to ‘draw assets from the pool’ of stuff supporting gay men, and use them to support trans women? I don’t even know why you didn’t say ‘draw from the pool supporting cis men’, i.e. draw from the richest part of society. Like, if we’re thinking about scarce financial resources, why think it’s better to impoverish gay men than to demand things, i dunno, general taxation? And if we’re not thinking about scarce financial resources, we don’t have to impoverish any marginalised group in order to support another.)

You say a bunch of stuff about people’s experiences of oppression:

“if we were to construct a Venn diagram of marginalization experiences with four categories – cis women, trans men, trans women, and homosexual cis men. It is my assertion that if we place down incidences of marginalization, we will find that the majority of those targeting cis women will be in common with those targeting trans men... and relatively few in common with transwomen”

“ciswomen+transwomen do not have a meaningful commonality of experience, compared to ciswomen+transmen”

“To postulate that transwomen receive “misogyny” as transwomen implies that someone has said something like, “I acknowledge your transition, but since you’re now a woman, it’s time for you to get in the kitchen and make a sandwich.”

“I am a pretty straight dude, and I’m thirsty enough that I don’t mind how an OFAB potential partner dresses or presents herself, but I definitely don’t accept OMABs as potential partners. By re-grouping these data points, you could just as well say “here’s a pansexual toketophile.”

All these assertions you make about whose experience resembles whose, who is attracted to who, what kind of abuse trans women do or don’t suffer, strike me as implausible and ignorant, based on all the testimony I’ve read. (And I have no clue what a toketophile is, nor any interest in who you accept as potential partners.) But I’m not really the person to tell you this with authority, and there’s probably not that much value in two cis dudes trading our reckons about different groups’ oppression. Readers who are interested in evaluating this dispute should go listen to someone more qualified.



K. B. T. Twitter says:

September 12, 2019 at 1:00 pm

I wonder how IllMadeKnight classifies XY women, i. e., women with complete androgen sensitivity syndrome, given that they are classified as female at birth and yet do not have uteruses, while some who are classified as male at birth have.

[Reply](#)



K. B. T. Twitter says:

September 12, 2019 at 1:13 pm

Also, IllMadeKnight’s pronouncements about intersex people in general are profoundly ignorant and offensive.

[Reply](#)



Corazon says:

July 31, 2019 at 7:19 am

Wow, a man mansplaining ‘the right and the wrong form of feminism’. How woke. Just what we needed.

[Reply](#)



Cathy D says:

August 2, 2019 at 3:06 am

Just to add, luke, your answer to me here was even more offensive on a number of counts. Yes, people seeking to downplay the effect of male violence often say ‘women are violent too’ and yes violent incidents happen between women in prison. But this discounts the entire female experience which is that men as a class are dangerous and violent to women as a class, not just as some one off incident. Men have power over women, are more violent, able to rape, bigger and stronger, and actively seek out female victims to dominate. Women sometimes fight. You’re being both disingenuous and deaf to women.

And your continued misinterpretation of intersectionality – what can I say. Feminists are no more obliged to fight for everyone suffering than ‘black lives matter’ is equivalent to ‘all lives matter’. And just because disabled women, black women, lesbian women, experience a different shade to sexism, the basic experience of misogyny is the same. We are all women fighting the same fight since birth. Eddie Izzard, for example, though undoubtedly the target of some abuse by other men, does not have the experience of sex discrimination that all women be they black, white, lesbian, straight, whatever, share.

Now, you can continue thinking you are very clever and try to argue at a tangent or set up straw men or false premises and clap yourself on the back for your ridiculous wiggling, or you could do what will actually impress

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**properlypurple** says:

August 1, 2019 at 3:09 am

Thank you for writing this.

[Reply](#)**jediger** says:

August 2, 2019 at 9:46 am

This is such an excellent breakdown of “Gender Critical” arguments that you have removed the last sneaking suspicion that they may be correct from my mind.

I find the responses thus far to be illuminating... They have generally been of three flavors:

Those who are aghast that a MAN is addressing this topic without bowing down to the GC consensus. In truth, GCRFs do this to literally anyone who disagrees with them. When cis women argue against their point of view, they call them handmaidens, so don't feel bad.

And then those who didn't read the article, but feel the need to drop in with condescending but juvenile reminders that dictionaries exist.

And there are those who read the article, and then claim that you misrepresented their case, proceeding to then re-iterate several of the points you addressed in your article.

They've said absolutely nothing that addresses your point that their unifying raison d'être is hatred of trans women, first and foremost. What you said about their attraction to trans women: “you find them unattractive or maybe too attractive” also seems to explain their almost psychosexual obsession.

One aspect, as an American, that seems odd to me about the UK trans “debate” is that there's a tinge of classism that doesn't appear in the American discourse. In the same way that changing your class is “not done,” changing your gender seems to touch on the same nerve? I'd be curious to hear your thoughts.

[Reply](#)**lukeroelofs** says:

August 4, 2019 at 1:47 pm

Thanks Jediger!

“What you said about their attraction to trans women: “you find them unattractive or maybe too attractive” also seems to explain their almost psychosexual obsession.”

Yeah, I hope that didn't seem like a salacious suggestion, since it's generally not good practice to speculate about people's attractions. But (as Illmadeknight is illustrating in his comments) GC material often pushes this underlying idea that nobody actually finds transwomen attractive unless they pass flawlessly as cis, or that anyone who does must really be attracted to men. And the message I get from both trans people's personal testimony and the limited amount of empirical work there is on the matter, is that this is more or less the opposite of the reality on the ground.

“One aspect, as an American, that seems odd to me about the UK trans “debate” is that there's a tinge of classism that doesn't appear in the American discourse. In the same way that changing your class is “not done,” changing your gender seems to touch on the same nerve? I'd be curious to hear your thoughts.”

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there's *more* transphobia in the UK than in America, so much as that it stands out more because in the US it tends to be coming from the openly homophobic anti-feminist side.

[Reply](#)



jediger says:

August 5, 2019 at 11:55 am

The GCRF reaction to trans people is more complex than the simple disgust response that, say, right-wingers display toward all LGBTQ people. They, on one hand, fetishize trans men by fawning over their feminine features, and then attack trans women for having ambiguous features (most of which fall within the bell curve of features cis women can have). It's clearly an obsession, above and beyond personal aversion.

