**The Emperor's Clothes: A Radical Feminist View of Gender and Transgender**

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I am one of the lucky ones. I came of age during the time of hippies. From the time that I first saw a hippie, I knew that these were the people I belonged with — the ones who didn’t fit into the 1950's and early 1960's rigid mainstream, the ones who were questioning EVERYTHING. As a hippie, I began wearing and doing whatever made me feel comfortable and fully express myself, instead of what an American “young lady” should wear and do. Then came women’s liberation, which included talk about sex role stereotypes in society and in relationships.

It wasn’t long before I was immersed in the blossoming lesbian feminist movement. One of the many things we wanted was the ending of sex roles. We also talked about the wide spectrum of what a woman could be — no matter how butch and masculine in her appearance, and her likes and dislikes. And that the feminine men were fine legitimate men. Butch dykes butched it up, proud to be women and proud to be lesbians.

We discussed butch and femme endlessly. We still do. What makes a lesbian one or the other or neither? We all can feel it, but how do we describe it? What is it? We recognize this spectrum — from the bull daggers and stone butches through soft butches to the many in the middle who don’t identify either way. These middle ones are the ones who don’t like the concepts of butch and femme and often get together with each other. Then there are the “heavy-duty puffs,” the butchy femmes, the high femmes, and everyone in between. As feminists, we recognize that “high femme” is about oppressive female stereotypes. We also recognize that femmes have privilege because they can sometimes pass as straight (although we lesbians usually know), and butches get a lot more venom thrown at them because of homophobia. Butch lesbians are out every day challenging gender norms.

Even though I am on the femmy side, a lot of the things I like and enjoy are things that are usually regarded as masculine. I’ve often changed the oil in my trucks and have built houses on women’s land. While there are some aspects of what is traditionally associated with womanhood that I enjoy, there are many others that I reject as painful, oppressive, and limiting.

What is Radical Feminism?

I’ve long been a Radical Feminist. Radical means to go to the root. I don't want equal power and inclusion in a corrupt society, I want a society that is not corrupt. I want a whole new world, in which the interlocking power of racism, classism, and (hetero)sexism do not exist. I want an end to the political systems of oppression that consolidate power for some and police others. I want the end of a racist patriarchal corporate capitalist world.

Women live under the constant background threat of male physical and sexual violence, the fear of which constrains our freedom and shapes our behavior and choices, often more than we realize. People born male and raised and socialized as men, whether they remain men or not, have internalized male supremacy as a result of being male in a sexist society. Male supremacy is institutionalized, which means it is embedded in every institution of our society – schools, governments, health care systems, etc, -- and is often invisible to us, like the air we breathe. We cannot simply ignore that our culture gives males an incredible amount of power over females. Women are all oppressed by patriarchy, sexism, and male supremacy.

Gender

Radical feminists see gender (what we not so long ago called sex‑role stereotypes) as an invented and socially constructed value system that dictates behavior, appearance, and expectations for males and females. Gender is what culture makes of sex. In our patriarchal society, gender is a hierarchical coercive, externally imposed power structure of rigid restrictions imposed on all people to enforce patriarchy. From birth, females are socialized to be submissive and passive and to put others first, and males are socialized to be dominant and aggressive.

At various times in history and in various cultures, gender has been constructed in different ways. For example, think of how women were restricted in Victorian times, compared to now. Some indigenous cultures have four genders, each with their own name: biological females, biological males, biological females who take on the male gender role, and biological males who take on the female gender role.

Patriarchal gendering inherently oppresses and abuses girls and women because it is a system of hierarchy of male over female, men over women, and masculine over feminine, set up to control behavior of both males and females. Psychological coercion and violence are used to exploit women for the benefit of men. We are targeted based on our bodies; how we “identify" is irrelevant to patriarchy. It is worth noting that gender punishes females whether we conform or not. Non‑conformity is socially frowned upon and punished for both sexes, but for females, conformity is also a form of punishment, since compliance with femininity is in itself submission and subordination.

