



TERF by Any Other Name: The Constitutive Rhetoric of Gender-Critical Feminism

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, I argue that gender-critical rhetoric has successfully constituted a new feminist subject position for cisgender women who deny trans existence but claim the TERF (trans-exclusionary radical feminist) label has become a slur. The “gender-critical feminist” identity redefines transantagonism from a form of hate into a necessary feminist pursuit, empowering its constituents by alleviating their discursive, material, and ideological contradictions. Attuning Charland’s constitutive rhetoric framework to Sylvia Wynter’s concept of overrepresentation, this analysis suggests that the racialized and cisgendered dimensions of U.S. gender-critical feminism qualify it as a fascist feminist project interconnected with fascist/feminist movements in the UK and Europe. By leveraging white cis paranoia, eugenicist biopolitical logics, and reactionary discursive tactics, gender-critical feminism re/produces itself as an overrepresentational project dedicated to conservative politics of purity and fear.

KEYWORDS

Gender-critical feminism;
constitutive rhetoric;
overrepresentation;
transantagonism; TERF

In July of 2022, amid spikes in anti-trans legislation across the United States, Australian political philosophy professor Holly Lawford-Smith published *Gender-Critical Feminism*. The 320-page book tries to neatly transform years of accumulated debate over the relationship between transphobia and feminism, selling gender-critical feminism as “a theory and movement that reclaims the sex/gender distinction, insists upon the reality and importance of sex, and continues to understand gender as a way that men and women are made to be, rather than a way they really are” (Lawford-Smith, 2022, cover copy). Now, in 2025, public and state-sponsored transantagonism continues to increase in ferocity at a transnational scale. The American Civil Liberties Union has tracked over 500 anti-LGBTQ (primarily anti-trans) bills in each of the 2023 and 2024 legislative sessions and the 2024 summer Olympic games were marked by a rabid online “transvestigation” campaign attempting to disprove Algerian boxer Imane Khelif’s cisgenderness¹ (Beachman, 2024; Mapping Attacks on LGBTQ Rights in U.S. State Legislatures, 2024). Factoring in the 2024 election cycle, trans historian Jules Gill-Peterson’s (2024b) point that trans people are cyclically demanded to relate to “the crisis of liberalism’s version of democracy” rings particularly true: trans futurity is held in a political siege mentality and problematized to be a wedge issue (p. 198). As Bassi and LaFleur (2022) make clear,

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trans-exclusionary feminisms play a critical role in contemporary transantagonism in how they try to litigate and enforce “legitimate” forms of womanhood, reinforcing systemic powers of white supremacy, eugenics, ableism, and cissexism in ways that appeal to both right-wing and liberal political agendas (p. 327).

In this essay, I argue that “gender-critical” rhetoric has successfully constituted a new feminist subject position for cisgender women who deny trans existence by containing and resolving the material and discursive contradictions present in their ideological tenets. Extending previous scholarship, I demonstrate how this rhetoric successfully constitutes a collective that similar efforts, like those of second-wave white lesbian separatists, could not (see Tate, 2005). More specifically, I argue that the “gender-critical” identity is a soothing rearticulation of two positions to those alienated by trans-inclusive feminisms: one vehemently against the existence of trans people and one of cisgender, primarily white, womanhood-as-victimhood. Just as second wave lesbian feminists sought out a “a new, affirming identity from which they could redefine the cultural meanings of lesbian from ‘deviant’ and ‘ill’ to the pinnacle of feminist radicalism” (Tate, 2005, p. 26), the identity of “gender-critical feminist” provides cis women an affirming rhetorical position from which to redefine the cultural meanings of transphobia from a form of hate into a necessary radical feminist pursuit. Building upon past arguments that TERF (trans-exclusionary radical feminist) is a slur seeking to shame women, trans-exclusionary feminists claim their opposition of trans rights, needs, and safety as feminist topics are justified by their belief that the very existence of trans people, let alone our² sociopolitical goals, are up for debate (Williams, 2014).

Gender-critical feminists often claim to be discriminated against by growing waves of trans-inclusive feminism; that they are opposed by looming cultural forces that seek to censor and erase the experiences, bodies, goals, and identities “innate” to cis women. To do so, gender-critical feminists have adopted stylistic tokens like “gender ideology” initially deployed by often-fascist European political and religious groups to attack trans activist efforts and, with increasing frequency, actively align themselves with conservative political actors who at first would seem antithetical to the goals of “radical” feminism (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017). This essay takes seriously these ideological connections to suggest that U.S. gender-critical feminism is a fascist feminist project, grounded by the sex-gender binary as a colonial structure and the historically over-representative powers of whiteness and cisness (Heaney, 2024; Wynter, 2003).

The white supremacist, imperial, carceral, and increasingly fascist nature of TERF ideology has been well-documented by scholars across communication, history, sociology, and trans/gender studies (Alexander, 2023; Bassi & LaFleur, 2022; Billard, 2023; Evang, 2022; Lewis & Seresin, 2022; Thurlow, 2024). Mapping the “telling” genealogy between trans-exclusionary radical feminism and gender-critical feminism in the UK, Claire Thurlow (2024) argues that shifts towards the “gender-critical” label is more than a renaming of TERF projects, but a more substantive ideological rebranding that attempts to obscure its transantagonistic aims as “pro-woman.” Thurlow concludes by pointing out that the potential obfuscation the “gender-critical” label provides ultimately fails to reframe the reactionary, anti-trans, and bioessentialist nature of TERF beliefs. This essay picks up Thurlow’s endpoint and reframes the gender-critical identificatory rebranding in rhetorical terms. In doing so, I hope to explicate the fascist and white

supremacist dimensions of U.S. gender-critical feminism as it is interrelated to fascist, feminist, and fascist feminist projects in the UK and Europe.

To analyze the constitutive rise of U.S. gender-critical rhetoric, I assembled a collection of rhetorical acts and artifacts—a discursive thread of gender-critical feminism—reaching back to older radical feminist works like Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire* (1994) that tether current gender-critical organizations like the Women's Liberation Front (WoLF), *Gender-Critical Feminism* (2022) and Holly Lawford-Smith's academic blog (2021).³ To demonstrate the interconnectedness of U.S. gender-critical feminism with predecessors in the UK and Europe, I also include social media posts that serve as less formal points of interpellation into the movement. Constitutive rhetoric's ability to negotiate between the material, the cultural, and between competing political visions at a given time to produce effective, lasting collective subject positions demonstrates its necessity for further unpacking trans-exclusionary and fascist feminist social movements as rhetorical processes (Charland, 1987; Delgado, 1995).