I would say that there's more transphobia in England among center-left media establishments than in the US. The US obviously has its political right that rejects gays, lesbians and trans people in the same breath. I'm not well-versed enough in Australian and New Zealand politics to make any claims therein.



lukeroelofs says:

August 5, 2019 at 7:32 pm

Aha, I see what you mean. You may be on to something.

Something related though – my impression is that there's a fairly strong positive correlation between feminist views that are: trans-exclusionary, anti-porn, anti-sex work, anti-BDSM, and anti-queer/biphobic. Those are positions that tend to be criticised for amounting to criticising, shaming, or (literally and figuratively) policing other women; they also seem to share a kind of boundary anxiety? Like, a tendency to problematise people or activities that aren't readily classifiable as men/women, voluntary/coerced, pro-woman/anti-woman, gay/straight, etc. That's just my impression though.



Alice says:

August 4, 2019 at 2:55 pm

You won't let me reply to your replies to my comments. The scenario of women with integrity being smeared as closet transwomen is real, I know a beautiful looking heterosexual young woman this happened to when she was still a teenager and it made her feel suicidal such was her feeling of hurt and hopelessness.. This kind of vicious smearing cannot happen to a transwoman, if a transwoman is in the closet and rumoured to be trans then obviously that's the truth not a smear. It isn't rooted in transphobia it's rooted in the sad reality that some people sometimes use malicious rumours to bring an innocent down. Transwomen have a responsibility to be open about who they are and need to know how their living by 'stealth' can be abused by rumour mongers to hurt an innocent women.

[Reply](#)



lukeroelofs says:

August 4, 2019 at 3:43 pm

I'm sorry you can't comment directly as a reply, I think that's a wordpress feature to limit thread length.

I find it striking that you don't see how what you're saying is a perfect parallel to bogus homophobic tropes:

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open about who they are and need to know how their living by 'stealth' can be abused by rumour mongers to hurt an innocent women."

I hope that both the absurdity of this as a grievance against trans people, and the parallel to equally absurd homophobic grievances, isn't lost on readers.

(Also, just for the record, the only speculating about a woman being secretly trans that I've witnessed online has been from GCRF-supportive sites.)

(Also also the emphasis on "beautiful" "heterosexual" "women of integrity" is super-weird. Trans women can be beautiful, can be heterosexual, and can have integrity.)

[Reply](#)



Alice says:

August 4, 2019 at 10:02 pm

I don't think hiding your true sex is really comparable to hiding your true sexuality.



lukeroelofs says:

August 5, 2019 at 10:19 am

I don't think we're going to agree on this.



K. B. T. Twitter says:

September 12, 2019 at 1:15 pm

Funny enough, heterosexual feminists once did treat lesbians in *very* similarly to the way GCRFs now treat trans women: as creepy sexual predators.



jediger says:

August 5, 2019 at 12:04 pm

This comment only makes sense if you believe that trans women are sub-human.

You say that being compared to them is a grave insult, enough to make people suicidal.

You think that they should be required to out themselves in every situation in order to bear the full scorn of everyone who thinks they're icky.

I could make several tactless analogies between what you've said and the rhetoric that other hate groups spout about the people they despise. This is a red flag: you're in a hate group, and you're posting on some dude's blog about how you find a specific class of people disgusting. This should should give you pause, and you should think about your life choices.

[Reply](#)



Alice says:

August 8, 2019 at 12:41 pm

You can't have it all ways. Either transphobia is real or it isn't. I don't think transwomen are disgusting, I think pretending to be born female when you're aren't isn't good or honest so to rumour a woman a closet transwoman is slandering them.. No transwoman can suffer such a rumour.can they.

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August 8, 2019 at 1:28 pm

@Alice

Maybe all trans people should be required to sew pink triangles into their clothing? That seems like the logical extrapolation of what you've been suggesting.

**Alice says:**

August 4, 2019 at 4:49 pm

Ah ok, I thought you must have blocked me somehow because 2 responses I did a few days ago wouldn't post. Grievance against trans people? You're ascribing motivations I don't have. I described the person I know that this happened to, I mentioned her beauty and her sexuality to ensure it was clear that this isn't a case of a butch or lesbian woman being mistaken for male or a transwoman. Obviously I'm aware some transwomen can look beautiful and have integrity too but not if they are pretending to be something they're not. How would you like it if you were an honest female person who is what she says she is and society perceived you as a closet transwoman?

[Reply](#)**lukeroelofs says:**

August 4, 2019 at 6:17 pm

'Greivance' in the sense that you're telling this story about a problem that you think trans people have caused and should change their behaviour to stop causing.

I think trans people can have integrity while being stealth. I don't think people are obligated to share their medical history with the general public.

If people thought I was a closet trans man, I would not have a problem with that, because being trans is not bad. It would just be weird, like people thinking I was Swedish or a hockey player.

[Reply](#)**Alice says:**

August 4, 2019 at 7:22 pm

I think passing transwomen who hide the fact they are trans aren't doing themselves or people like the girl I mentioned any favours.

Swedish people and hockey players don't get on the other end of discrimination, rejection or transphobia so it's not comparable is it.

[Reply](#)**lukeroelofs says:**

August 4, 2019 at 7:39 pm

Right, hockey players don't face discrimination. When people face discrimination, they get to decide whether to be public about their identity, and whether to expose themselves to that discrimination. Blaming them for their decisions and saying they ought to be public amounts to imposing a duty on oppressed people to expose themselves to more oppression in order to protect members of the dominant group from that oppression. Which

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IllMadeKnight says:

August 6, 2019 at 10:55 am

Another day, another glass of Perrier... So let's keep this conversation going.

The diamond model may not be universal, but it's useful in these circumstances for the exact reason you mentioned – because it deals with rivalrous distribution of scarce resources, which is the entire core of the gender-critical objection to trans inclusion. Indeed, if I were to summarize the gender-critical position in one sentence, it would be as follows:

“Transwomen are using their self-identification to colonize segregated assets reserved for ciswomen.”

This is not the whole position, of course, and it's not even the whole sentence – there ought to be a whole subclause about how many of these transwomen are using their presence in these segregated assets for the active detriment of ciswomen, ie cotton ceiling rhetoric & Vancouver scrotum waxes. But since you would reject that out of hand, let's stick to what's written.