In our sexist society gender functions to make the exploitation by males of females seem natural and inevitable. It is enforced consciously and subconsciously by all of us in all sorts of ways. Many people of both sexes are uncomfortable with the constraints that gender places on us. Yet men cannot choose to erase their male privilege any more than white people can choose to erase white privilege. Even those who rebel against gender roles associated with their biological sex are affected by social entitlements and diminishments.

The Conservative Backlash

Part of the conservative backlash against the many cultural and political changes of the late 1960's and 1970's has been a tremendous narrowing and rigidifying of gender definitions. In the counterculture era, those who lived at the extremes of gender stereotypes were much freer to be who they were. Conservatism now results in gender dysphoria, people being unhappy with who they are if they fall outside of the strict gender definitions, and urges them to change their sex. As women who suffer from gender socialization, radical feminists recognize and support the desire of those who seek to break free of sexist gender roles. But that does not necessarily mean changing from one set of gender roles to the other. It is logical to rebel against socially enforced limitations, and the solution is to broaden and change those norms, not simply facilitate the jump to a different set of narrow norms of the opposite gender.

As part of the conservative backlash, segments ofthe left have shifted away from political and structural analysis of oppression and injustice, towards an individualistic politics whose primary demand is for the recognition and validation of individualidentities. Gender becomes an identity based on an internal set of feelings that must be believed and accepted without question, and that is unrelated to biological sex. They claim that one set of traits is inherently masculine and another set of traits is inherently feminine, and our [identity](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udI-Go8KK2Q) is dependent on how we align with those traits. Gender identity is seen as innate, and being transgender is entirely a matter of self‑identification. They do not see gender in our patriarchal society as a hierarchical construct of a male supremacy.

This idea of “gender identity as essence” has troubling implications. Feminists have long been suspicious of arguments for the naturalness of gendered traits, which are frequently cited to justify women’s social and political subordination and oppression. Feminists have been pushing back against this gender essentialism for decades.

If anyone who feels like a woman is a woman, then someone raised and socialized as male with unavoidable male privilege and entitlement can claim to be a woman, can speak on behalf of those who were born female, and gain access to women‑only spaces. This conflicts with women’s rights. Men who have become women have disrupted women's spaces by centering themselves. By transitioning, the oppressor may shed his appearance of male privilege and claim the status of oppressed.

Female Bodies and Male Supremacy

Girls and women experience sexism and misogyny because we inhabit female bodies. Male supremacy is enforced by sexual violence and rape. Yet in the name of inclusivity, women are being stripped of the language required to identify and challenge our own oppression.

We are told that it is bigoted to say women have vaginas, and that a penis can be "female" if the person who has a penis "feels" like and identifies as a woman. Thus we've had the cancellation of performances of *The Vagina Monologues* on university campuses because “some women do not have vaginas,” and the insistence on eliminating the word “woman” from discussion of pregnancy because it is now considered bigoted to imply a direct connection between women and pregnancy. (Transmen who are biological females get pregnant.) Pregnancy is something that can happen only to the female body, and that fact is science, not prejudice. No wonder many biological women are offended by their own erasure!

Woman is not a feeling. Altering the definition of the word “woman” so that it now means “any person who believes themself to be a woman,” and that it doesn’t always mean possessing a vagina and a vulva, our experience of oppression as girls and women becomes literally unspeakable. This strange definition makes it impossible to describe and analyze the structural oppression that accompanies living in a female body. Women have a right to speak about our bodies and lives without the demand that we couch this self‑expression in language which suits the agenda of others. Demanding that we remain silent about our own bodies and our place in this world is unconscionable, especially during the backlash that we are experiencing. Women are not born with a female gender identity – we are born with female reproductive biology.

The word “female” refers to a biological category that one cannot transition one’s way into. Males who transition to become women have male bodies which they may choose to modify to resemble female bodies more closely, but they will never have female bodies. Female bodies menstruate, can give birth, and experience menopause. For those who feel strongly that they should have been born female but were not, changing the definition of the word "woman" so that it also applies to them is not the solution. The words are not the problem. The problem is the socially constructed gender roles that are associated with being male or female.

