

# Gender Critical Feminism, the roots of Radical Feminism and Trans oppression

*Published on December 8, 2014September 14, 2018 in [Cristan Williams/Opinion](#) by [Cristan Williams](#)*

Gender Critical Feminism (GCF) is a euphemism for Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism (TERF). There is no ideological difference between the TERF and “Gender Critical Feminist” (GCF) movement; they are one in the same. GCF teaches that because sex is a natural binary, intersex people are actually just deformed men and women and trans people are always the sex they were assigned at birth. As [Janice Raymond](#)’s acolyte Sheila Jeffreys wrote, “sex” is fixed and referring to trans women with female pronouns is therefore immoral in the sense that it is a dishonorable act.

Postmodern and queer theorists share with transgender theorists the idea that “gender” is a moveable feast that can be moved into and out of, swapped and so forth. Gender, used in this sense, disappears the fixedness of sex, the biological basis that underlies the relegation of females to their sex caste. The inferior sex caste status of women is assigned with reference to their biology, and it is through their biology that their subordination is enforced and maintained through rape, impregnation and forced childbearing. Another reason for adherence to pronouns that indicate biology is that, as a feminist, I consider the female pronoun to be an honorific, a term that conveys respect. Respect is due to women as members of a sex caste that have survived subordination and deserve to be addressed with honour. – Sheila Jeffreys, PhD, *Gender Hurts*, pp 5-6

While GCF/TERFs claim that they apply a “Radical Feminist” critique to gender, they are actually an ideological offshoot of Radical Feminism because instead of rejecting sex essentialism, the GCF/TERF movement uses sex essentialism as its ideological foundation. GCF/TERFs are generally sex-essentialists who believe that sex is a natural binary because there exists some undefined male or female essence that is found in all men and women. Sometimes this sexed essence is viewed as habits acquired during early socialization and at other times it is some specific sex attribute. The specific “essence” that GCF/TERFs appeal to changes from time to time, depending on the argument they’re making.

#### Sidebar:

- *Breaking:* The GCF/TERF movement is *currently* attempting to force the UK’s [Left Unity Party](#) to take a GCF/TERF stance towards the existence of trans people. More on this as the story develops!
- The GCF/TERF movement is [attempting to influence](#) trans policy in Australia.
- The GCF/TERF movement tried to [bar trans women from Take Back the Night event](#).
- The GCF/TERF movement has begun [forcibly injecting itself into trans-inclusive spaces](#).
- The GCF/TERF movement is currently promoting the “trans women are violent” meme [while endorsing actual, in-real-life GCF/TERF violence](#).

Many trans people are generally highly critical of a supposed natural sex and gender binary. In this way, the views of trans people can align well with the views of the Radical Feminist movement. The progenitor of Radical Feminism, Monique Wittig, rejected notions of a natural sex binary:

The ideology of sexual difference functions as censorship in our culture by masking, on the ground of nature, the social opposition between men and women. Masculine/feminine, male/female are the categories which serve to conceal the fact that social differences always belong to an economic, political, ideological order. Every system of domination establishes divisions at the material and economic level. Furthermore, the divisions are abstracted and turned into concepts by the masters, and later on by the slaves when they rebel and start to struggle. The masters explain and justify the established divisions as a result of natural differences. The slaves, when

they rebel and start to struggle, read social oppositions into the so-called natural differences. For there is no sex. There is but sex that is oppressed and sex that oppresses. It is oppression that creates sex and not the contrary. The contrary would be to say that sex creates oppression, or to say that the cause (origin) of oppression is to be found in sex itself, in a natural division of the sexes preexisting (or outside of) society. The primacy of difference so constitutes our thought that it prevents turning inward on itself to question itself, no matter how necessary that may be to apprehend the basis of that which precisely constitutes it.”

Sandy Stone, a trans woman who was [targeted for death by armed TERFs](#), said, “There is no ‘natural’ sex, because ‘sex’ itself as a medical or cultural category is nothing more the momentary outcome of battles over who owns the meanings of the category.” Most TERF/GCFs are ideological sex essentialists; most trans, intersex, and RadFems are not.