“Segregated assets” – we already know what these are. Women's bathrooms, women's sports, women's shelters, women's conferences, women's schools, and the blessed like. Obviously, yes obviously, there are other measures society can take for the advancement of women (or of anyone else), but this is what's under questioning; this, for our purposes, is what matters, because these are fundamentally zero-sum, this is where transwomen are a threat to ciswomen.

“Colonize” – what a bountiful word, this. We all know what this means, of course, and in this context we all know that it's the lowest of the low. If someone were to order a fake Purple Heart medal on the internet and use it to cadge free drinks at a bar, they'd be reprehensible. If someone borrowed a handicap decal and parked in the blue spaces, they'd be reprehensible. Rachel Dolezal, in all her glory, is reprehensible.

Heck, I could pull a Rachel Dolezal. Under the one-drop rule, I qualify as black, even though all the other drops are Mid-Atlantic bluebloods. But we all instinctively know that I shouldn't. We all instinctively know that it's stealing from the collections plate. It doesn't matter if my intentions are to sit quietly in the back and not bother anyone – my very presence, even if it's never noticed as such, even if it's never noticed at all, is still indecent. And if I actually steal a place or an opportunity from someone who actually qualifies, then it's reprehensible.

I can't stress this enough – *we all know this.* The outcry against Rachel Dolezal was universal, as is the outcry against Ja Du and Xiahn Nishi. And yet all the arguments against these people seem, at least to me, to apply perfectly against transgender, with nothing more than a wave of the hand to dismiss their similarities as being beneath contempt. (One might make an argument that Rachel Dolezal was lying about her, if you will, “trans-racial status” – but now that everybody knows and she's ‘fessing up, nobody's started accepting her.)

Let me ask you a direct question. Do you believe that a segregated asset with the standing to say “no men, only women” also has the legitimate standing to say “no transwomen, only ciswomen?”

[Reply](#).



jediger says:

August 6, 2019 at 11:41 am

I'd like to address your comparison between people who claim to be “transracial” vs “transgender.” The simple version of my counter argument is:

The relevant differences between men and women are less than the differences between people from different cultures. Granted, both involve, at the lowest level, differences in DNA, but those aren't relevant differences to this discussion.

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intended for asian students? Should they qualify for scholarships intended for Black students? There is not an easy answer for this question. We naturally give a lot of leeway in these scenarios.

Now, take a child who was born male, and socially transitioned to female at the age of 7, starting hormone blockers in her teens and cross-sex hormones when she turns 18. Her experience of the world would be almost identical to any cis woman her age. She would experience the same gendered oppression that other women experience. If she, as an adult, gets into a relationship with a man who abuses her, should she be able to seek refuge at a women's shelter? Does her trans-ness make her less deserving of those resources? Does the fact that she has never had a period solely disqualify her?

I have a feeling that the GCRF community REALLY has a problem with the existence of trans kids for this very reason. It blurs the line that they'd like to keep clear. If your compulsion to divide people into categories requires you to interfere with their autonomy, you should re-examine your motivations.

It's really easy to look at the cases with the greatest juxtapositions and declare "these are obviously wrong." These questions are always more complicated than they appear on the first viewing.

[Reply](#)



lukeroelofs says:

August 7, 2019 at 2:42 pm

Actually, we don't all share a precise understanding of what 'colonise' means, indeed the abuse of that word is rampant (e.g. in anti-immigrant rhetoric that deliberately runs together colonisation, invasion, and immigration), and it has a lot of connotations that don't really apply in this instance. Most obviously, it implies that the supposed 'colonisers' are exerting violent control. For another example, it implies that they aren't already there – even though trans women have been in women's spaces from the beginning. GCs aren't defending a current, cis-only, regime, they're trying to expel trans women from woman-only spaces.

Moreover, lots of the 'segregated assets' you describe ("Women's bathrooms, women's sports, women's shelters, women's conferences, women's schools") aren't actually zero-sum. Like, women's sports and conferences *benefit* from more people going into them: having fewer people trying to get in is what you want to avoid, it's a sign of failure. Bathrooms aren't zero-sum if amount of usage influences how much institutions spend on maintenance (I mean, between the out-of-the-way bathroom that barely anyone uses, or the big one that people are constantly in, I know which one I expect to be cleaner).

(I'm not saying that more usage of these things will always have a net good effect; I'm saying that it often will, and so holding them up as automatically zero-sum is false.)

Like, just to combine the 'trans women have been in women's spaces for years' and 'trans women entering women's spaces is not taking anything away from them' points, Sandy Stone joined Olivia Records, worked for it – i.e. contributed her labour, helped the lesbian feminist movement – and then was forced out by the activism of people who would now be called TERFs or GCRFs. Their activism is not a defence of women's spaces, it is more often an attack on them.

And, so, clearly you want to get me to stake out some position on Dolezal. But as Jediger nicely points out, cases of supposed 'transracialism' are much rarer than things like: people adopted across racial lines; mixed-race people; non-white people who can pass as white; people who are classified differently in different contexts (e.g. black or white in their home country, latinx in the US). Those phenomena are a better thing to have in view when thinking about how to weigh personal self-identifications into racial categories. Which, I should emphasise, I don't have a

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“Let me ask you a direct question. Do you believe that a segregated asset with the standing to say “no men, only women” also has the legitimate standing to say “no transwomen, only ciswomen?””

I think there are lots of contexts where it’s legitimate to organise people by particular traits that are often different between trans and cis women. The stock examples are things like screening for prostate cancer or ovarian cancer. But of course not all cis women have ovaries, and some trans men have ovaries. Anatomy matters, even when its decoupled from gender (indeed, since you threw it out there, the pro-trans take I’ve been seeing most frequently about Jessica Yaniv is that her lawsuits are wrong precisely because genital configuration is relevant to the mechanics of genital waxing, and it can make sense to only offer waxing services for vulvas without making any claims about which people are women and which aren’t). So I think it’s useful and valuable to be able to talk about concrete biological differences when they are relevant.

But GCRFs absolutely hate doing that. They complain vociferously whenever any institution uses language like ‘pregnant people’ instead of ‘pregnant mothers’, or ‘people who menstruate’ instead of ‘women’. They insist on using the word ‘woman’ even when something more specific is in question. Which is part of why I don’t really buy this manoeuvre you’re making: “surely you must accept that *under some circumstances* it could make sense to care whether someone was cis or trans?” like conceding that is one step towards the GCRF position. GCRFs actively work against the possibility of talking clearly about the ways that trans and cis women differ, and then accuse pro-trans feminists of doing so.