The behavioral choices that any individual makes, their tastes and preferences about dress and appearance, how they choose to express themselves, are independent of biological sex and have no impact on it. People can dress however they choose and behave however they choose. This is an important part of liberation from the oppressive constraints of gender in patriarchy. But none of this alters the underlying biological fact of their femaleness or maleness. No amount of challenging and modifying gender norms will make a male person female, because to be female means to be a member of the category of humans born with female sexual characteristics.

There are those who say, "I want to move beyond gender, I'm not a woman or a man, I'm a person who can't be defined by gender; call me 'they.'" Deleting any reference to gender does not prevent women from being oppressed in patriarchy. It is impossible to opt out of oppression that is structural and material in basis through personal identification. Women’s lived realities and oppression in patriarchy are made invisible by gender-neutral language. Challenging and playing with gender norms will never liberate females from the oppression that accompanies living in a female body in patriarchy. Colonization of our bodies by patriarchy is the problem, not the female body. The male supremacist system of power can be dismantled only by ending patriarchy.

The existence of intersex people does not negate the reality of female biology. Intersex conditions are based upon the biology of the body, not on gender identity or an adopted identity. We have not changed the biological definitions of male and female because of the existence of intersex individuals. Why would we now change biological definitions of female and male because a segment of the population changes their gender?

The Intersex Society of North America took a firm stand against transgender appropriation. "In order to further their own particular agenda, transgender activists go out of their way to conflate intersex with transgender as a way to gain legitimacy. It's shameless appropriation of intersex persons." An anonymous intersex person says, "Claiming intersex when you aren't is absolutely not okay because it's disrespectful to intersex people like myself. You don't know what it's like and you never will." Others have spoken out in opposition to the use of intersex people’s existence as an argument against the gender binary.

Claiming that all people are "assigned" a sex at birth is inaccurate, dishonest, and disingenuous. Sex isn’t some arbitrary thing people are assigned or given, sex is biological fact. Almost always, babies are unambiguously female or male. There is nothing remotely oppressive or unjust about correctly naming a child’s biological sex on the basis of their genitals. Only a small fraction of people who have intersex conditions are born with such ambiguous genitalia that they are actually “assigned” a sex. In the most common intersex conditions, the sex of the person is not ambiguous.

Children and Sexist Gender Stereotypes

There is plenty of talk about having a “female brain” or a “male brain” as a reason to change one’s gender. The widening belief in innate gender differences, now called neurosexism, has been shown to have a measurable and damaging effect on women. Numerous studies refute the idea of male and female brains, describing instead plastic, mutable minds that are continuously influenced by cultural assumptions about gender. Psychologist Cordelia Fine has provided much scientific evidence that testosterone is not the potent hormonal essence of masculinity, and that the circuits of the brain are quite literally a product of our physical, social and cultural environment, as well as our behavior and thoughts. To cuddle a baby, get a promotion, see billboard after billboard of near‑naked women, or constantly hear gender stereotypes that place one sex at a higher status than the other, all this affects the brain.

Studies show that even while believing that they are being gender neutral, everyone teaches gender to children from birth onward. Gender stereotypes and differing expectations, even if only implicitly held, affect behavior towards children and perception of children's emotions and physical abilities. By their second birthday, children understand that they are male or female, and are picking up sexist gender stereotyping. Social structure, media, the education system, and peers inundate children with stereotypes about masculinity and femininity. For example, children’s media implies that girls are not very important by how few books, TV shows, and movies are about them. This is what we mean when we say that male supremacy is institutionalized.

Any girl can see that boys get a lot more respect, have more power, and are taught to do all sorts of exciting things that girls aren’t, so why not be a boy, when the option is open and even encouraged? Internalized misogyny drives girls to dislike and reject their female bodies. Many girls just don’t want to be girls in a male supremacist world. Girls want to be taken seriously.

Girls discover, sometimes way before puberty, that they are subject to male harassment and assault. Some see transitioning to male as a way out of the pain of sexist oppression. As one girl said, “Transwomen who say they’ve always been a woman have no idea what it’s like to walk in fear constantly. They have no idea what it’s like to be my age and have people looking at you and thinking gross things – you can feel it and see it in their eyes.”