Consider the words of pioneering RadFem advocate, Andrea Dworkin:

“Hormone and chromosome research, attempts to develop new means of human reproduction (life created in, or considerably supported by, the scientist’s laboratory), work with transsexuals, and studies of formation of gender identity in children provide basic information which challenges the notion that there are two discrete biological sexes. That information threatens to transform the traditional biology of sex difference into the radical biology of sex similarity. That is not to say there is one sex, but that there are many. The evidence which is germane here is simple. The words ‘male’ and ‘female,’ ‘man’ and ‘woman,’ are used only because as yet there are no others.” – Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating*, pp175 – 176

There’s a reason Sheila Jeffreys carefully edits out Dworkin’s thoughts about trans people when she, not infrequently, cites Dworkin in her many condemnations of trans people. I submit to you that she engages in this intellectual turpitude because to

do otherwise would call into question her assertion that what she offers is a “Radical Feminist perspective” of the trans experience.

If one were to substitute “nature” for “god,” the sex essentialism found in the TERF/GCF crew is somewhat similar to the sex essentialism found in right-wing ideology. It is therefore not uncommon to find [anti-gay propaganda mills](#) and [Tea Party politicians](#) quoting [TERF/GCFs](#) and TERF/GCFs quoting anti-gay [Tea Party propagandists](#). Just as right-wingers have token gay people, the TERF/GCF crew has token trans people. The GCF/TERF movement, much like other sex essentialist ideologies, [encourages](#) trans people to detransition.



GCF/TERFs promoting the “trans women are violent” meme at a Take Back the Night event. So, let’s fly under our true colors, shall we? This group that professes to be “critical” of gender is so entrenched in it that they can’t even understand that they are acting agents of the very gender system they claim to hate. Or, as Wittig said, “*The primacy of difference so constitutes our thought that it prevents turning inward on itself to question itself, no matter how*

*necessary that may be to apprehend the basis of that which precisely constitutes it.”*

Here’s what most GCFs profess:

- Females are a caste system because of “class analysis”
- A natural binary is real; sex isn’t a continuum because “sexual dimorphism”
- Intersex people are just deformed binary sexes because “sexual dimorphism”
- Male and Female habits (socialization) are essential to being authentic males/females.
- “Male” and “Female” sex identifiers should be compulsory and eternal
- “Male” and “Female” gender identifiers are BS because “social construction”
- “Gender identity” only ever means cultural identities

When pressed on their ideology, GCF will almost never be able to name the attributes of their “class analysis” or “social constructionism.” On a recent BBC interview, Sheila Jeffreys asserted, “the phenomenon of transgenderism [sic] which is a social construction... is harmful to many groups of persons.” From what I’ve seen, these claims merely function as academic-sounding ideas whose value is purely rhetorical. Some of the brightest feminist thinkers of our time have noticed this too. [Judith Butler](#) notes that when GCF/TERF opinion leaders like Sheila Jeffreys burble on about social constructionism, the things she says makes no sense to people who actually understand social constructionism. Butler observes that Sheila Jeffreys and Janice Raymond “offers a kind of feminist policing of trans lives and trans choices.” About Jeffreys’ “social construction” talking points, [Butler said](#), “If she makes use of social construction as a theory to support her view, she very badly misunderstands its terms.” She goes on to say, “I oppose this kind of prescriptivism, which seems me to aspire to a kind of feminist tyranny.”

Consider how closely the now decades old worlds of long-term trans activist Susan Stryker mirrors the truths Wittig took pains to point out and TERF work so hard to obfuscate:

[T]he Nature you bedevil me with is a lie. Do not trust it to protect you from what I represent, for it is a fabrication that cloaks the groundlessness of the privilege you seek to maintain for yourself at my expense. You are as constructed as me; the

same anarchic Womb has birthed us both. I call upon you to investigate your nature as I have been compelled to confront mine. – Trans academic and historian, [Susan Stryker](#) from *My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage*, 1994

I read Jeffreys' book, *Gender Hurts*. In the precise way she hamfistedly appropriates social constructionism to attack trans people, she appropriates the *concept* of class analysis to support her targeting of trans people. *Gender Hurts* is not a class analysis of gender; rather, it is merely an *appeal* to class analysis. If you want to see a GCF/TERF squirm, press them to explicitly map the precise attributes of their "class analysis." They'll simply appeal to the authority of this academic pseudo-radical terminology until they're blue in the face. When they utterly fail to support their position, then inform them that the progenitor of Radical Feminism rejected such analysis as rhetorical *woo*.

