

TRANSADVOCATE

Are Misogynist, Homophobe, & TERF slurs?

By Cristan Williams

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Abstract

Into the nexus of the ‘gay alt-right feminist’ movement I received notice that an opinion leader in the sex essentialist activist community had linked to one of my articles titled, You Might be a TERF if... The article lists explicit instances of ideological hate and real-life violence (up to and including attempted murder) carried out in [...]

Article



Into the nexus of the ‘gay alt-right feminist’ movement

I received notice that an opinion leader in the sex essentialist activist community had linked to one of my articles titled, You Might be a TERF if... The article lists explicit instances of ideological hate and real-life violence (up to and including attempted murder) carried out in the name of a form of sex essentialist ‘feminism’ that developed in the US during the mid-to-late 1970s. The Feminist Current, a site substantially dedicated to reifying the type of sex essentialism of this 1970s-era movement, linked to my 2013 article as a “recent” example of “uncritical reporting” around the phenomena of Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminism:

When the media, institutions, and authorities become aware that a particular term is being used to incite violence against women, it is their responsibility to condemn or simply refrain from encouraging

the use of that language. And yet we have seen various media outlets using the term uncritically, of late. - Feminist Current

For a peer-reviewed look at the term “TERF” and the history of the sex essentialist anti-trans movement presenting itself as “radical feminism” to an uncritical media, please consider the following paper from the TSQ journal of the Duke University Press:

What’s missing from my above peer-reviewed historical analysis of the trans and radical feminist vs sex essentialist activist (now) decades-long controversy is a review of the etiology of the “TERF is a slur” slogan that is most often asserted when any critique of TERF behavior is made in comment sections, on social media, or in print. Here I wish to rectify that oversight.

The Slur Slogan: A Timeline

I began encountering the “TERF is a slur” slogan in 2013, around a year after the political Right experienced a measure of success with its 2012 “homophobe is a slur” campaign.

The case was made that when discussing anti-queer hate in the news and anti-bullying efforts in schools, the term “homophobia” should not be used to describe the very specific type of anti-queer hate and oppression faced by LGBTQIA people because the term was an offensive slur.

By the end of 2012, the Associate Press banned the term “homophobe” from its news coverage and right-wing religious groups were working to ban the term in anti-bullying school materials because, they claimed, “homophobe” was a “made-up” term that promotes “hate and contempt for Christians.”

Without terms like “homophobe” and “homophobia,” the queer community’s ability to communicate and reference a specific anti-gay culture is hobbled, caged inside of rhetorical parameters defined by those who work to empower anti-gay culture. After “homophobe” and “homophobia” were deemed by a heteronormative culture to be too toxic to use, the queer community’s languaging of the hate it faced each day disappeared from most mainstream media use.

Sometime in 2013, sex essentialists who self-identify as “radical feminists” began pushing the slogans, “TERF is a slur” and “Cis is a slur” on social media and blog posts.

Allen actually calls for more people to recognize radical feminists as a hate group and then pointedly adopts the term Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist (TERF) to refer to them throughout the article. Make no mistake, this is a slur. TERF is not meant to be explanatory, but insulting. These characterizations are hyperbolic, misleading, and ultimately defamatory. They do nothing but escalate the vitriol and fail to advance the conversation in any way. - Elizabeth Hungerford (2013), TERF1 attorney and opinion leader

Around this time, TERFs began pushing the false history that “TERF” was coined by trans people as a slur. Note how this rhetoric closely mimics the 2012 right-wing rhetoric that “homophobe” was a “made-up” term that promotes “hate and contempt for Christians.”



Justin Norwood
@Whoiscis

 Follow

@transadvocate @EileenBresnahan Actually
TERF is a slur rejected by the feminist
community coined by transactivist.

LIKES

3



10:39 AM - 14 Mar 2014



BigBooButch says:

April 17, 2014 at 9:42 pm

Typical response by an ignorant woman conditioned by the patriarchy; and nice name calling, very 3rd grade! Since I have never purported to be a radfem, thanks for, once again, labeling me against my will. The men in your life must be so proud that your conditioning is so complete that you would attack another woman in their name. Brava!

ps, "cis" is a slur created by men to other and silence women. Again, brava to you for giving in so easily.