To conduct this critique, I first situate this essay within scholarly conversations of trans-exclusionary/gender-critical feminism, fascist feminisms, and feminist history. I note the rhetorical dimensions of Sylvia Wynter's (2003) argument of overrepresentation, linking the concept to Charland's (1987) constitutive rhetoric framework. My analysis addresses how gender-critical feminism constitutes a new subject position for its members by flattening feminism in service of cisness and whiteness, which naturalize and re/produce each other. I demonstrate how gender-critical rhetoric positions itself historically against transness through biological essentialism to mythologize a gender "critic" persona that is constitutively effective in reframing transantagonism as a necessary feminist pursuit. Made possible through fascist biopolitical logics, the "critic" persona goes so far as to suture feminist sovereignty to racialized "replacement" conspiracy narratives, constitutively pushing gender-critical feminists to further racialize and cisgender their sociopolitical goals. The conclusion emphasizes how abolitionist and coalitional logics in trans of color feminisms are central to analyses of fascist/feminist, overrepresentational, and gender-critical political projects.

In their 2022 dialogue in *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, Sophie Lewis and Asa Seresin consider what is gained by antifascist, trans-inclusive feminists when the fascist nature of particular feminist projects are addressed head on, rather than dismissed or minimized. To that end, they comprehend fascism as "a fundamentally colonial matrix of domination" that utilizes (or aspires to utilize) eugenics to control the social, political, and physical reproduction of white supremacy, ableism, and cisheteronormativity (Lewis & Seresin, 2022, p. 465). In the same 2022 issue of *TSQ*, Bassi and LaFleur emphasize the politics of purity that conceptually envelop white Western feminisms (in which violence or exclusionary acts done in the name of "feminism" are excused as non-feminist, preserving feminism as purely "good") and as a fascist political register (in which a feminist project seeks racial, cisgender, and ideological purity within itself and the socio/geopolitical contexts it works within). While some feminist scholarship emphasizes the ways in which fascist movements fail to deliver on promises of (cis) gender equality or express dismay when feminist projects appear to align with fascist ones, Lewis and Seresin take seriously the ways cis women in fascist movements comprehend and justify their political ideologies. This historical reorientation grapples

with how fascism successfully appeals to feminists “invested in upholding white supremacy as well as conservative social norms surrounding the family, religious morality, and social purity” (Lewis & Seresin, 2022, p. 466). This essay seeks to better comprehend how fascist feminists might balance the contradictions between both identifications, specifically, when fascist logics are masked through “feminist” as a seemingly progressive label. Here, like Karen Tate (2005), I find rhetoric particularly useful for gauging the success of gender-critical feminism—as a particular constitutive rhetorical project—through its ideological aims and effects.

While it is important to recognize feminists who forward fascist projects (like TERFs) often do not directly label themselves as such, it is also worth noting that sociologists Kuhar and Patternotte (2017) trace the explicit neo-fascist roots of the European anti-gender movements that coined “gender ideology” as a pejorative. Whether or not they realize this, gender-critical feminists have flocked to the phrase with the same passion as their “anti-feminist” gender-critical peers. One explanation for this is that fascist goals of enforcing rigid traditionalism, ethnonationalism, and social purity remain consistently attached to “gender-critical” projects because those projects rely upon a mode of racialized, cisgendered citizenship (Gill-Peterson, 2024b, p. 207). Said mode revolves around transnational fantasies of peril that cast trans people as a collective scapegoat intent on harming and even socially replacing cis (white) women en masse.

In her pivotal 2003 argument “Unsettling the colonality of being/power/truth/freedom,” Sylvia Wynter proposes that the white ethnoclass of the global north overrepresents itself as Man—as the epitome of the modern, rational, autonomous human being—and in the process, dehumanizes all other races, classes, and in moments of differentiation, genders. The spread and calcification of imperial Christianity helped establish the white cis man as “Man—overrepresented as the generic, ostensibly supra-cultural human” as well as the relational dynamics that situated all global others as “Human Others” doomed to be subjugated to various degrees (Wynter, 2003, p. 288). Here, Wynter’s conceptualization of overrepresentation has explicit constitutive rhetorical qualities. Western criteria for being a “rational” human—whiteness, cisgenderedness, able-bodied- and mindedness, maleness, wealthiness—are produced, obfuscated, and reinforced through “symbolic, representational processes,” processes that require substantive rhetorical work to maintain their illusion as natural and stable (Wynter, 2003, p. 328). Charland (1987) similarly made clear that the “Quebécois” subject position only enjoyed its inherent sense of sovereignty as long as the colonial reality of “the people” in question stayed an opaque memory—demanding an ongoing presentist rhetorical reframing of history (pp. 144–145). The re/descriptive work needed to cement Western white supremacy at a transnational scale required the invention of white Man as the normative sociopolitical subject—the constitution of the ideal subject in a historical narrative always-already in place, with particular aspirations, ready to be institutionally enforced through theology, biological sciences, and other apparatuses. A feminist iteration of this overrepresentation requires an equally particular (rhetorical) invention of the white “female” sociopolitical subject. Using constitutive rhetoric, this essay aims to demonstrate how U.S. gender-critical feminism constitutes such a subject through a mythic narrative of sex-as-caste and cis womanhood defined through patriarchal violence, or, the gender “critic” feminist persona.

A Constitutive Rhetorical Framework Attuned to Feminism

In his pursuit to better understand rhetorical audiences, Kenneth Burke broke from the humanist conceptualization of a transcendental, extra-rhetorical subject to consider instead the very process of subjectivity as a rhetorical effect, or, the process of identification. Burke's theory of identification explicates the process through which individuals come together to create collectives through shared, specific actions, framing belonging as a rhetorical outcome (Burke, 1950, pp. 27–28). Following in Burke's footsteps, Michael C. McGee argued for the critical study of rhetoric's *functions*, more specifically, the study of political myths as processual, rather than phenomenological, as they collectivize groups of persons into a "people." McGee's conception of this process centered around the rhetorical movement of "ideas (and of the people) from one 'world' of attitudes and conditions to another" not in singular narratives, but "in the competitive relationships between myth and objective reality, between a myth and antithetical visions of collective life" (McGee, 1975, pp. 245–246). McGee's focus on the collectivizing power of convictions and beliefs through narrativization provided a stronger explanation for how humans act in ways both structured by and in contradiction to their lived conditions.