We need to stand up for gender non-conforming children and make it possible for them to live as who they are. Being transgender is always in the headlines and kids latch onto that. Says one mother, “My daughter thinks she needs to be a boy so that her love of wearing pants, loving science and math and sports and playing with boys is more in line with what society sees as boy behavior.” Gentle boys don’t like classic aggressive male sex roles. They need society's permission to be soft and peaceful, without the assumption that that means they are really girls. These children don't need sexual reassignment, they just need support — in their home life, in schools, with anti‑bullying protocols, and perhaps therapy for harassment for being different. It doesn’t follow, however, that they are somehow innately the opposite sex.

Transitioning Children

Research studies show that around 80% of youth outgrow gender dissatisfaction. Today's society is too quick to conclude that a gender non‑conforming child is destined to be transgender, that children who “consistently and persistently insist” that they are not the gender associated with their biological sex are innately transgender. The fact that in normal life and in psychiatry, anyone who “consistently and persistently insists” on anything else contrary to physical reality is considered either confused or delusional is conveniently ignored.

These children are being groomed to change their names and believe they are the opposite sex. More and more children are being diagnosed with “gender identity disorder” or "gender dysphoria," the green light to transition, so that they can receive hormone blockers, thereby halting puberty so that later on they may have a potentially better chance to "pass" as the opposite sex. Then they are given cross‑sex hormones and surgeries at young ages. Yet children are developmentally too young to assess and understand the risks and repercussions. Children do not always know what is best for them, and as adults it is our job to make sure that they are protected.

Sending a child the transgender route is not trivial. Using Lupron for delaying puberty is off label, experimental, and poorly studied. Endocrinologists are worried about its long‑term effects. There are already adults who were given this drug as children and adolescents who are speaking out about its adverse physical, mental, and emotional effects. A young woman wrote:

"I was given monthly injections over the course of about five years. I was a happy child before all this began. I was diagnosed with depression two years after I started Lupron, and it has gotten worse over the years.  I have been hospitalized five times due to my mental health. I also have joint pain very bad in just about all my joints and I am only 23. I also get crippling migraines very often. I feel Lupron was the cause of a lot of my pain both physically and emotionally."

Parents concerned about their trans‑identifying children face a perfect storm of opposition. They are accused of transphobia and bad parenting, and are warned that if they don’t support their child to transition, suicide can be the outcome. These messages come from their own children, the overwhelming pro‑trans voices online, the news and media, therapists, medical professionals, government officials, and even school districts. Many parents succumb to the pressure.

The high rate of transgender suicides is often cited as evidence of society’s discrimination, rejection, and lack of support, yet research shows similar rates of self harm and suicidality among teenagers with or without gender issues. Suicides happen most often AFTER transition, not before. Studies found that transgender adults are 22 times more likely to attempt suicide than the general population. Not considered is that transgender suicides may be the result of unhappiness that transitioning did not bring the hoped-for results, or of sex change not solving society's oppressions, or of underlying mental health problems that existed before transition.

Transition can bring new challenges that are unexpected. Sex change requires lifelong hormones, which cause infertility and carry significant lifelong health risks and problems, and create a lifelong dependence on the medical-industrial complex. Hormones and surgeries have limitations and complications. Males who have become transwomen are shocked at the sexism that they encounter in a female-appearing body, and females who have become transmen are disgusted by the women-hating they hear in all-male environments. The transgender movement does not provide the tools to understand sexism and male supremacy.

Professionals

It is difficult to find mental health professionals willing to help children (or adults) feel comfortable in their bodies and explore the dynamics that might lead someone to want to transition. Issues with gender identity can be rooted in traumatic histories and external social pressures. Once these other issues are explored and addressed, the desire to transition is sometimes alleviated. Queer activists are influencing guidelines to align with their beliefs. Seemingly defying common sense, it is now considered immoral and unethical for therapists to help children or adults feel comfortable with their body as it is.

There is a huge web of professionals, many who are themselves transgender, who have become wealthy on the backs of transitioning young people. Therapists are giving out paperwork after one interview. Doctors are making a living from only doing transition-related double mastectomies, one after another every day like a factory, and giving out hormones with only a single page printout of information after a 15-minute discussion. Pharmaceutical companies make millions on sex-changing hormones.