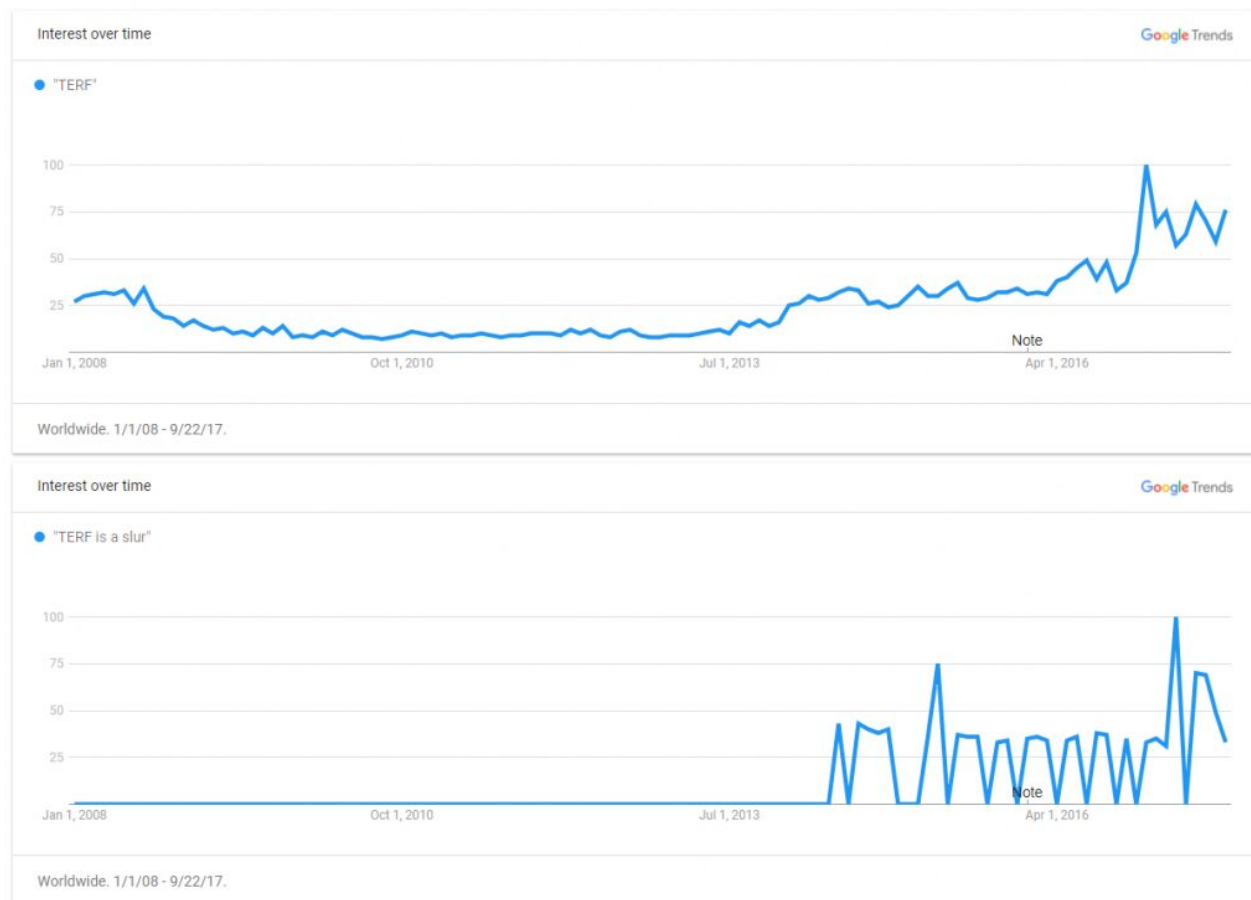
Figure 1. r/GenderCritical, 2014

In a 2014 New Yorker article subtitled, The dispute between radical feminism and transgenderism, Michelle Goldberg brought the idea that “TERF” was a slur into the mainstream. While trans feminist author Julia Serano was interviewed by Goldberg for the story and took pains to explain the politics behind the “TERF is a slur” slogan, Goldberg chose to quash that information in her article. Writing for the Advocate, Serano addressed this bias:

Some TERFs claim that “TERF” is a slur -- Goldberg highlights this in her article but never explains the reasoning behind it. From their point of view (which they have shared with me via their unprovoked attacks on me on Twitter), they should be referred to as MERFs -- i.e., Man-Exclusive Radical Feminists--because they reject trans women (who they see as “men”) but not trans men (who they view as misguided “women” who have been brainwashed by patriarchal and transgender agendas). Needless to say, an overwhelming majority of transgender people reject this framing of the issue. And there is nothing inherently demeaning about referring to people who exclude transgender people and issues from their movement as “trans-exclusive.” This is why I use the acronym “TERF” throughout this piece. - Julia Serano, 2014

In a follow-up piece on her own blog, Serano described the personal effect of Goldberg’s bias:

As others have pointed out, only four trans women are quoted in the piece: two of these side with the TERFs (which is extraordinarily rare - I know countless trans people, and while a few of them identify as radical feminists, none of them are pro-TERF). The remaining two trans women are Sandy Stone and myself, who seem to represent the progress made by transgender activism, especially within academia - in other words, we are painted as beneficiaries of a movement that has (in Goldberg’s rendition of events) marginalized radical feminists. I don’t appear in the piece until about 4,000 words into a 4,500-ish word article, and Stone is introduced at the very end - in other words, we appear well after readers have likely come to the conclusion that trans activism is out of control and unfairly oppresses TERFs. We are merely window dressing. We serve no purpose other than to give the impression that the article is fair and balanced, covering “both sides” of the issue, when in reality it is not.



By 2015, the “cis is a slur” campaign was dealt a critical blow when the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) added the term “cisgender” to its dictionary. Webster’s likewise announced the addition of the term to their dictionary in 2016. Since the 2015 OED addition, the “cis is a slur” campaign has largely evaporated while activity around the “TERF is a slur” campaign redoubled in 2016, the year Webster’s added the term to their dictionary: As expected, the first graph shows the term’s emergence in 2008, the year it was popularised by cis feminists, followed by an uptake of the term within larger discourse sometime around 2013. The second graph marks the “TERF is a slur” campaign’s 2013 launch, with a redoubling of activity between the 2015 and 2016 period.

But TERF is used as a slur!

Since 2013, I’ve most often encountered the “TERF is a slur” slogan used in conjunction with a screenshot of a social media post such as:

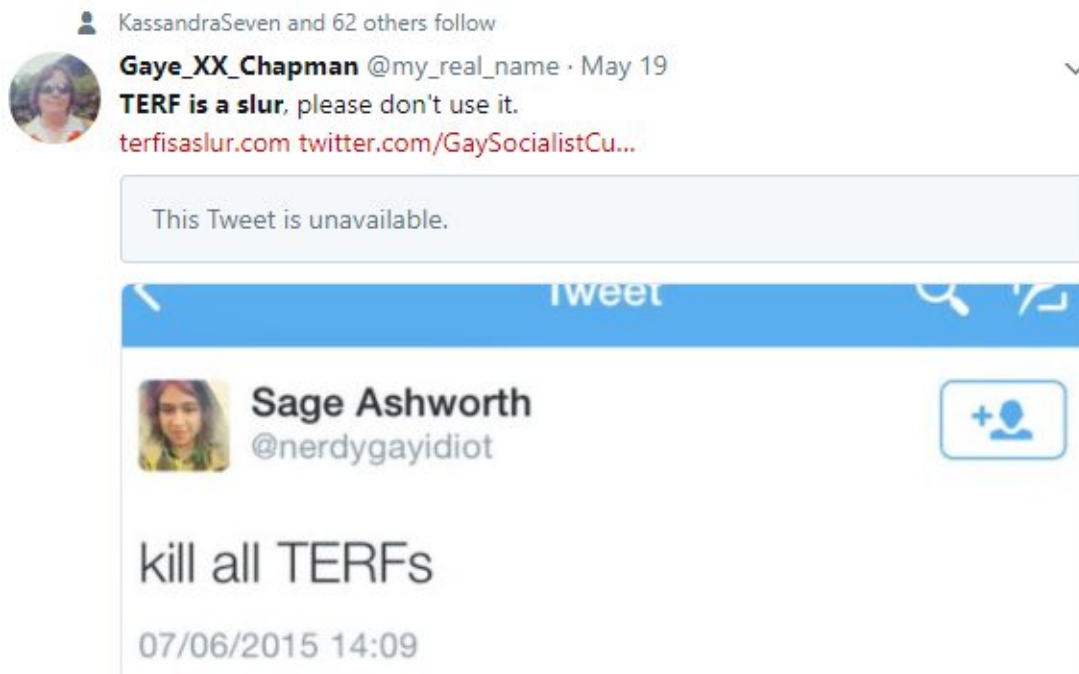


Figure 2. Twitter user claims “TERF is a slur,” citing a 2015 tweet reading “kill all TERFs”

Certainly, violent statements calling for TERFs to be killed is as morally wrong as it is ethically obtuse and while such violent rhetoric should be condemned, does the existence of such rhetoric validate the “TERF is a slur” slogan? Let’s review how other feminist terms are used in social media discourse:





Christian Dacanay @MacrossCreddie · 21 Nov 2016

I'm kinda pissed off because this guy sexually harassed my friend and got away with it... I want to **kill a misogynist**. FUCKING EVIL!!!



Laura Byko @lbyko · 15 Jul 2015

i have just returned from magic mike xxi and I feel- jubilant? exhilarated? reborn? like i could **kill a misogynist** if one dared speak to me?



7



Hugh Jazz @_HayleyGood · 1 Feb 2015

i'd **kill a misogynist** for a glass bottle of irn bru



NOH8 Campaign follows



bodega bukowski @jenyyakir · 14 Apr 2014

today's gonna be so productive im gonna clean my room take a shower **kill a misogynist** or two maybe shower again im so excited!! [#carpediem](#)



9



alien in a top hat @stylitzmom · 16 Sep 2013

Let's go **kill a misogynist** douchebag :DDDD



krakengoo @krakengoo · 29 Aug 2013

Replying to [@dauntdraws](#)

[@dauntdraws](#) can we still **kill a misogynist** please, just the one?



1



Hugo Thomas @hugobook · 2 Apr 2012

"Is it Always Illegal to Kill a Woman?" "No but it may be legal to **kill a misogynist** copywriter! 1947 [pinterest.com/pin/3032899746...](#)



Anna and 8 others follow



witch of Angmar @gwrthryfel · 23 Mar 2012

Kill A Misogynist, The Road To Full Feminism



Usage of the term misogynist on social media

Since some people on twitter post that racists and homophobes should be killed, does that mean that these terms are also slurs? Or, does it merely mean that these (and numerous other) terms can be used as slurs by some people sometimes?



Figure 3. Available to buy on Etsy: “Crucify the racists bash all the homophobes”

Does the existence of an Etsy store dedicated to promoting the above patch validate what right-wing anti-queer activists said about “homophobe”? What about when an anti-gay media reports that anti-gay activists (referred to as “street preachers” in homophobic media sources) were called “homophobes” and beaten by “NOH8” activists?

Christian Preachers Brutally Beaten at Gay Pride Festival

2:00PM EDT 6/30/2015 | TODD STARNES



Pastors holding signs like these were brutally attacked at a Seattle pride event. (Flickr/Creative Commons)

Two street preachers were brutally beaten—punched and kicked—by a crowd at a gay pride festival in Seattle and the entire melee was captured on video.

The preachers were holding signs reading "Repent or Else" and "Jesus Saves From Sin." The video shows a group of people initially screaming and threatening the men during Pridefest at the Seattle Space Needle.

Television station KOMO reported that some of the attackers belonged to a group called NOH8.

The above article depicts pro-equality activists as both dangerous and violent:

Last year, one pro-gay group caused thousands of dollars in damage to the Portland, Ore. campus of Mars Hill Church. The vandals hurled stones through stain glass windows, LifeSiteNews reported.

The vandals sent an email to local television station KOIN-TV stating they took the action, because "Mars Hill is notoriously anti-gay and anti-woman."

And when the new campus of the church opened gay rights protestors shouted profanities at children calling them "homophobes" and telling the boys and girls they were "going to burn ..."

In thinking about the toxic nexus of GamerGate and the alt-right, how are feminists portrayed?