In 1987, Maurice Charland built upon both McGee (1975) and Burke (1950) by examining the rhetorical formation of the *peuple Québécois*, forwarding the notion of constitutive rhetoric. Through the case study, Charland argued that to be persuaded or pushed to act, a subject must already be constituted within a particular identity inside of an ideology. Constitutive rhetoric utilizes Althusser's notion of interpellation, acting as a "hailing call" that attempts to address individuals always-already embedded in discourse and call them into being as a particular collective subjectivity—to embody that discourse toward political, social, and economic action (Charland, 1987, p. 134, 145). When a collective successfully constitutes itself rhetorically, Charland argued, said group becomes able to re/define and re/name who they are in juxtaposition to groups of "others" through three narrative ideological effects:

1. a shared, collective, and binding identity,
2. a transhistorical subject position, and
3. the illusion of freedom from previous subject positions.

Charland's (1987) first ideological effect, the "process of constituting a collective subject," entails ideologically rendering a group through a particular narrative (p. 139). This rendering is not just what members of the group do, say, or feel within this identity they have defined, but the way in which their shared identity manifests discursively as the rhetorical character of the group. By explicating the constitutive functions Chicano as an ideograph, Fernando Delgado (1995) built upon McGee's (1980) work by demonstrating how the Chicano social movement wielded different ideological tokens to rearticulate their identity beyond the dominating power of the state, distance themselves from competing ideologies, and materialize their liberatory ideas as new interpretations of power/knowledge. As ideas-made-material, ideographs operate as tokens that deepen and extend the narrative history of a social movement "as cultural form, political act, and ideological substance" (Delgado, 1995, p. 446). This fact is particularly crucial for understanding how different collectives aim to

discursively redress perceived social, political, and economic subordination and provide themselves a new, empowering mythic identity through the constitutive rhetoric process.

In 2005, Karen Tate argued that feminism is one example of successful rhetorical constitution, tapping into shared history and particular political myths/discourses to interpellate, historically, different groups of cisgender women into a collective feminist identity and corresponding *telos*. Tate (2005) explicates how, facing homophobia and ostracization in the lavender scare, groups of second-wave white lesbian feminists abandoned the National Organization for Women (NOW) in pursuit of their own consciousness-raising groups to forward their own needs, goals, and values, strengthening their social presence. Around the same time, early trans-exclusionary radical feminist arguments took pains to pose trans women as an imagined threat to feminist peers, particularly lesbian feminists who had positioned themselves against heteronormativity within white, mainstream feminist spaces. During the 1973 West Coast Lesbian Conference in Los Angeles, for example, then-prominent author Robin Morgan used her position as keynote speaker to verbally attack one of the conference organizers, folk singer Beth Elliot, for being trans (Gill-Peterson, 2024a). Furthermore, Morgan's screed likened Elliot, and by extension all trans women, to "blackface" actors of gender, claiming trans women's existence to be a de facto form of violence against cisgender women—grounds for making feminist spaces cis-only. American lesbian feminist Janice Raymond's polemic *The Transsexual Empire*, first published in 1979, would further crystallize transantagonism as a moral rubric for radical feminists.⁴ Raymond, along with figures like Shiela Jeffreys and Mary Daly, were pivotal in spreading transmisogynoir through feminist organizations in the United States, Australia, and the UK (Williams, 2020). As feminist scholars like Maria Lugones (2010) and Jenny Evang (2022) make clear, the prevalence of trans-exclusionary feminism in these particular countries is no coincidence: the "biological" sex categorizations that ground the notion of the sex-gender binary were originally established to overrepresent whiteness and dehumanize bodies understood as non-white and non-cis.

The constitutive process of second-wave radical feminist groups ultimately split along lines of trans inclusivity, where a narrative of allyship linked cis women and trans women with similar feminist goals, or trans exclusivity, which manifested around a narrative of cis women in direct opposition to trans women. For these trans-exclusive branches of radical feminism, the constitutive process was driven by shared perceptions of postmodernism, gender performativity, and "androgynous humanism" as sources of false or immaterial ideas about sex that made "transgenderism" a threat to their own "real" feminist politics (Raymond, 1994, p. xxix). While this trans-exclusionary politic has dominated historical understandings of radical feminism, scholars like Cristan Williams (2014, 2016) do important work to re-illuminate feminists who took political action and even risked bodily harm against anti-trans peers in the name of radical trans inclusion. Drawing on transnational histories of gender and empire, the dominant narratives of white feminism and trans exclusion offer a lasting, robust feminist history for gender-critical feminists to situate themselves within. This makes possible Charland's (1987) second ideological effect, the "positing of a transhistorical subject" with a "concrete link" of ancestry to ground an emerging collective (p. 140).

Works like *The Transsexual Empire* reify a broader historical focus on sex and sexuality as sites of power that lends feminist ideologies opposed to trans existence

chronological weight—especially when “gender” is a more recently codified aspect of academic and activist work by comparison.⁵ More specifically, works like *The Transsexual Empire* claim that trans people reinforce patriarchy by:

[encouraging] persons to view other persons (especially children) who do not engage in normative sex-role behavior as potential transsexuals Reinforces social conformity by encouraging the individual to become an agreeable participant in a role-defined society, substituting one sex role stereotype for the other A “social tranquilizer” reinforcing sexism and its foundation of sex-role conformity. (Raymond, 1994, p. xvii)

The above passage demonstrates the “perfectly tautological” nature of trans-exclusionary radical feminism (Charland, 1987, p. 140). The *a priori* acceptance of trans people as “socially tranquilized” by sexual conformity begins to transcend the work of individuals and instead positions a radical feminist coalition against the collective threat of trans people. The us-versus-them mentality of this rhetoric lays the foundation for other paternalistic tactics, like those that position trans people and our needs against children by lumping trans identities in with pedophilia and sexual violence as moves of “rhetorical commonsense” to help fearmonger support for transantagonistic efforts (Barnard, 2017).