I guess it might make sense to have a space specifically for people to talk about the experience they had being raised as a girl, which a lot of trans women won’t have had (though as Jediger says, some might). But I have trouble seeing a context where the trans/cis distinction all by itself is relevant.

[Reply](#)



Alice says:

August 6, 2019 at 3:05 pm

There was a time when people seriously believed that black and white people were temperamentally different (some people still do) just as many people still believe about males and females. I’m not one of them, so for me the concept of a person having a female/male mind/temperament with the wrongly sexed body isn’t a concept I can believe in anymore than I can believe a person has a black/white mind/temperament with the wrongly skin toned body.

As you say Luke, we aren’t going to agree, thank you for your replies to me anyway.

[Reply](#)



jediger says:

August 7, 2019 at 1:02 pm

You’re arguing against an idea that almost no-one believes, least of all trans people.
You’re in a hate group.

[Reply](#)



oetpay says:

August 8, 2019 at 9:06 am

This is a lot of words but you can do it in one paragraph:

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You HAVE to pick one side, and trans people who write extensive philosophy on and debate with gcrf people are common, while gcrf people who acknowledge trans thinkers even exist do so from a position fundamentally exclusionary to those thinkers.

[Reply](#)



oetpay says:

August 8, 2019 at 9:07 am

In other words, trans people believe GCRFs are misguided, while GCRFs believe trans people are dishonest sexual predators with absolutely no restraints, one of which is an acceptable position to hold that permits debate and the other is not.

[Reply](#)



Boatshoe says:

August 8, 2019 at 2:07 pm

Your essay has value as an exposé of certain shortcomings in gender-critical feminist thinking, but it fails to address the very core of this controversy, focusing instead on items of secondary importance (although in their own right they certainly are relevant and interesting topics for applied philosophy). There would be nothing wrong with this, was it not for the fact that your stated goal is to entirely discredit GCRF, but as it is, it greatly harms your credibility in this undertaking. You fail to attack the foundations of GCRF. As long as there is no consensus on the definitions of female and male, or sex, there can be no resolution to this debate. This is a struggle over the meanings of words, in an increasingly polarized society. If you as a philosopher arrive at the conclusion that GCRF arguments are hateful and bogus, that is no excuse to hide and repress the questions they attempt to answer. I believe this course of action you recommend in your essay aligns with a counter-productive and dogmatic pattern of thought in the liberal West. Obscurantism will not benefit you as a liberal. It will benefit the conservative movements you associate with GCRF. To understand this, look at the American White House, and ask yourself what happened. Progress will always come from progressives. As a liberal you cannot afford to be intellectually dishonest in the way conservatives can, as their goals are fundamentally different from yours.

Apart from this basal flaw in the framing of your essay, I'll critique some points that particularly caught my attention:

1. You outline two ways of framing the question of gender identity; one that is tolerant and constructive, the other transphobic and biased, and you attribute the first the first to gender-critical feminism and the second to 'pro-trans'. I cannot attest to the validity or lack thereof in your claim. But certainly it is anecdotal, and the way you present these questions is tendentious. It is all well and good and admirable to ask them: "Where's that coming from? What are the psychological roots and structure of this fascinating phenomenon?" But quite simply it is bad philosophy to automatically take gender as the given starting point. The concept of gender is so nebulous and arbitrary that you have to frame it somehow, you have to frame it according to your own biases, to be able to ask any meaningful questions. Therefore I advice you to take a step back and explore other approaches, and think of gender (identity) as a very loosely defined field of ideations, schemes and impulses in the psyche. The difficulty is that, in doing so, you might find you actually end up 'gender-critical'.

You say that "If we can't come up with a good answer, we just have to work harder." This may be a good recipe for producing a large quantity of essays, but you may find they lead nowhere.

2. You dismiss GCRF's concerns for young people by reassuring us of good medical practice. I personally believe that these treatments for trans people should be available, and again, I won't venture to comment on the current state of health-care in various countries. Yet it has to be pointed out that GCRF criticizes the trans phenomenon on many levels in society and culture, especially as it affects young girls these days. They do not blame the medical establishment as the only or even the

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“But even if we thought women’s interest in ‘making it hard for opportunistic cis men to sneak into their bathroom’ was really so compelling and vital, the conflict is in practice between women-who-might-be-mistaken-for-men and more unambiguously feminine-looking looking women.”

Why is this the case in practice? Can there not simultaneously also be a conflict between cis women and trans women? It is beneficial to admit, if there are such conflicts at play. However I certainly agree that no clear solution has been provided, especially if we expect more GNC women in the future, and more difficulty in telling apart the bodies of cis and trans women.

In addition, you dismiss the perceived threat of trans women in female bathrooms, under a clever shroud of magnanimity:

“I’m making a point here of engaging with the most respectable-sounding version of this argument, the one that GCRFs in philosophy explicitly make – which is about opportunistic cis men claiming to be trans in order to enter the women’s bathrooms. Philosophy GCRFs emphasise that they are not claiming that trans women themselves are likely to assault or otherwise endanger cis women in bathrooms. That argument is more obviously transphobic, in that it positions a tiny minority of marginalised people as posing a major sexual threat to vulnerable women and children, validating the kind of mentality that gets trans women murdered.”

Unfortunately philosophy may not always be respectable. This is a painful and controversial question, and of course you have the choice to ask it or leave it unasked.

“GCRF is a feminist fig leaf waved in front of social conservatism. The more of it we hear, the less clearly we’ll understand things.”

This lack of clarity may be a sign of cognitive dissonance.

[Reply](#)



lukeroelofs says:

August 10, 2019 at 12:17 pm

Hi Boatshoe,

“Your essay has value as an exposé of certain shortcomings in gender-critical feminist thinking, but it fails to address the very core of this controversy... As long as there is no consensus on the definitions of female and male, or sex, there can be no resolution to this debate.”