Practically any user of social media will know the answer. Are misogynists correct when they assert that

“misogynist is a slur”? Let’s look to a subreddit popular with TERFs and other sex essentialists for the answer:



Figure 4. r/GenderCritical, 2017

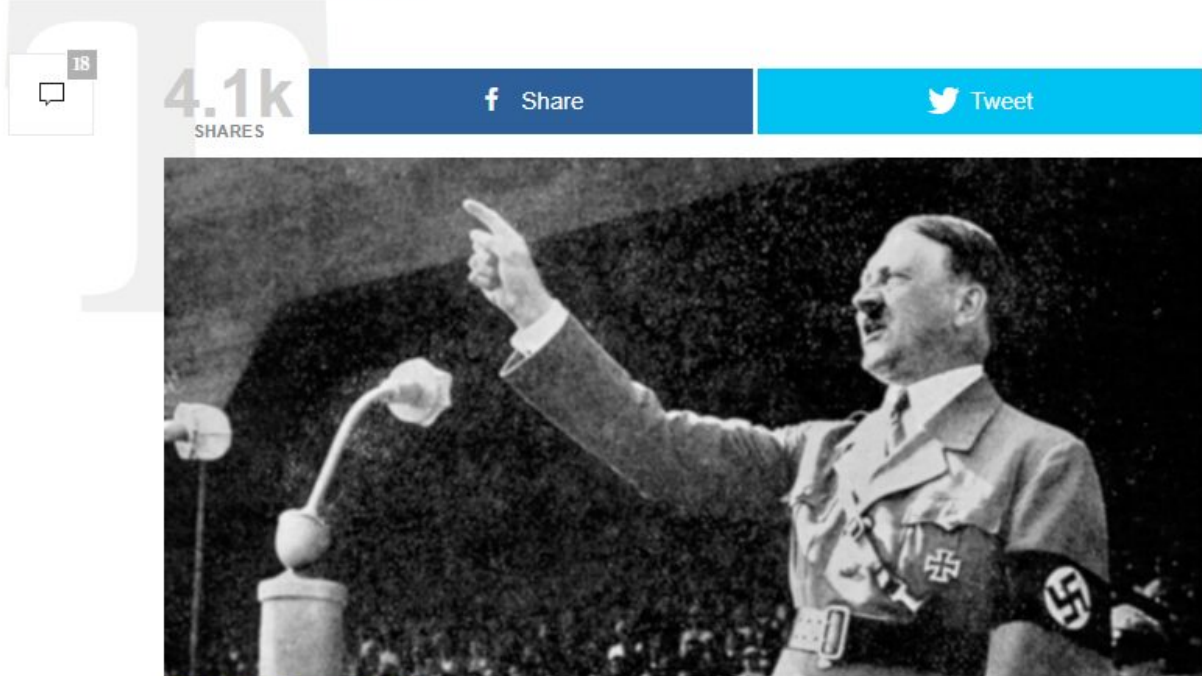
How is “TERF” currently being portrayed by sites popular with TERFs?

ARTICLES, COMMENTARY, GENDER

‘TERF’ isn’t just a slur, it’s hate speech

The term “TERF” is not just used to smear and deride, but to incite violence.

SEPTEMBER 21, 2017 by MEGHAN MURPHY



Adolf Hitler addressing Nazi rally

Figure 5. Meghan Murphy for the Feminist Current, 2017

In the above article comparing trans activists to Nazis, Murphy appeals to a recent violent incident between sex essentialist activist and individuals the Feminist Current asserts to be “trans activists” in the UK.

Speaking of Nazis: TERFs and the Alt-Right

In a recent Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) HateWatch report, the SPLC remarked on a disturbing trend they’ve observed among right-wing hate groups: a tendency to recruit sex essentialist LGB and self-identified feminists to spread alt-right anti-trans ideology:

As Right Wing Watch also mentioned in their coverage of the same panel, a trend emerged during the session, as various speakers wrapped their opposition to nondiscrimination measures in rhetoric passing as progressive: transgender rights were depicted as anti-feminist, hostile to minorities and even disrespectful to LGB individuals. This seems to be part of a larger strategy, meant to weaken transgender rights advocates by attempting to separate them from their allies, feminists and LGBT

rights advocates.