For contemporary feminists, works like *The Transsexual Empire* help collapse past and present together within the same identificatory narrative that lends trans-exclusionary feminists a clear history, set of motives, and *telos*. To be a “gender-critical feminist” requires more than avowing oneself to the label, but rather, to take necessary action in the material world to affirm that subject position (Charland, 1987, p. 141). Cisgender women who agree with anti-trans logics must then act within those seemingly timeless logics of gender-critical feminism to become one themselves and help secure a future for the larger collective. In this way, digital spaces have become crucial for allowing women to post, share, and spread their gender-critical claims on blogs and sites like X (née Twitter) to further collapse the individual aspects of this movement into a broader discursive collective. Even if women are not actively involved with a formal feminist organization like the Women’s Liberation Front (WoLF), social media’s structural and connective capacities enable individuals to discursively align themselves within the illusory freedoms of gender-critical feminism without geographic closeness to other feminists like them (Riemensperger, 2018). By interpreting themselves, trans people, and feminism’s purpose through this totalizing frame, gender-critical feminists take the next step in the constitutive process to become formally and ideologically bound to their rearticulated subject position.

The binding of a new subjecthood leads to Charland’s (1987) third ideological effect: the illusion of freedom from previous subject positions through a totalizing and already complete identificatory narrative. To this end, power supplies the conditions for a shared subjectivity as well as a collective’s potential future paths, constraining subjects to “follow through” on the narrative they are ensconced in to ensure ideological consistency (Charland, 1987, p. 141). In *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997), Judith Butler described power as “what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are,” speaking to how subjection “consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose, but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency” (p. 2). To this end, feminist thought and action is simultaneously sustained

and limited by the boundaries of sex/uality and gender within its different branches. For example, Mikkelsen and Kornfield's (2021) deconstruction of white Christian nationalist womanhood demonstrates how identificatory beliefs about "pure" white femininity synthesize white supremacy with an understanding of patriarchal sex-gender roles as inherently religious and sexuality as exclusively reproductive. The sense of power and purity white Christian wives gain from upholding and enforcing the sexism intrinsic to the white Christian nationalist myth is also the source of their subjugation—without it, their collective identity and purpose is lost, but with it, the potential to understand Christianity separate from racism, nationalism, and patriarchy is extirpated. The power of gender-critical feminism is rooted in many of those same ideologies.

The current role of technology and online communication in feminist social movements further complicates how, when, and to whom different feminists understand their work belongs. Trans-inclusivity slowly works its way further and further into the mainstream thanks, in part, to increasing recognition of what trans and cis people both face under cisheteropatriarchy. And, as much as trans-exclusionary radical feminist (TERF) politics have dominated mainstream understandings of radical feminism, there is also a history of radical inclusion that brought trans and cis feminists together in solidarity against anti-trans violence—including barrages of death threats and groups of armed TERF activists attempting to act upon said threats—within third-wave feminist action (Williams, 2016, p. 255). This historical context is useful because it helps demonstrate how the identificatory label of "gender-critical" is nothing more than a rebranding of TERF. TERF was initially coined in the early 2000s as a concise, supposedly neutral marker for radical, cis-exclusive feminist positionalities that has since mutated into a pejorative (Williams, 2014). The derogatory connotations TERF has gained over the past two decades has resulted in collective pushback from the very feminists it was coined to describe, who decry the term as little more than a misogynistic slur or shaming, silencing linguistic tool (e.g., Lawford-Smith, 2022, ch. 6). Trans-exclusionary radicalism, however, is but one competing claim about the nature of feminism as a collective identity and social movement with others like Williams (2016) reminding us that "conflating TERF ideology with radical feminism erases the voices of numerous radical feminist opinion leaders" (p. 257).

Forming a White Cis Feminist Constituency

In gender-critical feminism, the relationship between white supremacy and transantagonism is ouroboric. It is the successful re/production of *whiteness* that hinges on the erasure of difference and the naturalization of cisness. The successful re/production of *cisness* equally hinges on that success of whiteness, which is yet again calcified through the overrepresentation of "cis" white women subjects.

Take, for example, the third chapter of *Gender-Critical Feminism*, which tenuously details how gender-critical philosophy literally flattens the pursuit of feminism to "a single-axis movement for women's liberation" where "the members of feminist groups are equals in that context, so long as they're all women" (Lawford-Smith, 2022, p. 58). Gender-critical feminism speaks directly to a shared identity of cis womanhood, particularly, an imagined sense of precarity in white, cis self-understanding. Lawford-Smith (2022) continues her explanation, speaking directly to how race factors into gender-critical feminism:

If we instead maintain that feminism is a single-axis movement for women's liberation, then the members of feminist groups are equals in that context, so long as they're all women. If we changed the context so that all the same women were at a Black Lives Matter meeting, the white women would need to learn to be quiet and find out how to be good allies to black people. But in the context of a feminist meeting, where the focus is and should be on sex-based oppression, there is no further hierarchy between women that is of relevance to the feminist movement. No one needs to apologize and defer within such a group; women have done enough apologizing and deferring in human history to last a lifetime. (pp. 58–59)

If the cisness inherent to gender-critical feminism is its theoretical beginning, *Gender-Critical Feminism* swiftly moves on to how that sense of cisness apparently avoids being racialized. In doing so, the book confirms Gill-Peterson's (2024b) astute prediction by ratifying "the charge of whiteness as an anchor of identity politics" through resentment at the thought of apologizing or deferring to another group of women in a feminist space (p. 205). Furthermore, this intrinsic defense of whiteness within gender-critical feminism reiterates Wynter's (2003) argument that particular arbitrary representations must be framed as truth to uphold social order in favor of the overrepresented (pp. 271, 281). The white, cis mode of being enshrined through gender-critical feminism's "single-axis" language accomplishes constitutive rhetoric's first ideological effect of creating a collective subject position. In doing so, gender-critical feminism internally justifies the subordination of transness while also moving Black, poor, and disabled cis women into sub-rational positions. Sites of unmarked whiteness in gender-critical feminism similarly contribute to the movement's white supremacy.

While *Gender-Critical Feminism* speaks to its sense of whiteness directly, the whiteness of the Women's Liberation Front emerges through how race fails to be acknowledged in any of its work. On the key informational pages of WoLF's website—its code of conduct, its "herstory" timeline, and its organizational goals—race is nowhere to be found. As Sara Ahmed (2007) argued, whiteness is "what does not get seen as the background to social action," made invisible to those who inhabit it and used as the unmarked comparison point for others' supposed deviance (pp. 157, 165). Whiteness is the background of WoLF's social action and more importantly a direct factor in its embrace of gender-critical ideology. While left unmarked by the organization, reviewing WoLF's rhetoric with both gender and race in mind reframes the group's goals such as "reproductive sovereignty" as presumably exclusive to the overrepresented subject of white cis women.