I’m actually quite strongly of the opinion that this is not true – that rejecting movements driven by transphobia, and enquiring into the nature of sex and gender, are two different projects, and doing the former doesn’t require doing the latter. I think that this statement supports that position.

https://blog.apaonline.org/2019/08/07/on-philosophical-scholarship-of-gender-a-response-to-12-leading-scholars/?fbclid=IwAR2j7ekZaKn6eXqAdJ-nO8KBfXmYjysLItdvKpRYcrhqR79OJ395wI_7XMo

“that is no excuse to hide and repress the questions they attempt to answer. I believe this course of action you recommend in your essay aligns with a counter-productive and dogmatic pattern of thought in the liberal West. Obscurantism will not benefit you as a liberal....As a liberal you cannot afford to be intellectually dishonest” My dude, it is not intellectual dishonesty to discuss some questions while not discussing others. Also, I didn’t recommend a course of action.

“To understand this, look at the American White House, and ask yourself what happened.”

Oh shove off. Trump got elected because liberals weren’t intellectually honest enough? That is the worst take.

What happened to the American White House is that it turned out a big chunk of the population *were after

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“The concept of gender is so nebulous and arbitrary that you have to frame it somehow, you have to frame it according to your own biases, to be able to ask any meaningful questions. Therefore I advice you to take a step back and explore other approaches, and think of gender (identity) as a very loosely defined field of ideations, schemes and impulses in the psyche. The difficulty is that, in doing so, you might find you actually end up ‘gender-critical’.”

I am super critical of gender, as will be clear if I do get around to posting my actual opinions on the nature of sex and gender. But my thesis in this post was that respectful good faith inquiry into those topics won’t actually get you to the so-called ‘gender-critical’ position, because it only holds together through transphobia.

[Reply](#)



woman with an internet connection says:

August 10, 2019 at 4:18 pm

I’m not a GCRF, but I’ve found their ideas valuable, especially on a practical level in recognizing male exploitation patterns. Knowing this stuff when I was younger could have saved me a lot of grief, but I listened to the men who told me it was all bunk.

[Reply](#)



lukeroelofs says:

August 10, 2019 at 6:19 pm

I’m sorry to hear that. I hope the valuable ideas can be separated from the transphobic parts, to hopefully save other people from similar grief.

[Reply](#)



Astra Poole says:

August 11, 2019 at 12:37 pm

Re 3. The argument which is often put by GCRF (which you don’t address) is that the category ‘trans woman’ now includes (according to Stonewall) people who used to be referred to as ‘transvestites’ and ‘crossdressers’. Some of whom may or may not take hormones. There is no evidence to suggest that this very wide category of feminine-presenting males are less likely to offend at rates any different to other males.

Why separate males and females in the first place? Does putting on a dress, wig and makeup make a male sufficiently different to other males that they should be in female space?

Also re point 3. a GNC female when challenged in the toilet who replies ‘I am female’ in her female (unaffected by testosterone) voice (with likely small stature and small hands etc) can quite easily clear up any misunderstanding in most circumstances.

[Reply](#)



lukeroelofs says:

August 11, 2019 at 2:19 pm

Hi Astra,

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“Women were desperate to be able to use public toilets and men were desperate to keep them out of them, so segregated bathrooms were created as a compromise. It had nothing to do with protecting women from men.”
(thread here with links to some pop-history articles
https://twitter.com/Chris_Hubris/status/1158642573927419904)

If the latter view is correct, then the answer to ‘why separate males and females in the first place?’ is ‘because of sexist ideas about purity and modesty, recruited to limit women’s access to public spaces’. In which case feminists should be very suspicious of the institution as a whole – although of course that’s compatible with recognising that, given the present norm of separate bathrooms, having women’s bathrooms to overcome the ‘urinary leash’ is a vital feminist goal.

I don’t know which of those accounts is correct! I’ve read a bit but not enough to be confident, and it may well be a bit of both. (I mean, it’s not like the call to ‘protect women from men’ can’t itself be a tool of sexism!) If you have more knowledge than me I’m happy to learn.

A couple of other quick things: I think it’s true that many people who would previously have been referred to as transvestites would now be referred to as trans women, but it’s worth noting that this isn’t because they were transvestites. The people to recognise as trans women are those who take themselves to be women, and it just happens that many of those would, in some social contexts, have been identified and referred to (and perhaps referred to themselves) in terms specifically of cross-dressing. So it’s not that the one category has simply subsumed the other – at least as I understand it? I’m not sure if this is different from what you were saying, I just wanted to be as precise as possible. And the point that not all trans women take hormones is, of course, true.

Regarding whether bathroom misunderstandings can be cleared up by appeal to high voice, small statue, small hands, etc., my concern is that if we entrench this as a normal thing – to challenge people in the bathroom, confident that those who are really female will be able to clear things up with their voice, hands, and stature – the consequences will be bad for tall women, women with big hands, etc. (And this also won’t work to exclude male predators who are short or have done vocal training – which, I should emphasise, I don’t myself think is a huge problem (for one thing, buying a fake janitor’s uniform and mop is probably a better strategy for bathroom pervers than doing vocal training) but seems to matter if the discussion is about opportunities for abuse.)

[Reply](#)



Astra Poole says:

August 12, 2019 at 3:45 pm

I don’t doubt that the origin of single sex bathrooms was rooted in separate spheres ideology to some extent. But I don’t think that is all there is to sex segregation. There are also issues of dignity and privacy etc. Anyway toilets could be easily addressed by having individual floor to ceiling cubicles with washbasins/ sinks in. But toilets is only one environment.

It still leaves the broader question of ‘does biology matter, when and why?’ in a whole range of other situations. For changing rooms where people are naked there is sex segregation because people with vaginas don’t usually want to get undressed in front of (strangers) people with penises. And vice versa. Of course sports and swimming changing rooms in schools are separated by sex after a certain age – for obvious reasons. It would be unthinkable to have teenage boys and girls changing in the same room. This is because of material differences between the sexes.

What about medical care and hospital wards? Are males and females separate on hospital wards because of privacy issues? An AFAB (sticking with this terminology) woman has a right to ask for a female to provide

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There are some AFABs that have been abused by men and really do not want to be in vulnerable situations with men. Unfortunately some TW still look and sound male – so I can understand why some women would not want to be alone in a toilet or changing room with someone that to them (and materially?) is a biological male – whether they are in a dress or not. I don't know what we do about that though.