During a recent right-wing convention, the executive director of Concerned Parents and Educators of Fairfax County, Meg Kilgannon described how the political right is recruiting feminists and LGB people:

Explain that gender identity rights only come at the expense of others: women, sexual assault survivors, female athletes forced to compete against men and boys, ethnic minorities who culturally value modesty, economically challenged children who face many barriers to educational success and don't need another level of chaos in their lives, children with anxiety disorders and the list goes on and on and on.

SPLC continues:

For Kilgannon, an example of effective coalition building includes the Hands Across the Aisle Coalition (HATAC), a group that unites religious and non-religious women to oppose transgender rights. The co-founders of the group are sexual assault survivor Kaeley Triller Haver and lesbian activist and radical feminist Miriam Ben-Shalom, who was discharged from the U.S. Army for declaring herself a lesbian in 1976.

Miriam Ben-Shalom, a TERF, was recently invited to speak at the Heritage Foundation with Kaeley Triller Haver:

≡ Q THE CHRISTIAN POST

WASHINGTON — Radical feminists, right-leaning Christians, and a Jewish lesbian who is a former drill sergeant are uniting to fight against "gender identity" laws, policies they say pose a grave threat to women and girls.



(PHOTO: CHRISTIAN POST/BRANDON SHOWALTER)

Miriam Ben Shalom, Kaeley Triller Haver, Kami Mueller, and Mary Lou Singleton speak at the "Biology Isn't Bigotry: Why Sex Matters in the Age of Gender Identity" panel the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C., February 16, 2017.

In a panel discussion titled "Biology Isn't Bigotry" hosted by scholar Ryan Anderson at the Heritage Foundation Thursday, in front of approximately 100 people, five women from The Hands Across the Aisle Coalition blasted recent moves by federal and state governments codifying gender identity — the notion that gender is not biological but self-determined — into the law. (See below to watch the full panel discussion.)

Miriam Ben-Shalom, co-founder of the Hands Across the Aisle Coalition appeared with the Communications Director for the Just Want Privacy Campaign in Washington State, Kaeley Triller Haver. Also on the Heritage Foundation's panel was board members of (as the Heritage Foundation asserts) "the Women's Liberation Front (WOLF), the radical feminist organization that filed a lawsuit against the Obama Administration to restore Title IX rights to women and girls."

WOLF recently issued a letter to the Secretary of Health Washington State Department of Health, John Wiesman demanding that the state cease changing gender designations on birth certificates. The letter was signed by:

Miriam Ben-Shalom
Co-Founder

Hands Across the Aisle Coalition

Kaeley Triller Haver

Just Want Privacy Campaign

Meg Kilgannon

Concerned Parents and Educators

While you might have a sense for who Meg Kilgannon is from the SPLC HateWatch report, allow me to introduce you to Kaeley Triller Haver, the Washington “bathroom bill” crusader of the Just Want Privacy Campaign:

Meet @KaeleyT, a “concerned” woman who has sex w/kids, who snuck into a parents group, doxxed the trans kids 4 god, & of course TERFs ? her pic.twitter.com/mVrbFBGytC
-- transadvocate (@transadvocate) September 27, 2017

In a public post, Haver admits that when she was in charge of adolescents for a Christian organization, she had sex with a kid and eventually became pregnant. For a full account of Haver’s behavior, along with her remarks to the TransAdvocate, see this Storify.

Haver was recently involved in a custody battle (yes, with the now-adult kid from the Christian organization) wherein she was made to hire a guardian ad litem. Ben-Shalom made light of the situation and volunteered to be the guardian ad litem for Haver’s child before making a few transphobic remarks:

[Kaeley Triller Haver](#) Thanks to all for your prayers. I can't really say too much on FB, but the hearing went as well as could be expected today. The thing I was afraid of happening did not happen. Still have to hire/pay a guardian ad litem, and we aren't out of the woods, but I can at least breathe tonight. I appreciate all your prayers and encouragement.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 26 · 4 hrs

 [Miriam Ben-Shalom](#) would be honored to be your guardian ad litem. No fee involved.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 3 · 1 hr

 [Miriam Ben-Shalom](#) See, I can prevent your children from learning hatred about Lesbians and Gay men--I am the antidote to your ex's phobias <grin>

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 3 · 1 hr

 [Kaeley Triller Haver](#) Lol. Such a generous offer, though I do think my ex might have some reservations. 😊

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 hr

 [Miriam Ben-Shalom](#) Well, why? Perfection is not a reality. So what would he want? A Gay man? Nope, cuz you got boys. Lesbian, no cuz he thinks we think all hets are just--so---attractive. A dress wearing male? A bearded female? I have no idea whatsoever.