Like second-wave radical lesbians, gender-critical feminists successfully politicize their natural—or rather, *naturalized*—state to advance their own notion of liberation (Tate, 2005). While second-wave lesbians were attempting to mitigate stereotypical articulations of queerness as delusion or deviance, gender-critical feminists instead lean into essentialist ideas that position the sex-gender binary as irrefutable for the ways it has been scientifically and culturally codified. Like their TERF predecessors, gender-critical feminist arguments are rife with moral traps designed to obscure the work required of and by cis people to make their bodies align with the sex-gender binary (Williams, 2020, p. 47). Lawford-Smith (2021) exemplified this sentiment with the claim that "sex was always a 'difference' that distinguished two types of humans, perhaps most obviously in the fact of female humans being the ones who got pregnant

and gave birth” (para. 15). Lawford-Smith’s matter-of-fact link of what is “female” with what is “woman,” what is “female” as the natural, intrinsic opposite of “male,” and what is female/woman as defined through reproduction is an exhausting bout of rhetorical gymnastics: she situates her reduction of womanhood to binary sex-gender roles within a stoic timelessness, through the preface of an eternal *always*. If sex was always this way, then, the project of gender-critical feminism as a collective identity is one supported by the very nature of human existence, or, the ancestral transhistorical *telos* that is Charland’s (1987) second ideological effect.

While this historicized biological essentialism supplies a key element of the gender-critical feminist subject position, it simultaneously catalyzes and contains the kind of ideological contradiction successful constitutive rhetoric must help define away. In this case, the fact that the sex-gender binary is an arbitrary, raced construction is that contradiction. Gender-critical feminism’s constitutive overrepresentation colonizes what is deemed natural, assigning it a place in the realm of objective fact (Wynter, 2003, p. 313). To this end, gender-critical theorizing frames the existence of intersex bodies (let alone the violent and systemic medical mistreatment intersex people face) as non-existent and in that way, non-human (Repo, 2013). The neatness of binary sex categories ignores a systemically overlooked fact that most introductory gender studies courses cover: that sex is more complex than what can be easily observed and that ideological investments in the sex-gender binary are what ground its illusion of immutability, naturalness, and invisibilized whiteness.

Later, in the tenth “coda” chapter of *Gender-Critical Feminism*, Lawford-Smith (2022) includes a gender-critical manifesto reiterating that feminism is by and for “women as women” (p. 201, emphasis in original). The manifesto also calls for “protection for feminist speech, which won’t be secured by a feminism busy cancelling its detractors for ‘whorephobia,’ ‘transphobia,’ or ‘white feminism’” (Lawford-Smith, 2022, p. 202). In its titular text, gender-critical feminism is defined by biological essentialism, disavowals of sex work (another historical TERF value) and of transness, but perhaps most importantly its explicit, defensive sense of whiteness. This kind of cis womanhood is granted purpose and power through the racialized transmisogyny made possible through transmisogynoir. Rejecting the sex-gender binary as a structure of both white supremacy and cissexism means losing what offers gender-critical feminists their collective identity and their political purpose.

As many gender-critical feminists make clear, their identity is rooted in a profound and foundational sense of victimhood under patriarchy as manifested through sexual violence perpetuated by cisgender men against cisgender women (Lawford-Smith, 2022; Women’s Liberation Front, n.d.b). This essay does not deny the realities of patriarchal oppression, but rather, stresses the corollary point that gender-critical feminists exaggerate their own challenges by minimizing the oppression of other groups, namely trans people, as a means of sustaining their own privileged sociopolitical position. The necropolitical matrix of violence that harms all bodies, but black and brown trans bodies especially, should be grounds for collective action against the patriarchal and white supremacist system that fuels it (Westbrook, 2023). However, such recognition of cis women’s privilege simultaneously with domination through patriarchy (that cis women experience privilege in the sex-gender “caste” hierarchy) is a “political reality” that denies the “very being” of the mythic gender-critical collective identity (Charland, 1987, p. 145).

At first glance, it is not out of political praxis but constitutive fidelity that a gender-critical feminist lens frames trans people as scapegoats for harm caused by cis men or accountability for cis women through patriarchy. However, Lewis and Seresin (2022) make clear that women invested in fascist political projects believe fascism has something to offer them (p. 466). Rather than treating gender-critical feminism's fascist political praxis dedicated to white supremacist purity politics as an incongruity, addressing gender-critical feminism as a fascist feminism demonstrates how its potentially "un-feminist" ideological tenets are constitutively resolved through gender-critical rhetoric. For example, while Lawford-Smith (2022) argues gender-critical feminism is not transphobic because it considers trans men to be included in its constituency of "female" people (p. 61), such statements turn mephitic when they are immediately followed by disinformation about trans masculinity.⁶ Gender-critical feminism claims young cis women are being forcefully transitioned by social pressures and/or pharmaceutical conspiracies as part of their ongoing argument that transness does not exist (Billard, 2023; Hsu, 2022). Gender-critical feminists constitutively organize themselves and their own *telos* through negation, specifically negating intersex and trans realities and negating the role whiteness plays in structuring their beliefs. While the "pro-woman" arguments Thurlow (2024) noted do play a substantive role in gender-critical feminist rhetoric, the necessity of negative rhetorical framings to maintain constitutive overrepresentation indicates that gender-critical feminism continues to wield transphobia not only as an ideological tenet, but an explicitly (fascist) feminist pursuit.

Getting Gender Critic/al

Gender-critical feminism asserts that cis women, because of their lived ("biological") experiences, are the only group qualified to assess and critique sex, gender, and feminism itself, deeming what is and what is not true about said topics. In this way, the phrase "gender-critical" does double rhetorical duty. The identity explicates both an ability to see through the supposed crisis that "gender ideology" has created but also establishes the cis woman-as-feminist critic. This mythic constitutive identity, rooted in politics of whiteness and essentialism, offers gender-critical feminists a sense of identificatory resolution that allows them to justify sociopolitical conflict against trans Others (Charland, 1987). For example, the WoLF (n.d.a) code of conduct literally positions itself within the concept of truth:

Members of WoLF commit to being powerful truth-speakers. Because WoLF's position reflects the objective reality of what women and girls face under oppressive power structures, there is no need for us to make up falsehoods. Furthermore, members recognize that women of conscience can disagree, and in these cases, understanding the source of disagreement can bring us closer to the truth. Members approach disagreement among their sisters not out of anger or sadness, but with curiosity, seeking to understand how the conflict arose and how it can be resolved.