Consider what Witting has to say about much of what we find in GCF/TERF ideology. Remember, the following is foundational Radical Feminist thought, not (as GCF/TERFs would say) "transgender ideology:"

[N]ot only is there no natural group "women" (we lesbians are living proof of it), but as individuals as well we question "woman," which for us, as for Simone de Beauvoir, is only a myth. She said: "One is not born, but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society: it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine."

**However, most of the feminists and lesbian-feminists in America and elsewhere still believe that the basis of women's oppression is biological as well as historical. Some of them even claim to find their sources in Simone de Beauvoir.**

Colette Guillaumin has shown that before the socioeconomic reality of black slavery, the concept of race did not exist, at least not in its modern meaning, since it was applied to the lineage of families. However, now, race, exactly like sex, is taken as an “immediate given,” a “sensible given,” “physical features,” belonging to a natural order. **But what we believe to be a physical and direct perception is only a sophisticated and mythic construction, an “imaginary formation,” which reinterprets physical features (in themselves as neutral as any others but marked by the social system) through the network of relationships in which they are perceived.** (They are seen as black, therefore they are black; they are seen as women, therefore, they are women. But before being seen that way, they first had to be made that way.) **Lesbians should always remember and acknowledge how “unnatural,” compelling, totally oppressive, and destructive being “woman” was for us in the old days before the women’s liberation movement. It was a political constraint, and those who resisted it were accused of not being “real” women. But then we were proud of it, since in the accusation there was already something like a shadow of victory: the avowal by the oppressor that “woman” is not something that goes without saying, since to be one, one has to be a “real” one.**

Besides, if we take as an example the perfect “butch,” the classic example which provokes the most horror, whom Proust would have called a woman/man, how is her alienation different from that of someone who wants to become a woman? [Tweedledum and Tweedledee](#).

However, as Andrea Dworkin emphasizes, many lesbians recently “have increasingly tried to transform the very ideology that has enslaved us into a dynamic, religious, psychologically compelling celebration of female biological potential.” Thus, some avenues of the feminist and lesbian movement lead us back to the myth of woman which was created by men especially for us, and with it we sink back into a natural group. Having stood up to fight for a sexless society,” we now find ourselves entrapped in the familiar deadlock of “woman is wonderful.”

Simone de Beauvoir underlined particularly the false consciousness which consists of selecting among the features of the myth (that women are different from men) those which look good and using them as a definition for women. **What the concept “woman is wonderful” accomplishes is that it retains for defining women the best features (best according to whom?) which oppression has granted us, and it does not radically question the categories “man” and “woman,” which are political categories and not natural givens. It puts us in a position of fighting within the class “women” not as the other classes do, for the disappearance of our class, but for the defense of “woman” and its reinforcement.** It leads us to develop with complacency “new” theories about our specificity: thus, we call our passivity “nonviolence,” when the main and emergent point for us is to fight our passivity (our fear, rather, a justified one).

She goes on to note that if we are to apply class analysis to “woman,” it can only be done as a *political* class aimed at deconstructing the “natural” sex binary. GCF/TERFs **do the exact opposite** and view “woman” as a natural biological class aimed at deconstructing the political binary.



**We are Homosexuals Not Homogenderuals** shared a link.

October 2 · Edited

Biological sex isn't a social construct, gender is. Your world is upside down people. And Yes, Cox is male.