[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · 1 hr · [Edited](#)

Involved with both Haver and Ben-Shalom is WOLF, a “radical feminist” organization funded by an anti-abortion James Dobson organization. While this triangulation of so-called “radical feminism” and the political right might be new to the SPLC, it isn’t new to trans people:

garyglenn.us

He also cited opposition to such legislation by two prominent lesbian attorneys, Cathy Brennan and Elizabeth Hungerford, who wrote the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 2011 urging the U.N. to reject so-called "gender identity" legislation.

Brennan and Hungerford wrote: "We write to advise you of a legal development in the United States that compromises hard won sex-based classification protections for females. ...in which gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender organizations and individual activists work to enact protections based on 'gender identity'... In addition to compromising rational sex-based protections for females, 'gender identity' legislation incorporates stereotypical ideas of 'what is female' into law. ...As lesbians, we are concerned about the impact of this legislation on our community and our community's ability to meet free from male influence and involvement. More importantly, as females, we are concerned that in the attempt to provide protections for a few, we will compromise the protections of the many."

Glenn also expressly rejected claims that such laws have any bearing on Michigan's economic performance.

"The suggestion that such demonstrably discriminatory



transadvocate
@transadvocate

Follow

Breaking: Tea Party Republican quotes #TERF propaganda to supporters. garyglenn.us/dowpacsurvey

Figure 6. Tea Party right-winger quoting TERFs to support their anti-trans bigotry



Figure 7. Alt-right media pundit promoting the TERF cause



Figure 8. WBC rejecting criticism of TERFs



Figure 9. Ideological counterparts are anti-LGBT anti-feminist hate groups

Rhetoric, Power, and Liberation

If like “homophobe” and “homophobia,” make-it-a-slur campaigns continue to remove queer and feminist language from the lexicon available to us, our ability to language our experience will be confined to the parameters anti-equality activists set for us. Is that acceptable? Here, I want to recount some important words by the pioneering (trans-inclusive) radical feminist, Andrea Dworkin:

One other discipline is essential both to the practice of feminism and to its theoretical integrity: the firm, unsentimental, continuous recognition that women are a class having a common condition. This is not some psychological process of identification with women because women are wonderful; nor is it the insupportable assertion that there are no substantive, treacherous differences among women. This is

not a liberal mandate to ignore what is cruel, despicable, or stupid in women, nor is it a mandate to ignore dangerous political ideas or allegiances of women. This does not mean women first, women best, women only. It does mean that the fate of every individual woman--no matter what her politics, character, values, qualities--is tied to the fate of all women whether she likes it or not. On one level, it means that every woman's fate is tied to the fate of women she dislikes personally. On another level, it means that every woman's fate is tied to the fate of women whom she politically and morally abhors. For instance, it means that rape jeopardizes communist and fascist women, liberal, conservative, Democratic, or Republican women, racist women and black women, Nazi women and Jewish women, homophobic women and homosexual women. The crimes committed against women because they are women articulate the condition of women. The eradication of these crimes, the transformation of the condition of women, is the purpose of feminism: which means that feminism requires a most rigorous definition of what those crimes are so as to determine what that condition is. This definition cannot be compromised by a selective representation of the sex class based on sentimentality or wishful thinking. This definition cannot exclude prudes or sluts or dykes or mothers or virgins because one does not want to be associated with them. To be a feminist means recognizing that one is associated with all women not as an act of choice but as a matter of fact. The sex-class system creates the fact. - Andrea Dworkin in *Right Wing Women*, 1983

That men in our culture have a habit of treating trans women the way they wish they could treat cis women means that the transmisogyny trans women face is linked to the misogyny cis women face. This means that when a man stuck his penis inside my unconscious body's "neovagina" without a condom, he did so because culture identified me as a member of a class who should be raped if they're unconscious. That I am told to smile more by strangers, that I am cat called for walking down the street, and that I am demeaned for not sexually engaging a man's online advances are all tied to the system of sexism cis women face. My liberation from my culture's sexist system will not happen without the liberation of all those sex essentialist activists who want trans bodies eradicated from the world. In this way, my fate as a trans woman is tied to the fate of every woman who personally hates me. Likewise, liberation from the sexist system each sex essentialist (from TERFs to theocrats who tell me my body violates the will of their particular deity) struggles in will not happen without the liberation of trans and intersex women as well.