Here, WoLF uses perceived ownership over feminist truths and feminist falsehoods to continually place cisgender women in a position of deliberative power within the social movement. This statement implies the truth of feminism is disconcertingly objective and homogenous, that there are truths and resolutions both in and outside the

movement that must be dictated on white, cis feminist terms. Returning to *Gender-Critical Feminism's* refrain of biological essentialism and unapologetically “putting women first,” gender-critical women use this rhetoric to determine not just what “living” as a woman means, but the very aspects of sex/uality and gender that are “real” or not (Lawford-Smith, 2022, p. 60). Social media posts (e.g., Berns, 2018) that keep Robin Morgan’s gendered “blackface” equivalency alive and circulating further reinforce the way gender-critical feminism gains authoritative power from the racialized, carceral purity politics that reinforce its logics (Alexander, 2023; Bassi & LaFleur, 2022).

For a constitutive collective to reiterate itself through sociopolitical action, its constitutive narrative must culminate in the identification of an existential threat (Charland, 1987, p. 146). Situated as mutually exclusive to its collective goals, needs, and wants, the constitutive myth of gender-critical feminism frames trans people as harmful to the feminist movement, and by extension, cis women, because it conceptualizes trans existence as an extension of cispatriarchal oppression. By rhetorically framing trans people as patriarchal agents, gender-critical feminists relieve the contradiction between their feminist identity, their transphobia, and their devotion to pillars of fascism like traditionalism by reframing their white transphobia as a form of integrity.

While the WoLF (n.d.b) describes gender ideology as “new misogyny” (Public Talks and Education section), the phrase itself is taken from the European, Christian right populist movements who first articulated it (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017). Constitutively, the original source of the word pales compared to its deployment as a “generative act” that offers cisgender women an empowering defensive position against the supposed harm “gender ideology” causes to women and girls (Delgado, 1995, p. 451). In fact, “abolishing gender ideology” is now the first activist goal in WoLF’s code of conduct, explicating how “sisters” should commit to the totalized yet fallacious logic that gender is a tool of “male domination” and that sex-segregation needs to be defended (Women’s Liberation Front, n.d.a). The ideological character of this rearticulated transantagonism calls for gender-critical feminists to act against the sites of gender ideology they identify (like drag shows in public spaces that the WoLF Board of Directors lobbied against in 2019) because the political future of cis women is stronger than, as Lawford-Smith (2022) argues, divides between gender-critical feminists and their critics (feminist or otherwise).

To this end, gender is the “symbolic glue” that brings together seemingly discordant groups and goals across various political stances to form a reactionary front against trans people as a common enemy (Kováts, 2018). Political scientist Eszter Kováts (2018) demonstrates how these anti-trans alliances between seemingly progressive groups (anti-trans feminists, gay/lesbian separatists) and established conservative groups challenge structural understandings of liberal democracy by expanding the appeals of anti-progress populism. By coming together to bemoan the purported brainwashing capacities of “gender ideology” and transness more generally, groups across the liberal-conservative continuum obfuscate the material and power-bound benefits they enjoy by escalating transantagonism as a raced sociopolitical norm. As WoLF (2024b) continues to pursue conservative legislation banning trans people from organized sports and structurally ostracizing trans youth from their cisgender peers, the articulation of gender ideology becomes critical to the stability that alignment as a feminist choice. Said differently, the maintenance of “feminist” as an assumed marker of progressivism

works to mask the fascist and white-supremacist “concessions” gender-critical feminists make in these reactionary collaborations—and there are plenty who do not need to concede any of their existing beliefs to do so (Lewis & Seresin, 2022). Whether in its most extreme instances or through milder iterations, gender-critical feminism rearticulates trans-exclusion as a positive, protective identity for white cis women, who are then framed as the leaders in a fight against trans people and trans/gender agendas to preserve their feminist goals of past, present, and future.

Trans people are, by necessity, the third persona of gender-critical rhetoric: by alienating and negating trans people as the “it” others should fear becoming (or even supporting), gender-critical feminists attempt to close their own constitutive narrative by restricting the discursive/material resources available to trans people to speak on our own behalf and accurately voice our own needs (Wander, 1984). Instead, a chorus of gender-critical feminists take over, calling for conversion therapy, the “protection” of children from exploring gender, and making clear that they have found the artificial, uncritical, decrepit “problem,” as Raymond (1994) put it, that transness really is (see also, Romano, 2023). As Bassi and LaFleur (2022) note, “the transphobic imperative to consistently frame transness through the lens of novelty undergirds transexclusionary feminist claims to the historical endurance of their beliefs” (p. 327). Rhetorically, this undergirding work lends itself to gender-critical feminism’s second ideological effect, which Lawford-Smith (2022) takes advantage of when *Gender-Critical Feminism* calls for gender-critical women to renew the “precedent” of feminist social movements and celebrate being considered “apostates and heretics” by other feminists and non-feminists alike (p. 65).

Fascist Feminist Constitutive Fantasies

The constitutive rhetorical shift from TERF to gender-critical demonstrates not a substantive shift in (U.S.) white trans-exclusionary feminism but a renaming that brings the constitutive power of fascist biopolitics to that feminism’s forefront. This analysis argues that the construction of a gender “critic” persona reinforces overrepresented notions of knowing and being, merging en masse the cis white feminist identity with an anti-trans political agenda. In this section, I specifically suggest that gender-critical feminist rhetoric goes so far as to adapt conspiracy theory logic as a (fascist) feminist logic, primarily through replacement narratives. These narratives are rooted in the broader white supremacist conspiracy theory of a “great replacement,” which fantasizes about homogenous white populations being overtaken by non-white populations (Billard, 2023, p. 238). Gender-critical feminism overrepresents white, cis women to reimagine them at the helm of the moral social order, which relies upon the differentiation of other degrees of “evolutionary selectedness/eugenicity and/or dysselectedness/dysgenicity” to function (Wynter, 2003, p. 316). As discussed earlier in this analysis, gender-critical feminism comprehends non-white, intersex, and trans bodies through those degrees of “dysgenicity”: through subjugation and negation via cis white experience-as-truth. In other words, a rhetorical perspective further illuminates how gender-critical feminism fuels “an ongoing effort to forge and consolidate a new vision of cis womanhood rising from the ashes of a theory of sexual vulnerability rooted in a profoundly racialized and cissexist understanding of embodiment” (Bassi & LaFleur, 2022, p. 325). As

an overrepresentative figuration, the gender “critic” persona synthesizes its feminist positionality with its eugenicist logics—reframing fascistic or conspiracy theory sensibilities as feminist ones that further the gender-critical sense of white womanhood-as-victimhood.