I don't think TW should be forced to use male toilets or a 3rd space, and as you've highlighted it's unenforceable in practice anyway. Ultimately I don't think there is a right or wrong answer – only consequences and people are responsible for making their own decisions (for TW and GCRFs). Very passable looking TW will likely not have much problem using female spaces. Less passable TW will have more issues depending on who else is around them and whether other women are willing to speak out.

I think GCRFs know very well it's unenforceable and they are trying to change the culture to make it more socially unacceptable for TW to use female toilets. As GCRF begins to spread (which it might) more women may feel emboldened to challenge TW in spaces – in effect creating a 'hostile environment'.

Re transvestites – comedian Eddie Izzard used to describe himself as a straight transvestite but now identifies as 'transgender':

"It was locked in from coming out in 1985, coming up 32 years ago as transgender or – I was TV when I came out. The language has changed over the years – transvestite, TV, transsexual, TS. We are now at trans and transgender."

<https://www.npr.org/2018/01/01/574986014/encore-eddie-izzard-talks-about-coming-out?t=1565638692662>

No one does call themselves 'transvestite' or 'crossdresser' anymore (except Grayson Perry!). Apologies if you've got to the end of this it was a longer ramble than anticipated.



lukeroelofs says:

August 12, 2019 at 6:07 pm

"the broader question of 'does biology matter, when and why?'"

Which I think is a perfectly good question, in itself.

"For changing rooms where people are naked there is sex segregation because people with vaginas don't usually want to get undressed in front of (strangers) people with penises."

So, I mean, I get that, that's a perfectly understandable way for some people to feel, but also, I felt that way for much of my life. Like, I didn't really want to get undressed in front of anyone. I'm sure there are plenty of people with vaginas who don't want to get undressed in front of other people with vaginas (especially if, in their local social context, it's the people with vaginas who are most likely to make cruel and judgemental remarks about their bodies). As far as I can tell, our society's collective reaction to these sort of desires for privacy is to not care: 'tough, it's normal, now get changed.' So it seems like there's a double standard there? Like, it seems like the default view is that if a girl doesn't want to get changed in front of boys, that's a very valid and important desire which obviously it would be degrading and violating to ignore, but if a girl doesn't want to get changed in front of girls, she's just being silly and should grow up and get over it.

I think one of the reasons it might be valuable to delve into the history of how these traditions emerged is that if we end up thinking that we don't agree with the ideology behind their emergence, it makes this kind of disparity in how society treats different desires seem more striking, and less natural and obvious.

"It would be unthinkable to have teenage boys and girls changing in the same room. This is because of material differences between the sexes."

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that it would be ok, just that whether it's ok depends in large part on how different bodies, desires, etc. are 'socially constructed' (if I can use a somewhat ambiguous phrase).

"An AFAB (sticking with this terminology) woman has a right to ask for a female to provide medical interventions. When an AFAB woman asks for another woman to perform her cervical smear test is it reasonable that she would not want a TW to do it, but another AFAB?"

I think in many places, at least in the UK as far as I know, you can request to see another doctor or nurse for any reason? On the principle that having someone touch your body in that kind of intimate way is something where you should have complete control of who can and can't do it, without the question of whether it's 'reasonable'. That seems to me a good position, and it bypasses any question about trans vs. cis.

"There are some AFABs that have been abused by men and really do not want to be in vulnerable situations with men. Unfortunately some TW still look and sound male... I don't know what we do about that though."

Yeah, I feel like the thing about trauma from abuse is that we can't organise society around assumptions about what's going to be triggering, or what's going to make survivors uncomfortable, because it's so deeply deeply individual. Like, particular sorts of voice, particular sorts of contact, particular social dynamics or choices of words, can be absolutely horrible for people to encounter. I think we should absolutely do everything we can to allow people to avoid their triggers, to make choices about whether and when to encounter them, the way that trigger warnings for common triggers can do. But obviously we can't systematically bar all X people from using certain facilities, to protect people traumatised by violence from X people.

"comedian Eddie Izzard used to describe himself as a straight transvestite but how identifies as 'transgender'"

Yes – though not as a woman, I think? It looks like his public statements tend to say things like "a complete boy plus half girl", and "somewhat boy-ish and somewhat girl-ish". Which sounds like, yeah, definitely under the trans umbrella but not a trans woman? Something like what people might express with 'genderfluid' or 'genderqueer'?



K. B. T. Twitter says:

September 12, 2019 at 1:35 pm

"No one does call themselves 'transvestite' or 'crossdresser' anymore (except Grayson Perry!)."

That's so obviously not true and just the mirror image of the claim that there are no butch women anymore. There are; it's just that many people who were thought to be "merely GNC" turned out to be not cis.



eleanor says:

August 12, 2019 at 7:33 am

I read the articles. Bemused at the author's apparent thought that he had argumentatively supported his bizarre conclusions, I read the comments. I got as far as 'I am a social constructionist' (from the author).

That explains. Consider a collection of premises that fit social constructivism. Remember 'ex falso quodlibet'. Arrive at your chosen conclusions.

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lukeroelofs says:

August 12, 2019 at 5:06 pm

” I read the comments. I got as far as ‘I am a social constructionist’...”

That appeared in the comments because I made a point of not relying on it in the post.

[Reply](#)



Emma Casey says:

August 12, 2019 at 12:17 pm

Of course! Thank you, as a man, explaining to me, a woman, on how I am womaning wrong and am not a as good a feminist as you.

Gender critical means rejecting social gender norms. I believe that men and women should be free to present and behave how they wish, so long as they are not harming anyone else.

Trans ideology reinforces these stereotypes as the TRAs shouting the loudest seem to be reducing being a women to looks, sexual attraction etc. I appreciate that there may be many transwomen who are not like thus and are just not vocal. Maybe they need to be?

There is certainly a lot of stereotyping in gender identity of children who don't fit social 'norms'. I've had several people tell me that my son is 'probably trans'. I mean, he is 3 years old but if he likes dolls and princesses then he can't possibly be a boy.

I don't care what people wear, what name they use, what pro nouns they want. I strongly believe that nobody deserves abuse and discrimination for any reason. That is why I used to be a trans-ally. However I am never going to agree with the definition of a women being 'anyone who sometimes feels like a woman' and the dismantling of much-needed and hard-won sex based rights based on this.