Katherine Cross skillfully reminds us that trans women and cis women share the material effect of woman-hating:

Men can often get away with doing absolutely anything to trans women in particular, especially if we do sex work: that double stigma is a brand that says "no one will miss you" in invisible ink all over our bodies. Even as men lust after us, they want to destroy us as an extroverted act of revenge against all womankind. Because they can.

They say we're not "real women" and yet do to us the things they wish they could do to other women: their wives, their mothers, female politicians, the ball-busting boss, the ice queen who won't date them. We are, in fact, the canvas of so many cisgender men's own deeply unresolved psychological crises, which themselves never make it to the front page of the *Times*' Sunday Review in the form of hand-wringing editorial piety. - Katherine Cross

I say this to call attention to the "firm, unsentimental, continuous recognition" that those who share

in the effects of woman-hating share a destiny, like it or not. A sex essentialist cis woman named Janice Raymond infamously asserted that “the problem of transsexualism would best be served by morally mandating it out of existence.” She further claimed that people like me have a “deeply decaying self” that wasn’t human in the way she herself was; that I was, in fact, merely a “synthetic product” and that my demise was at hand. Raymond went on to produce 1/3 of the work for US government findings that led to the revocation of trans care for both public and private insurance. How much suffering is attributable to Raymond’s attempt to mandate transness out of existence? How much animus has Raymond and other sex essentialist activists inspired? How many hours have sex essentialist activists of all stripes invested in objectifying trans women, viewing us as objects to be “noted, remarked on, explicated, analyzed” and, not infrequently, degraded in the ways men have degraded them?

- Were TERFs perpetuating the woman-hating they face when they attempted to murder Sandy Stone for being a trans member of a radical feminist group?
- Were TERFs perpetuating the woman-hating they face when they attempted to publicly bash the trans woman, Beth Elliot, and instead beat the radical feminists who used their own bodies as a shield to protect her?
- Were TERFs perpetuating the woman-hating they face when they mobbed a group of (trans-inclusive) Lesbian Avengers and then threatened the life of a 15-year-old trans girl with a knife?
- Were TERFs perpetuating the woman-hating they face when they arranged to have Sylvia Rivera beaten?
- Were TERFs perpetuating the woman-hating they face when they threatened cis and trans Lesbians with physical violence?
- Were TERFs perpetuating the woman-hating they face when they physically attacked cis people TERFs apparently took to be “trans activists”?

For me, speaking the truth about whether “TERF is a slur” is to refuse to participate in dishonoring the bravery and courage of radical feminists who stood with their trans Sisters. I won’t dishonor their feminist ethic by ceasing to acknowledge the difference between the “radical feminism” of pioneering radical feminist organizations like Cell 16, the Olivia Collective, the Lesbian Tide Collective, etc and the “radical feminism” that leads TERFs like Raymond to objectify me as being without humanity.

I am not willing to treat TERFs the way men in this culture have treated me. This means:

- I will not reenact upon TERFs the violence men in this culture have directed against my body.
- I will not claim that TERFs are without humanity.
- I will not use the terms men used as they grabbed me, held me down, or hit me to describe the ideological character of TERFs.
- I will resist the harm TERFs and other sex essentialist activists cause through nonviolence.

I urge you to join me, in this spirit of mutual liberation, and never cease speaking the language of truth.

Do you write about issues affecting the trans community?

Submit articles for publication on the TransAdvocate here.

1. Hungerford wrote, “It’s just that I DO want to exclude some trans people from some situations, depending on the context... So yeah, I am a TERF. And I’m not ashamed. At all.”

Suggested citation

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