<http://www.autostraddle.com/its-time-for-people-to-stop-using-the-social-construct-of-biological-sex-to-defend-their-transmisogyny-240284/>



**It's Time For People to Stop Using the Social Construct of "Biological Sex" to Defend Their...**

[www.autostraddle.com](http://www.autostraddle.com)

Wittig continues:

Marxist theory does not allow women any more than other classes of oppressed people to constitute themselves as historical subjects, because Marxism does not take into account the fact that a class also consists of individuals one by one. Class consciousness is not enough. We must try to understand philosophically (politically) these concepts of "subject" and "class consciousness" and how they work in relation to our history. When we discover that women are the objects of oppression and appropriation, at the very moment that we become able to perceive this, we become subjects in the sense of cognitive subjects, through an operation of abstraction. Consciousness of Oppression is not only a reaction to (fight against) oppression. It is also the whole conceptual reevaluation of the social world, its whole reorganization with new concepts, from the point of view of oppression. It is what I would call the

science of oppression created by the oppressed. This operation of understanding reality has to be undertaken by every one of us: call it a subjective, cognitive practice. The movement back and forth between the levels of reality (the conceptual reality and the material reality of oppression, which are both social realities) is accomplished through language.

It is we who historically must undertake the task of defining the individual subject in materialist terms. This certainly seems to be an impossibility since materialism and subjectivity have always been mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, and rather than despairing of ever understanding, we must recognize the need to reach subjectivity in the abandonment by many of us to the myth “woman” (the myth of woman being only a snare that holds us up). This real necessity for everyone to exist as an individual, as well as a member of a class, is perhaps the first condition for the accomplishment of a revolution, without which there can be no real fight or transformation. But the opposite is also true; without class and class consciousness there are no real subjects, only alienated individuals.

Here, Wittig explicitly notes that the subjective is the fatal flaw of Marxist theory. You cannot appropriate and objectify women as a class; as a monolithic “thing” called “sex.” It is the subjective that can’t be erased when being critical of the supposed natural sex binary. Again, this isn’t so-called “transgender ideology,” this is Radical Feminism. And yet, with GCF/TERF goggles on, even Wittig supposedly rejected the subjective regarding gender:



KT  
@sugaredpeas



Follow

@evilfelicity @cristanwilliams  
@iadorepeople @technicolorwar  
@QueenThingy Wittig sees nothing  
"subjective" (ur words) about gender

← Reply ↻ Retweet ★ Favorited ⋮ More

FAVORITE

1



9:20 AM - 14 Oct 2014

GCF/TERFs offer a perspective of sex and gender that's fatally warped to the point that it explicitly advocates for the very ideas foundational Radical Feminist theory rejected. GCF/TERFs might call themselves RadFem or "gender critical" but what they offer is the very poison chalice RadFems spent decades warning against; it's an ideology at war with its own roots. The very perspective GCF/TERFs so viciously attack is the foundation of Radical Feminism. GCF/TERFs have such a long history of, with all the asperity of a hellfire creationist, asserting that sexing everyone is better/different/more natural than gendering everyone that I hold no hope they will see past their own obtuse equivocations.

Radical feminists have developed the most realistic framework for analyzing the social realities of gender. Specifically: gender is a hierarchy which is constructed on top of the (real, permanent, dimorphic) category of biological sex. – GCF trans woman, [SnowFlakeEspecial](#)

Stop me if you've heard this GCF/TERF meme before: unless the natural sex binary is embraced and enforced, gay men and lesbians will disappear. Wittig refuted that meme decades ago but GCF/TERFs don't want you to know that:

To destroy “woman” does not mean that we aim, short of physical destruction, to destroy lesbianism simultaneously with the categories of sex, because lesbianism provides for the moment the only social form in which we can live freely. Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is not a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically. For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation that we have previously called servitude, a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation (“forced residence,” domestic corvee, conjugal duties, unlimited production of children, etc.), a relation which lesbians escape by refusing to become or to stay heterosexual. We are escapees from our class in the same way as the American runaway slaves were when escaping slavery and becoming free. For us this is an absolute necessity; our survival demands that we contribute all our strength to the destruction of the class of women within which men appropriate women. This can be accomplished only by the destruction of heterosexuality as a social system which is based on the oppression of women by men and which produces the doctrine of the difference between the sexes to justify this oppression.