While in most other areas, academic research and writing offers a space in which critical thinking can take place and conflicting theories and opinions can be expressed and debated, on the topic of transgenderism, debate is suppressed and obstructed by transgender activists through threats, harassment, vilification, and intimidation of professionals. Research about anything that does not fit their agenda of seeking to prove that it is a naturally-occurring phenomenon is blocked. Bath Spa University rejected a researcher’s proposal, stating:

“Engaging in a potentially politically incorrect piece of research carries a risk to the university. Attacks on social media may not be confined to the researcher, but may involve the university. The posting of unpleasant material on blogs or social media may be detrimental to the reputation of the university.”

Research should be conducted without personal or professional risk and researchers should be free to investigate topics irrespective of political sensitivities. A sign of a truly progressive society is one in which serious critical debate can take place.

Detransition

A growing number of detransitioners, ones who transitioned and then reclaimed their original sex, are speaking out. The majority are female, and they tell us that transitioning and passing for male was easier and safer than the hatred and intolerance they were subject to for being gender non-conforming butch women, that social intolerance drove them to take desperate measures in order to have a better life. Growing up isolated among hostile peers and adults in a homophobic world with no positive images of girls like them, they were punished for not fitting female gender norms and rewarded for transitioning.

These women report that no therapist helped them work through why they felt that transitioning was their only option or where these feelings might be coming from. No therapist asked questions about whether they might be lesbians. No therapist explained misogyny to them or assured them that it is usual in a sexist society for young women to hate their bodies, especially when they don't conform to conservative gender standards. Instead of giving them the tools to unlearn internalized misogyny and homophobia, they were encouraged to disown womanhood. Finally meeting older butch women and hearing their stories is life-changing for these young women. The voices of detransitioned women and butch women need to be more widely available.

In her blog, *This Soft Space,* Strayaway Woman writes, “Despite the flashes of hopeful possibility, at the end of the day it [transitioning] didn’t actually fix anything... I finally realized the transgender narrative would not solve my problems.

“In the current cultural climate, it’s now seen as rude and harmful to even question a person who is considering transition... Nothing I experienced stemmed from some essential 'feeling,' some innate discord between body and mind. All of it emerged from a lifetime of experiencing oppressive gender roles and confusing expectations, ignorance about what it meant to be a homosexual woman, and both internal and external homophobia. It added up to the long‑term reinforcement, in a very susceptible mind, of the idea that I was ‘wrong’ in my body and my sex, and that led me to identify as transgender… For the sake of so many others, I hope these root causes are further discussed and explored, so that transition is no longer viewed as the immediate answer to gender identity confusion. It is an act of compassion to ask, ‘Why do you feel this way?’

“I feel like I can finally start living as who and what I am, no longer obsessively worried about how I appear to others or what sort of strange being I might be. I am simply a female human being who loves other women. And it’s a consolation to know that the kid in her sweatshirt and muddy jeans was always okay just as she was. I just wish she had known all along.”

Disappearing Gays and Lesbians

According to many studies, a high percentage of girls who experience gender dysphoria at adolescence are same‑sex attracted. Girls who are aware of same-sex attraction now consider this to be a confirmation of cross‑gender identification, “If I like girls, I must be a guy.” In our hetero-normative society, they view themselves as typically heterosexual. These girls transition to become heterosexual women-loving transmen, bearing the scars of double mastectomies and the lasting effects of taking synthetic testosterone. Thirty years ago they would have grown up to be happy lesbians.

Many butch lesbians I know went through a period of wanting to be a boy, but now are happy lesbians. Today, the pressure on butch lesbians to transition is so great, one friend spells her name Maxxx, to emphasize that she is happy to remain female and will not transition, in spite of constant urging. Butch lesbians are transitioning at alarming rates.

The number of children who transition at the Gender Identity Clinic in London, the UK’s main child gender service, has quadrupled in the last five years. A decade ago, girls were a fraction of patients. Now girls are 70% of all clients. Today, butch is unacceptable, a failure of gender, old fashioned. Lesbians are disappearing. I mourn the loss of so many of my people.