[Reply](#)



lukeroelofs says:

August 12, 2019 at 5:25 pm

“Of course! Thank you, as a man, explaining to me, a woman, on how I am womaning wrong and am not a as good a feminist as you.”

The main prompt to me writing this was seeing a one large group of philosophers, many or most them women, criticising the GCRF position in very harsh terms, and another large group, many or most of them men, react by denouncing the first group as unfairly slandering and vilifying a perfectly respectable philosophical position. It was that second group – again, mostly in my experience men – who I was primarily addressing, and telling to trust the first group – again, mostly in my experience women. Perhaps your experience of the demographics of this dispute has been different, but I was speaking fairly specifically to my own professional context (I think the post expresses all of this fairly explicitly, starting with the title).

[Reply](#)



Dave says:

September 2, 2019 at 9:21 am

1) You think what constitutes man and woman is not biology/physiology but philosophy? – Interesting.

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Dear Philosophers, You Can Trust the Feminist Consensus: Gender-Critical Radical Feminism is Bogus | Majestic Equality

From a fellow man, you are nothing but a sexist attention seeker. Like most men jumping onto pomo (gender) identity ideology.



K. B. T. Twitter says:

September 12, 2019 at 1:49 pm

“There is certainly a lot of stereotyping in gender identity of children who don’t fit social ‘norms’. I’ve had several people tell me that my son is ‘probably trans’. I mean, he is 3 years old but if he likes dolls and princesses then he can’t possibly be a boy.”

Now, if your child says he’s a boy, he’s a boy, and everyone else is simply wrong. No transactivist will disagree.

However, there have been analogous cases where the parent left off a crucial piece of information: the child *is actually saying* that they are not a boy (or girl, respectively), but the parent insists they are.

So this kind of anecdote, even if true, proves nothing, and there is reason to be suspicious if the parent reports that people just can’t shut up about how their child is probably trans.

I *hope* that’s not the case here, and my skepticism is unwarranted and my worry unnecessary. For the sake of your child. It’s cool that you don’t police their behavior, but should your child ever start to insist they’re not a boy, and you force them to undergo a puberty they don’t want, you’ll destroy your whole relationship.

[Reply](#)



completelykaty says:

August 16, 2019 at 9:33 am

Hello, this is such a great review of the current state of GCRF.

I would like to add two things to what you’ve said:

Firstly, in the case of “sometimes, females in those spaces will be missexed... [this is] a regrettable cost” it’s important to note that the majority of the people targeted will be cis women. Here’s some maths to back up that claim:

I often see a defence of [#wecanalwaysstell](#) as “well we can tell 99% of the time!”

Let’s do some maths!

— Katy Montgomerie 🐼 (@KatyMontgomerie) [May 27, 2019](#)

Secondly for the “passport as ID” enforcement system, in the UK that would mean we already have “self ID” as that is how the passport is updated. It’s significantly easier to get a new passport with your new sex on it than it is to get a GRC.

that combined with the fact that neither a GRC or birth certificate are valid forms of ID shows how even further impractical this idea is

[Reply](#)



ramendik says:

August 23, 2019 at 11:58 am

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Moreover, before his current sh*tshow started, many trans people themselves would say that a letter from a doctor should still be required. And I'm not speaking of the "GC trans" like Debbie Hayton. I don't think Tara Hudson was ever seen hanging around GC circles, but you can search for "GP" in this interview

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/tara-hudson-the-harrowing-reality-of-being-a-trans-woman-in-an-a/> .

Moreover, the European Court of Human Rights in a series of decisions has worked out a position that a state is *required*, as a matter of human rights, to change one's "civil status" of sex based on a diagnosis (not treatment), but that there is no mandate for self-ID. https://echr.coe.int/Documents/FS_Gender_identity_ENG.pdf

While I support self-ID myself, I would suggest that this position, the one expressed in 2016 by Tara Hudson, should not be seen as "bogus" the way Luke defines the term. That position should be welcomed at the civil discussion table.

Among other things there is a practical reason. The link of GCF to odious trad/alt right circles is becoming increasingly obvious. Academics found posting on KiwiFarms, "women's iberation front" engaging in rhetorical gymnastics to call for the SCOTUS to reverse a decision against enforcement of sex stereotypes (EEOC v Hunson case) based on a claim it would reinforce sex stereotypes, the calls for "free speech" in employers defining employers (imagine what this would do to same-sex marriage benefits and to expression of sexist views by employers), and so on.

There can well be people who oppose self-ID because "women's safety" but who are not willing to go with GCF where GCF is going. I would not want to force them to choose between "a woman is whoever identifies as a woman, social sex segregation should ultimately go the way of race segregation" – the position I hold myself – and the Heritage Foundation. There must be a safe place for these people, or else at least a plurality of them will pick Heritage.

[Reply](#)



lukeroelofs says:

August 26, 2019 at 11:31 pm

Thanks Ramendik (and sorry for the slow reply).

I do feel the force of this kind of worry – I think the majority of people have pretty unformed and uninformed views on the matter, and I don't want to push people away by seeming to demonise all views except the Certified Woke Right Answer (especially since I'm not sure myself what the right answer is to lots of these questions). Part of that I think is looking beyond positions to what is being done with them – like, there's a difference between 'when asked what they thought of bathroom policies, this person thought for a bit and said they supported X policy', and 'this person has devoted the bulk of their activist energies for years now to arguing against trans people's access to bathrooms, stoking fears about what they might do, presenting trans rights as a major threat to women's rights, etc.'

But at the end of the day I don't know a great way to draw the relevant lines, on this or other parallel issues.



lukeroelofs says:

August 26, 2019 at 11:20 pm

Thanks for this Katy, and sorry my replying has lagged behind! These are very welcome additions to the post.

[Reply](#)

One suggestion in this debate might be that the side represented by Stock and “S” sees sexual orientation as a valid model describing reality in at least a mostly accurate way. While the side represented by Luke (and I’m on that too) sees it, insofar as it is a model of human sexuality, as a very primitive model that *more often than not* does not fit; however, it also has acquire an important meaning regarding self-identity.

Stock likes to claim that the “objective” meaning is socially important. Well the self-identity meaning is so crucially important that in the United States the right to “intimate choices defining personal identity and beliefs” is the basis for sex-neutral (including same-sex) marriage.