**It is the system of heteronormativity that is at the root of oppression and it is the heteronormative gaze that produced the concept of the natural sex binary.** It is only with a perspective rooted in heteronormativity that a GCF/TERF can assert that gender is an oppressive system that must be abolished by replacing it with a new set of taboos, norms, language and identity labels all must adhere to and somehow won't be gender. A GCF/TERF seems to think that when they assert that a trans woman is male, insists upon using male pronouns, uses the person's old name/old picture to construct a sex context for the trans woman to occupy within a cultural system, they aren't engaging in forced gender performance.

If “he” is hurtful or if “she” is hurtful and you’re a friend, or someone who isn’t an asshole then I avoid using them. However I’m not, nor should I or anyone, actually be expected to lie to appease another’s feelings. When we (gender critical folk) are accused of “misgendering” what we are actually doing is telling the truth. “He” and “she” denote sex, lets be honest about that and sex is immutable. – WhoIsCis, GCF affiliated with GenderIdentityWatch

In fact, most of them will assert that they aren’t performing gender, that they are instead honoring natural sex binary. They do this without seeing any irony. They seek to institutionalize the naturalistic essence-based sex binary as a means of taking ownership of sex labels, which they mistake for authentic empowerment.

Another reason for adherence to pronouns that indicate biology is that, as a feminist, I consider the female pronoun to be an honorific, a term that conveys respect. Respect is due to women as members of a sex caste that have survived subordination and deserve to be addressed with honour. – Sheila Jeffreys, PhD, Gender Hurts, pp 5-6

Let’s contrast the above GCF/TERF view with foundational Radical Feminist theory:

However, most of the feminists and lesbian-feminists in America and elsewhere still believe that the basis of women’s oppression is biological as well as historical. Some of them even claim to find their sources in Simone de Beauvoir... But what we believe to be a physical and direct perception is only a sophisticated and mythic construction, an “imaginary formation,” which reinterprets physical features (in themselves as neutral as any others but marked by the social system) through the network of relationships in which they are perceived. Lesbians should always remember and acknowledge how “unnatural,” compelling, totally oppressive, and destructive being “woman” was for us in the old days before the women’s liberation movement. It was a political constraint, and those who resisted

it were accused of not being “real” women. But then we were proud of it, since in the accusation there was already something like a shadow of victory: the avowal by the oppressor that “woman” is not something that goes without saying, since to be one, one has to be a “real” one.

It is heteronormative indoctrination that prevents GCF/TERFs from understanding that the “natural sex binary” is just another aspect of gender. While much of the rest of the feminist world is confronting both the causes and effects of oppression, GCF/TERFs spend a significant amount of time and energy in preserving, supporting and appealing to a binary-sexed body system constitutionally incapable of working with concepts like cis, trans, [gender queer](#), agender, intersex as it relates to reality of human bodies because such views of humanity are supplanted by the asserted preeminence of an [ad naturam](#) binary sexed essence:

Men appropriating our identity hate us, and want to take our skin to become us. Can never happen, but they sure want to destroy us in the process.

No, of all the oppressive forces against Lesbians and women in patriarchy, I believe the trans cult is at the top. Far more dangerous than the rest of the right wing like the nazis and clan and christian, muslim, etc. religious fanatics, THEY WANT TO DESTROY US FROM THE INSIDE OUT.

They are like the worst form of parasite, who tricks the victim into protecting and fighting for those who are killing them. So we don't even end up fighting these men directly. We have to first face the women who are standing in front of them, working to destroy all women's rights. – [Bev Von Dohre](#), TERF pioneer

GCF/TERF ideology is rooted in a twisted ad naturam morality, not radical-feminist-gender-critical theory. As Jeffreys herself puts it:

Consider that another reason for adherence to pronouns that indicate biology is that, as a feminist, I consider the female pronoun to be an honorific, a term that conveys respect. Respect is due to women as members of a sex caste that have survived subordination and deserve to be addressed with honour.

Jeffreys seems totally oblivious to the reality that when she explicitly appeals to the embedded ad naturam morality within her natural sex binary, she is publicly pronouncing her attachment to and support of behavioral norms and taboos **predicated upon a coercive binary cultural system**. Jeffreys' hubris and morality blind her to her own hypocrisy while functioning to validate her cruel behavior. Not buying into the naturalistic binary of Jeffreys' female-essence is, to her mind, a morally dishonorable behavior. Jeffreys' drive to lay claim to labels rooted in a morally natural male/female essence means that she is privileged to dismissively or mockingly disregard another's identity precisely because, within her gender system, such behavior is honorable and even preordained.