How much is homophobia playing a part in urging young people to transition in order to avoid homosexuality? Homophobia still runs deep outside of liberal circles. Detransitioned women say that they got more acceptance as transmen than as butch lesbians. There were plenty of supportive people and resources to help them deal with the difficulties of living as a transman in a transphobic society, but few resources to help them learn how to survive as a butch dyke in a woman-hating and lesbian-hating society. We need to protect gay and lesbian youth, not encourage them to transition.

Many gender non-conforming boys and girls would grow up to be gay and lesbian if left alone. There is no thought or care of the thousands of gay and lesbian children disappearing through this homophobic practice of transitioning. There is now a new way to deny a gay or lesbian identity — simply say you are transgender. It is a new conversion therapy. In deeply homophobic and conservative Iran it is enforced by law and threat of death, but passed off as "progressive" here.

Many transgender people are quick to insist that they are not gay or lesbian. Is this internalized homophobia? Many of them lived as gay men or lesbians prior to transition, and as heterosexuals after transition. There is a persistent element of homophobia within queer ideology. Same-sex attraction is a problem in queer theory because it acknowledges the existence of biological sex and its significance in determining who one is attracted to, in opposition to the claim that gender, not sex, defines identity.

It has become a topsy-turvy world in which everyone is scared to tell the truth and radical feminists feel like the kid who said, "But the Emperor has no clothes!"

Women-Only Space

Given our lifetime of common experience of male supremacy, we who are biologically female – especially those who have personally suffered male abuse and violence – have a legitimate interest in the existence of spaces designated for females only, away from the presence of those who have been born, raised, and socialized male. Our lives are informed by the fact that we are biologically female and that we have female bodies. Transwomen do not have the same experience.

A person born with a male body and socialized with male privilege can no more shed it through drugs and surgery than a white person can claim an African‑American identity by darkening their skin. Just as white people live in and act within an almost invisible fog of white privilege, boys and men, even if they are gender non‑conforming and have tried to change their gender by becoming transwomen, still live in and act within an almost invisible fog of male privilege and entitlement.

Those of us who are institutionally oppressed often experience micro-aggressions that privileged persons are not aware of. We need to gather with our “home” group of people who have the same lived experience that we do, to validate our experience and heal our wounds. Without this separatist space, we can easily internalize the oppression we are subject to and think it is somehow our fault.

Separatism for women who were born female eliminates male interruption, challenges, taking over the conversation, women deferring to men, having to answer to male authority, and bowing to male intimidation. Separatist spaces are used to heal from sexist trauma, for consciousness‑raising and political organization, and as places for temporary sanctuary away from male attention. It is a way to center ourselves and figure out what it really means to be female. We relax, we laugh, and we strategize together. Women-only spaces provide a site of safety from male aggression and violence in a deeply misogynist and male dominated world.

Who objects to people of color gathering without white people present? Who objects to Native Americans excluding outsiders from certain ceremonies? Why is there objection to women who have lived their entire lives as women wishing to gather with other women like ourselves? What other class of oppressed people are still fighting for the right to meet without the oppressor present?

What the pro-trans lobby is doing to eliminate female‑only spaces, advocating that any male who "feels female" should be allowed to enter protected sex‑segregated spaces, is sexist and misogynistic. One of the fundamental aims of feminism is for women’s right to draw our own boundaries, to exercise control over who we associate with and what form this association takes. Our right to set boundaries is under attack. Every oppressed group has the right to set boundaries. We have the right to autonomy, to gather exclusively with others who have shared experiences. It is not transphobic or bigoted to have boundaries.

Nothing shouts male privilege and entitlement quite like those who were socialized as male demanding access to spaces reserved for women. If we ask that the intention of a space be considered with respect, too many transwomen act like privileged male-supremacist men, entitled to be wherever they want to be and forcing themselves into places where they do not belong. Males have been told all their lives that they are the center of the world. Women are expected to accommodate men, transitioned or not, in the usual patriarchal gender roles, to put the beliefs and feelings of others before themselves.

Female-only spaces do not exist to validate the identities of those who believe themselves to be women. These spaces are not about them or the hatred of anyone. We need to not be in denial about the significance of a lifetime of female lived experiences. When women say no, we are accused of hatred, discrimination, and bigotry, the newest way of punishing women who say no to men.