In a May 2024 press release, WoLF linked the linguistic swap of “sex” with “gender identity” in U.S. anti-discrimination legislation to the symbolic replacement of cis women with trans people in the American public consciousness as well as the literal replacement of “female” bodies with trans ones in traditionally sex-segregated spaces (Women’s Liberation Front, 2024a). Centering member quotes to synecdochally capture outrage on behalf of all American cis women, WoLF claims to have predicted and warned against such a decision for years. Suturing outrage and prediction together, WoLF’s release shows gender-critical feminist fears of political “war” against cis women, the “taking away” of futures from “little girls,” and the “butchering” of sex-segregated spaces coming true in real time (Women’s Liberation Front, 2024a, Women Speak Out! section). These replacement narrative lamentations culminate in a gender-critical sense of, in Charland’s (1987) words, “transcendent” existential victimhood at the hands of the U.S. government—the appropriate response(s) to this existential threat are dictated through gender-critical mythos (p. 143).

As gender-critical feminism’s mythic narrative offers solace from the TERF subject position as part of its third ideological effect, it offers its constituents a positive rearticulation of their whiteness, cisness, and transantagonism to empower them to act within a “logic of meaningful totality” (Charland, 1987, p. 141). While highly fragile from an outside perspective, the narrative logic of gender-critical rhetoric confidently comprehends itself within its contradictions. Lawford-Smith (2021) argues that gender-critical cis women are forced to serve as “the very few” willing to stand up to trans people because trans people are trying to make sex/gender “a matter of subjective identification rather than material fact” (para. 4). Later, she claims that “it is not just trans people who face discrimination on the grounds of gender non-conformity. And yet it is only trans people who there is a serious social effort to protect from this kind of discrimination” (Lawford-Smith, 2022, p. 54). This rhetorical positioning creates a hailing call to action for cis white women to join gender-critical efforts to save themselves as a “dying breed” being abandoned by mainstream society. The constructed threat of transness becomes “a sort of conspiracy aimed at seizing power and imposing deviant and minority values” to comparably “average” cis people, which perpetuates fascistic politics of fear (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017, pp. 6, 15). WoLF (n.d.a) similarly does this in their code of conduct by claiming they are “one of the few organizations willing to speak up for women’s rights at a time when they are under attack.” In doing so, the constitutive positioning of transness as an inflated threat to white cisness narrativizes the necessity of gender-critical work through the motive of self-preservation (Charland, 1987, p. 147).

Gender-critical feminism’s fascistic self-preservation narrative also includes an unfortunate set of appeals across other queer sexualities: cis lesbians who join the gender-critical movement note doing so because they feel they are threatened to a point of purported extinction.⁷ The website “Gender Identity Watch,” created by a white cis lesbian and “spiritual leader” of online TERF communities, served as one of the most prolific spaces of transantagonistic feminism in the early 2010s before it was

formally petitioned and labeled a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center (McDonald, 2014; Nightshade, 2014). When the site was shut down by WordPress for its evocations of hate speech, it did not disappear, but was recovered and absorbed into the Women's Liberation Front. WoLF declared that they were saving the site because it served as a "valuable archive" to "resist the erasure of the rights of women and girls," echoing the site's original intentions to protect "female and lesbian" identities and histories (Wordpress's Suspension of Gender Identity Watch, 2018, para. 2). What sets gender-critical feminism apart from its failed second-wave predecessor that Tate (2005) explored is that cis womanhood has a far greater ideological bond to the current moment, as many cis white women's perceived and/or real racial, material, and moral realities do align with the *telos* of gender-critical rhetoric. Broader social acceptance, legal protections, and mainstream media representations have all contributed to normalizing and assimilating queer sexualities; queer cisgender women today do not have to reach through the same barriers of stigma that lesbian feminists in the 1970s were restrained by. Gender identity, however, has been reconfigured into that "most" stigmatized position, as gender-critical feminists comprehend being a gay or bisexual cis woman as more "real" and acceptable than being nonbinary or transmasculine (Hsu, 2022). Furthermore, scholars like Gill-Peterson (2024b) reiterate the raced nature of these reconfigurations: whether queer or straight, naturalized-and-cis or dehumanized-and-trans, gender-critical feminist representations of personhood are assumed to be white.

The gender-critical feminist-as-critic is a powerful position in the sense that what gender-critical feminists can do from this discursive position has legible productive possibilities: gender-critical feminist legal actions and "mommy" group mobilizing have real material impacts on the world (Gill-Peterson, 2024b; Women's Liberation Front, 2024b). But as much as these acts bring gender-critical feminism's third ideological effect (the way these feminists fulfill their *telos*) into fruition, the "critic" narrative also illuminates the boundaries of the gender-critical subject position. Gender-critical feminists have first denied themselves the ability to see beyond the sex-gender binary to try and deny others the same right. Their role as "critic" is illusory—not so much freeing as constraining them to "follow through" on the ideological tenets that maintain their identificatory narrative (Charland, 1987, p. 141). Without the overrepresentational sovereignty over naturalized truths about gender, sex categorizations, and whiteness within feminism, gender-critical feminist power is "stunted," its cis white subjects "incapable of autonomy," and its constitutive capacities would "ultimately die" (Charland, 1987, p. 146). Gender-critical feminist calls to shove trans people out of public life through "rehabilitation" are, in terms of intention and material implications, the same as fascist right-wing demands to fully eradicate "transgenderism" from public life "for the good of society" (Kilander, 2023). This is because gender "critics" across the political continuum are invested in the same goal of eugenicist, biopolitical population management. Constitutive rhetoric illuminates the internal stakes of gender-critical feminism's continuation as a fascist feminism. By leveraging white cis paranoia and deploying reactionary discursive tactics to naturalize structures of cisness, gender-critical feminism re/produces itself as an overrepresentational project.