“There is a witness to the transsexual's script, a witness who is never consulted. She is the person who built the transsexual's body of her own flesh and brought it up as her son or daughter, the transsexual's worst enemy, his/her mother. Whatever else it is gender reassignment is an exorcism of the mother. When a man decides to spend his life impersonating his mother (like Norman Bates in Psycho) it is as if he murders her and gets away with it, proving at a stroke that there was nothing to her... ”  
– [Germaine Greer](#), PhD, [The Whole Woman](#)

In transsexualism, males put on “female” bodies (which are in fact pseudofemale). In a real sense they are separated from their original mothers by the rituals of the counseling process, which usually result in “discovering” that the mother of the transsexual-to-be is at fault for his “gender identity crisis.” These “patients” are reborn from males. As Linda Barufaldi suggested, this fact was symbolized in the renaming of the renowned transsexual of tennis, Renee (literally, “re-born”)

Richards, whose original first name was Richard.” The re-birthing male supermothers include psychiatrists, surgeons, hormone therapists, and other cooperating professionals. The surgeons and hormone therapists of the transsexual kingdom, in their effort to give birth, can be said to produce feminine persons. They cannot produce women. – Mary Daly, PhD, [Gyn/Ecology](#), pp 67 – 68

It is only through a moralistic lens that the trans experience can be constructed as being [monstrous](#), [Frankensteinian](#) and/or even [vampire](#)-like. Notice that GCF/TERFs like Janice Raymond make a point of ensuring that the morality of the natural is withheld when speaking about trans women through phrases like, “male-to-constructed-female.” TERFs, so focused on watchdogging which essence is natural (ie, “[real](#)” and therefore valid) – predicated on the notion that their appeal to their own perceived woman-essence is natural – they fail to perceive their own hypocrisy.

Transgender activists such as Serano have developed a new vocabulary to advance their political agenda. One of these new terms is ‘cis’, which they apply to all those who are not unhappy with their ‘gender’. In effect the term ‘cis’ creates two kinds of women, those with female bodies who are labeled ‘cisgender’, and those with male bodies who are ‘transwomen’. Women, those born female and raised as women, thus suffer a loss of status as they are relegated to being just one kind of woman and their voices will have to compete on a level playing field with the other variety, men who transgender. – Sheila Jeffreys, PhD, *Gender Hurts*, p 50

Returning to what Wittig said, “*The primacy of difference so constitutes our thought that it prevents turning inward on itself to question itself, no matter how necessary that may be to apprehend the basis of that which precisely constitutes it.*” Jeffreys, acting to protect her stake in a natural binary sexed essence asserts that [cisgender](#) should not be used because it somehow impugns the nature of her own claim within

a natural sex binary. This isn't about biology or feminist theory, it's about a morality.

Let's be clear about what GCF/TERFs offer. It's not a non-gender system, it's merely a new incarnation of a heteronormative gender system in which trans and intersex people are erased. It is an enfeebled attempt at empowerment through forced appropriation and objectification by defining what you are by what you're not and in this way, what GCF/TERFs offer is nothing new or radical:

“Authentication and denaturalization, the second pair of tactics, respectively concern the construction of a credible or genuine identity and the production of an identity that is literally incredible or non-genuine. We have chosen the term authentication in deliberate contrast with authenticity, another term that circulates widely in scholarly discourses of identity and its critique. Where authenticity has been tied to essentialism through the notion that some identities are more “real” than others, authentication highlights the agentive processes whereby claims to realness are asserted. Such claims often surface in nationalist movements, where a shared language becomes a powerful force in the formation and articulation of an imagined national unity (Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983). Here the process of authentication often involves the rewriting of linguistic and cultural history.” – Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall, Language and Identity in [A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology](#)

So, meet the new boss, the same as the old boss. It's called “Gender Critical Feminism.”