Transwomen are committing real harm against women in women’s protected sex-segregated safe-space settings such as single-sex college campuses, prisons, locker-rooms, bathrooms, and sports competitions, as well as women-only spaces. Transwomen inflict male violence upon women at the same rates as biological males. Transwomen’s and female-born women’s bodies cannot be equivalent in athletics and or in their biological needs.

Vulnerable women in shelters, jails, and prisons, who can’t leave or choose who they’re living with, shouldn’t have to share rooms, bathrooms, or group showers with males, no matter how they identify. If a lesbian says that she wants to date only women, she shouldn’t be called a bigot if she won’t date males who identify themselves as women. When a male rapes a woman, she shouldn’t have to call him “she,” no matter who he says he is.

Transgender activists and their allies have continually attacked women who want female-only spaces. Careers have been ruined by accusations of transphobia for playing at women's music festivals or advocating radical feminism. Radical feminists who question queer ideology are branded as bigots. We are told repeatedly that our only motive in critiquing gender is discrimination and hatred. Women face online threats of sexual violence and death for expressing opinions. Gatherings for only female-born women have been physically assaulted. This violence is unprecedented in feminism.

Lots of feminists have fallen silent out of fear of attacks. It is no coincidence that lesbians experience the greatest amount of queer hostility. Our groups have been taken to court for discrimination, resulting in many lesbian-centered groups being forced to go underground, i.e. back into the closet. It’s like the Emperor’s new clothes — nobody is willing to say anything because nobody wants to lose their head.

The targets of this anti-woman witch hunting have always been women, feminists, and lesbians. Misogyny is rampant in these backlash times, and women make easy targets. Yet it is males who are inflicting actual violence on transgender people. Bullying women to accept your ideology is not the act of an oppressed group, it is the act of the oppressor. Whether you help women or hurt women matters. Targeting a women’s music festival, suing a women’s rape shelter, and ruining a women's career appears more important to transgender activists than overcoming male socialization and misogyny, and dismantling male supremacy.

It is not just transwomen doing this, but also their allies. In their desire to prove they are not prejudiced or bigoted against any minority group, they unquestioningly support transition, the queer agenda, and transitioned males' right to be in female spaces. In leftist circles, "inclusion" and exclusion" have become code words that are all too frequently used to shame and silence women and lesbians with different beliefs, opinions, and a critical analysis of gender and transition. Queer ideology is celebrated as progressive, yet with a deeper critical look, it is deeply conservative, pushing gender stereotypes, capitalizing on misogyny, and erasing homosexuality.

When the question of whether or not male-to-transwomen should be welcomed into space that has previously been for biological women comes up, division and disagreement among women arise. Women who need women-born-female-only space find themselves in conflict with those who believe in "inclusion." There is a huge amount of bullying to make sure organizers of women's events include transwomen. Organizers fear being targeted if they don't allow transwomen to attend. How can we be allies to transwomen when we are told we must cede to their demands that they have unquestioned, unlimited access to spaces we have created for ourselves? "Inclusion" ends up excluding radical feminists who want (female-born) women-only space. More often than not, women-only spaces disappear because of the conflict. I grieve the disappearance of so many women-only spaces.

LGBTQ and Feminism

Most LGBTQ groups now focus on transgender rights. Wealthy celebrities who have transitioned male-to-female are significant sources of funding for queer organizations. Transgender people deserve human rights, but transgender theory is openly contradictory to the long-term feminist goal of ending male supremacy and sexist gender stereotypes. Lesbians are now being called "queer," erasing that we are female and survivors of sexism. Transwomen are now speaking as lesbians, appropriating our identity and erasing what a lesbian actually is, so LGBTQ groups don't even need us representing ourselves anymore. The silencing of lesbians in spaces that are supposed to be for us is misogyny and homophobia. Many lesbians are leaving LGBTQ groups, feeling that we are invisible and that our concerns are ignored and disrespected.