Conclusion

This essay has argued that a growing number of white cisgender women have successfully constituted as “gender-critical” feminists, a sociopolitical subject position that rearticulates their transantagonism not as hateful or discriminatory, but as a necessary feminist defense. Claiming that the feminist movement must be salvaged from transness and “gender ideology,” gender-critical rhetoric denounces feminism’s liberatory capacities to forward a fascist political project. As gender-critical rhetoric makes transantagonistic beliefs more palatable, it promises white cis feminists across political ideologies sovereignty and protection by empowering them to be gender “critics” and further subjugate non-white, trans, and intersex people. By integrating Sylvia Wynter’s (2003) concept of overrepresentation with Charland’s (1987) constitutive rhetoric framework, this essay has demonstrated how gender-critical feminism successfully re/produces naturalized senses of whiteness and cisness to fulfill constitutive rhetoric’s three ideological effects. In doing so, I suggest how U.S. gender-critical feminism in organizations like the Women’s Liberation Front operates fascistically, having been shaped by works like *Gender-Critical Feminism* (2022) and sister projects in the UK, Australia, and Europe.

Granted a transhistorical position by previous trans-exclusionary feminist projects, the gender-critical feminist identity collectively situates transphobic cis women into a mythic position of power/knowledge from which to deliberate the discursive and material futures of feminism. Simultaneously restricted and empowered by the performative boundaries of biological essentialism and a constructed enemy of “gender ideology,” the rhetorical project of gender-critical feminism is far from closed. Radical feminism does not and has never belonged to transphobic feminists, and assuming so erases the “exceptionally courageous history of radical trans inclusion” that reaffirms the fact that feminism does belong to everyone, particularly trans people (Williams, 2016, p. 257). While women in fascist movements see value in politics of purity, fear, and ethnonationalism, trans voices of past and present have made clear that revoking human rights along eugenicist and cisheterosexist lines is a slippery slope.

According to Lawford-Smith (2022), gender-critical feminism will only be able to address other political issues “when the fight against gender identity ideology is exhausted” (p. 66). Existing scholarship on trans-exclusionary feminisms and constitutive rhetoric both reiterate how gender-critical feminism, like other attempts to preserve white and cis supremacist ways of being, are never fully closed—their “fights” morph and change, but never really end. The fight against transantagonism as a fascist transnational project is also unending. Recognizing the overrepresentational function of fascist feminist projects makes clear that trans futurity and the future of anti-fascist feminisms are one and the same. In doing so, we might recognize how the stakes of those efforts are the stakes of the struggle against overrepresentation: not just collective well-being but “the full cognitive and behavioral autonomy of the human species itself/ourselves” (Wynter, 2003, p. 260). Trans of color pedagogies and praxes have and continue to pursue this autonomy in ways that directly counter the fascist mythos of gender-critical feminism and its “critic” persona. Gill-Peterson (2024b), for example, offers a trans feminist relational mode that breaks the fascist paternal logics of gender-critical “mommy” groups. By centering the interrelationship between embodiment, futurity, and well-being, Black trans pedagogies refuse white supremacist ways

of being and relating to each other that undergird gender-critical feminism (Alexander, 2023; Hsu, 2022). Instead, these pedagogies work towards shared visions of racial, trans/queer, and disability justice through abolitionist logics to negate the logics of domination that make white fascist feminism possible. Similar approaches in trans history focus on destabilizing and denaturalizing cisness rather than historicizing transness on cis terms and forward trans of color critiques that offer new readings of trans history, rightfully centering Black trans knowledge in the process (Gill-Peterson, 2018; Velocci, 2024). As a reactionary rhetorical construction, the gender “critic” persona feels particularly important for rhetoric scholars invested in these topics. Taking cues from trans studies and feminisms of color, trans of color rhetorical conceptualizations could further explore examples of social movement rhetoric that is successfully identificatory and liberatory, that champion transness, intersectionality, and coalitional politics.

Notes

1. Khelif is neither trans nor intersex, which sparked commentary about the way “transvestigation” discourses harm cis women by gatekeeping the concept of womanhood.
2. As a trans person who studies rhetoric, I see the *telos* of this critique as deeply informed by the lived realities of myself and other trans people. I implicate my own transness in this critique through my linguistic choices as an attempt to push back against this alienation; to encourage the reader to keep in mind that the stakes of gender-critical rhetoric are not abstract. Furthermore, as a white trans scholar, I want to acknowledge the fact that gender-critical feminism imagines someone “like” me within its key audience—gender-critical feminist rhetoric does envision white transmasculine folks in its project. While those attempts are messy and undermined by the movement’s transphobia, the power of that racial component should not be ignored.
3. I focus on Lawford-Smith’s (2022) book in particular because it is one of, if not the first, book that has used the “gender-critical” label in/as its title. While other works have discussed gender-critical and TERF ideas, Lawford-Smith’s is a concentrated effort toward cementing the feminist project in question within a broader academic landscape.
4. I prioritize Raymond’s book as a rhetorical object over other TERF writing of the time for its ideological intensity and notoriety. While work from Jeffreys and other TERFs help map anti-trans feminism as a transnational historical project, Raymond’s status as an American is also useful for this essay’s focus on U.S. gender-critical feminism.
5. The conception of “gender” as a social construction linked to, but separate from, sex/uality is a crucial point of difference between transantagonistic and trans-inclusive feminisms. In *Histories of the Transgender Child* (2018), Gill-Peterson deftly explores how this construction is (1) interwoven with racializing processes and systemic racism and (2) made possible through the exploitation of trans people, particularly trans children of color.
6. A common move of gender-critical rhetoric is to deploy “trans” as a prefix instead of descriptively. For example, Lawford-Smith and WoLF use “transwomen” and “transmen” rather than “trans women” or “trans men.” When using pronouns in conjunction with these terms, gender-critical feminists defer to assumed sex categorizations as a misgendering linguistic move.
7. I want to be mindful of the fact that overexaggerating the number of lesbians who align themselves with trans exclusionary cis peers is a dangerous intersection of homophobic and transphobic logics. Trans-exclusionary feminists have and continue to target lesbians who express gender beyond the terms their acceptability politics dictates. At the same time, anti-trans lesbian feminisms and cis queer separatism that abandons trans peers in favor of assimilationism are well documented (e.g., Gill-Peterson’s *A Short History of Trans Misogyny*).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author. A version of this essay was selected for presentation at the 2024 meeting of the Rhetoric Society of America.

Funding

No funding was received.

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