Meanwhile, as an “objective” model, sexual orientation stems from the early days of behaviour science. It has been superceded by a better model as far back as 1949, when the Kinsey Scale was published. Much of the debate is simply whether a “5” on the Kinsey Scale can be described as gay/lesbian. And frankly there is no “right” answer because the entire model is just so darn old!

The problem predates the current wave of trans issues – by decades. There was the “gold star” debate – can any (cis) woman who *ever was* sincerely attracted to a man be called a lesbian? There was Tom Robinson, a gay man who found himself in love with one particular woman while choosing to retain the label “gay”, with support of gay luminaries such as Peter Tatchell. All of this is easily resolved if we accept that the model is outdated, the labels are approximate, and we should use *at least* the Kinsey Scale (if not something more elaborate) when classifying actual human sexual attraction (not “intimate identity” as per Obergefell).

And if we just keep to the Kinsey scale, *even if* we use it by sex classification at birth, the problem simply does not arise. A lesbian who happens to be with a trans woman at this time is just Kinsey 5.

(There are also the recently published findings that seem to claim that all cis women are, at least to a degree, aroused by images of other women, which in the old model might pu the very existence of “straight woman” to the question; if we recognize a Kinsey 1 as straight the issue does not arise; but I don’t see a logical way to recognize Kinsey 1 as straight but not Kinsey 5 as gay/lesbian).

[Reply](#)



lukeroelofs says:

August 26, 2019 at 11:49 pm

Thanks Ramendik,

I think that’s a fair statement of the dispute, though I think even in a world where sexual attraction was more fully and accurately described by a hetero-/bi-/homo- model, I would still support letting people more or less define for themselves the orientation terms they self-ascribe. Essentially for the reasons you describe – it’s become an important identity, it’s become a matter of community and of legal rights and so on.

(Re. “There are also the recently published findings that seem to claim that all cis women are, at least to a degree, aroused by images of other women”

For what it’s worth, I’m a little wary of drawing conclusions from this kind of study, since arousal non-concordance is a big thing, and finding an image arousing may just show that it’s recognised as sex-relevant rather than that there’s sexual attraction.

(I’m going off Emily Nagoski’s writing on this here <https://medium.com/@enagoski/unwanted-arousal-it-happens-29679a156b92>))

[Reply](#)

Thanks for your hard work and the clarity you bring to the subject. Very well done.

[Reply](#)



Don't quit your day job says:

September 1, 2019 at 10:10 am

How am I supposed to get past the first few paragraphs, let alone take your argument seriously, when you've written an entire article with these intentions:

"Dear philosophers, this post is my attempt to persuade you that actually, gender-critical feminism is not worth engaging with. It really is as valueless as people are telling you."

But then you follow-up with this:

"(That's not an accusation of personal evil against you, dear philosophers, who are taken in by it, or against people who espouse it. I DON'T KNOW what personal motives and circumstances lead people to their views.)"

Are you serious with this? Basically you're arguing a viewpoint different from yours is worthless... but you just can't be bothered with understanding anything about it?! Is this not the definition of lazy?

"[...] I also am not speaking to what practical steps can or should be taken, where to draw the line between protest and harassment, or anything like that."

Oh I see — you just can't be bothered with that either! But we're supposed to totally trust you that your opinions are good, their opinions are bad — just cause you say so. Who the Hell are you again, and who voted you dictator over what people should think?

"I'm specifically talking about whether the view itself deserves intellectual respect.)"

How can you determine whether a view "deserves intellectual respect", if you openly admitted your complete ignorance on the subject. You can't be bothered to learn why people have that view, can't be bothered to explore solutions, but want to act like an authoritarian over what views are valuable or not... is this supposed to be a joke? If it is, it's not funny.

[Reply](#)



Dave says:

September 2, 2019 at 9:26 am

"This is a good example of what it feels like to not fully take on someone else's humanity, "

terfisaslur dot com -> Luke, go f... yourself. I couldn't bring myself to read the entire heap of ... that you compiled but what I did is nothing but parroted trans validation ideology that anyone can get of Twitter. And this part (btw classic "they are dehumanizing" cries of TVAs) is just so freaking hypocritical. The entire ideology you support dehumanizes women, best highlighted by the above website, and yet you still go on about how these evil radfems are the ones doing the dehumanizing. Pathetic.

[Reply](#)



ramendik says:

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[Reply](#)

K

K. B. T. Twitter says:

September 12, 2019 at 9:39 am

“No health system currently is doing surgery on minors.”

Bizarrely, and tellingly for the GCRF position, that’s not even true. It does happen all the time, and frequently enough – except that it’s not trans kids who are forced to undergo surgery, but intersex kids, and often already as infants, often with terrible, life-long side effects like inability to orgasm and even chronic pain (it doesn’t help that surgery on children is particularly difficult because their genitalia are so small). Oddly, GCRFs have no problem with that. They actually **hate** it when trans people even mention the existence of intersex people in any context. (That even though trans people not rarely actually turn out to be intersex. For example, sometimes, when a trans woman has bottom surgery, surgeons find out that she has a uterus.) Because they are glossing over a gigantic human rights violation, a vast scandal as enraging as child sexual abuse. Adults are not only nonconsensually manipulating children’s genitalia, they are surgically injuring, changing (against the children’s interests, who either do not want to have surgery at all, ever, or a different kind of surgery, which forced surgery in minors makes extremely difficult) and all too often even permanently **damaging** them, all in the name of sexism (more precisely, oppositional sexism and binarist ideology). The contradiction in spreading a moral panic about (non-existent) surgery on trans children while helping to cover up the real scandal consisting of surgery on intersex children is more than embarrassing for the GCRF position. The real handmaidens of the patriarchy are not who GCRFs claim them to be.

[Reply](#)

Pingback: [Why Has Transphobia Gone Mainstream in Philosophy? | My blog](#).

Pingback: [Gender, Intellectual Freedom and Public Policy, pt. 3: Confirmation: Patriarchy and Women’s Only Spaces – The Decolonized Librarian](#)

**ericlinuskaplan** says:

February 29, 2020 at 12:56 pm

This essay is great! I think you have nailed the tone for engaging with this kind of bigoted speech masquerading as cool-headed analysis, and made a very important point about why it’s dangerous to engage with bogus thought. I’m eager to see you apply it to other bogus movements e.g. “race realism”. Well done!

[Reply](#)

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