Heterosexual males who have transitioned to become women are still sexually attracted to women and therefore want to have sex with lesbians. Even some who have not had surgery call themselves "lesbian." Lesbians are criticized and shunned and called transphobic for not wanting to partner with transmen who call themselves "lesbian" and for not wanting their “lady stick” (aka penis). Biological males are not females and therefore by definition cannot be lesbian, however they may see themselves or demand others to see them. Even if he gets his genitals cut off, he is still not a lesbian.

The word lesbian has become unspeakable in queer circles because it is seen as regressive or narrow-minded or exclusionary to be only into women. Lesbian erasure is happening in the name of inclusivity, despite the harm it does to lesbians. Historic lesbians are now being re-branded as "queer."

Transgender activists are co-opting feminism. "Trans-feminism" is a male definition of feminism that serves transgender interests. As a female, I have nothing in common with males who transition or who start calling themselves women. They need to stop colonizing other marginalized groups.

Transgender activists had nothing to do with the things that really matter to women – suffrage, abortion rights, access to contraception, domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, or any of the other things we take for granted that second wave feminists fought so hard for. Transitioning hasn’t broken down the patriarchy or done anything at all to break down rigid gender norms.

Conclusions

What has our society come to, that we have skewed gender so much that people are unhappy in the bodies they are born with? Why do so many feel that their only hope is to transition? Why not work for loosening society's rigid gender norms and normalizing gender non-conformity? What’s wrong with a male in a dress? What’s wrong with an outspoken woman? What's wrong with a capable butch lesbian? Why are we colluding with narrow conservative ideas of femininity and masculinity? Where is honesty and integrity in the idea of “passing,” proving membership in the identified sex by trying to become indistinguishable from those born as that sex? When will the transgender fad be seen as the social contagion that it is?

I am not a gender abolitionist, who would like to see the concept of gender ended. Instead, I am gender critical, of how gender has been constructed in patriarchal societies to be male supremacist. I want an end to sexist gender stereotypes. All human societies have gender, but non-patriarchal societies have not used gender to oppress and exploit women, and often have more complex systems of gender. Globally and historically, there have been far broader cultural expressions of gender.

I believe that each of us are given the bodies that we are supposed to live in, that no one is born the "wrong" sex, and that our bodies are sacred and perfectly fine without alteration of any sort. Can we be honest about the body we were born with? What is radical to me is proudly affirming and loving one's body, especially if it is not what our conservative society says it should be.

There should be broad social acceptance for the entire spectrum of each gender. There is nothing wrong with a masculine female or a feminine male. No one should be harassed and unaccepted for being gender non-conforming. Everyone should be allowed to live their lives to be all they want to be, without sexist stereotypes and regardless of their biological sex. Then there would be no need to transition. This is the position of the gender critical. We reject the patriarchal dictate that one's personality must match their biological sex, and we reject the queer theory dictate that one's gender must match their personality.

Even if we don't agree on specific points, in these times we desperately need coalitions. Why can’t we all work together to end misogyny, male supremacy and patriarchy, which hurts us all?

Note: If I have used anyone else's words without attributing them, I apologize. I have absorbed many thoughts from reading the writings of others, and have not been accustomed to recording all that influenced me along my way. Let me just say I am grateful to all who have enriched my thinking and have thus contributed to this essay.

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Websites for helping children hold firm in their own bodies:

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4thWaveNow.com

GenderCriticalResources.com/Support/

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"Not just in Britain and the US, but across the western world, the number of female referrals to gender clinics has soared." Although this article is behind a paywall at The Times, it can be read here:

<https://gendertrender.wordpress.com/2017/11/11/meet-alex-bertie-the-transgender-poster-boy/>

Blogs by detransitioned women:

<https://crashchaoscats.wordpress.com/>

<https://desisterresister.wordpress.com/>

<http://redressalert.tumblr.com/>

<https://thissoftspace.wordpress.com/>

*Re-Sisters* is a zine telling stories of female detransition and re-identification, from a number of womyn and in a variety of mediums, 2017. <https://gumroad.com/l/re-sisters>

*Blood and Visions: Womyn Reconciling With Being Female*, 2015 (writings by detransitioned women).

<http://www.greenwomanstore.com/blood-and-visions.html>