

TRANSADVOCATE

TERF Academic Rewrites History

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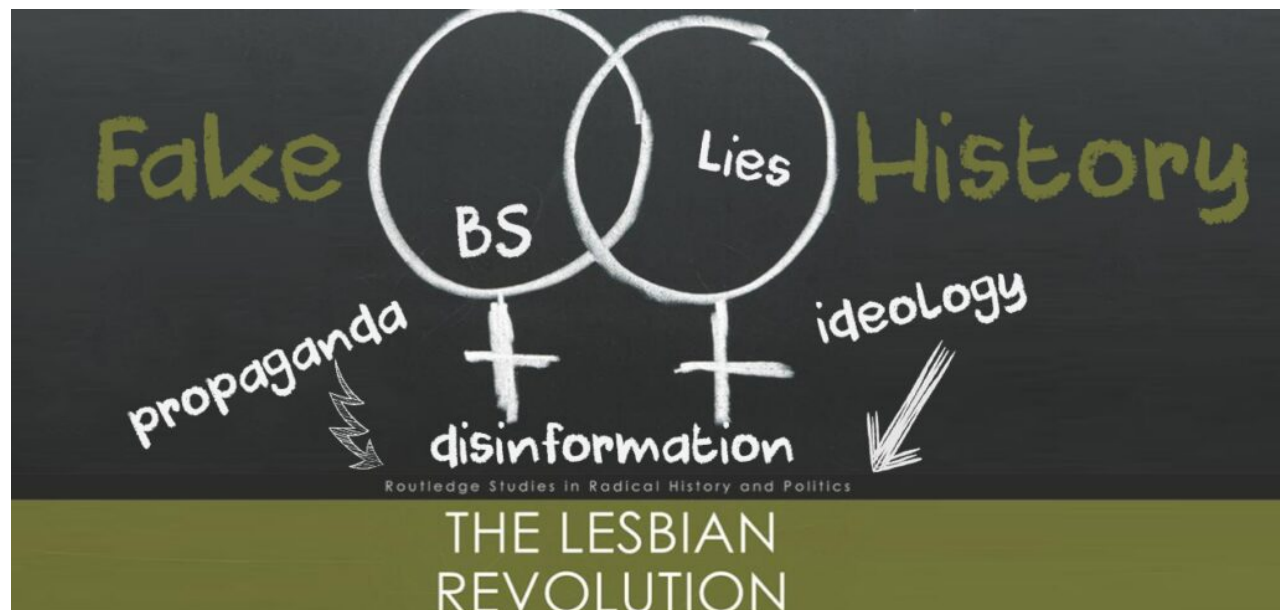
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Abstract

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Article

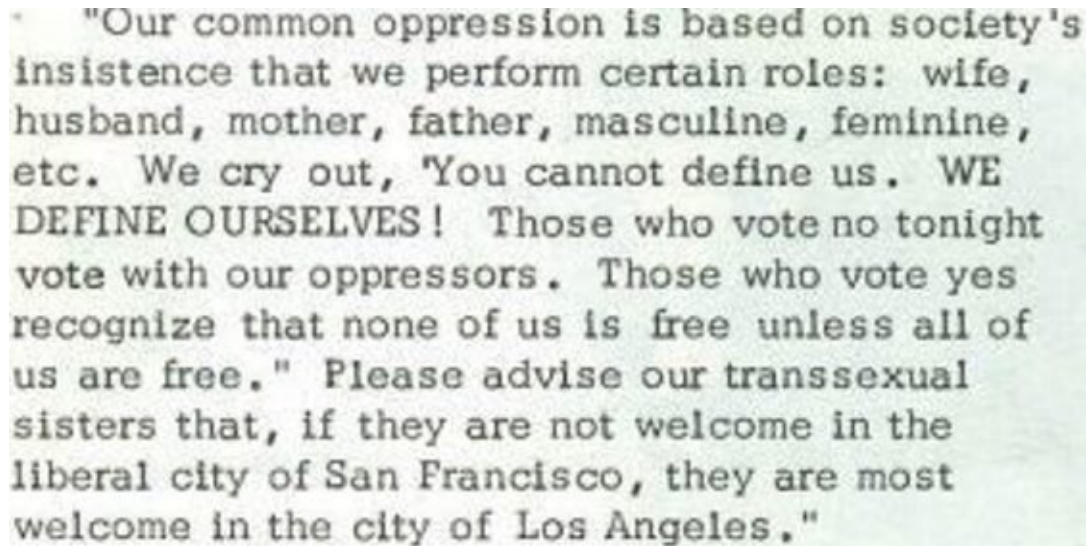


TERF activist censors Radical Feminist voices to sneak hate into the classroom.

Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist (TERF) activist, Sheila Jeffreys has written a new academic book that claims to inform readers of the various ways TERF culture, “has all been disappeared from history.” Chief among those Jeffreys’ claims to have the power to disappear TERFs from history is an “influential men’s cross-dressing rights movement which enforces men’s access to lesbians wherever we seek to meet or network.” To support this fact claim, Jeffreys cites problems that occurred at the largest Lesbian gathering in history, the 1973 West Coast Lesbian Conference (WCLC).

For those who don’t know, the WCLC was a trans-inclusive Radical Feminist Lesbian Conference that was co-organized by an out trans woman. Interestingly, Jeffreys fails to mention that the group that organized this event was The Lesbian Tide Collective, an organization headed by a trans-identified

Radical Feminist Lesbian who liked to cite Monique Wittig. I'm guessing Jeffreys doesn't want Jeanne "trans butch" Córdova's voice getting in the way of the academic story she's selling (for the low-low price of \$150). Having edited out all of this defining context, Jeffreys proceeds to pretend that this Radical Feminist Lesbian conference experienced disruption due to the existence of trans women and not, as the actual historical record shows, due to a small group of violent TERFs.



"Our common oppression is based on society's insistence that we perform certain roles: wife, husband, mother, father, masculine, feminine, etc. We cry out, 'You cannot define us. WE DEFINE OURSELVES! Those who vote no tonight vote with our oppressors. Those who vote yes recognize that none of us is free unless all of us are free.'" Please advise our transsexual sisters that, if they are not welcome in the liberal city of San Francisco, they are most welcome in the city of Los Angeles."

Figure 1. The Lesbian Tide Collective responding to TERFs trying to ban trans women from a San Francisco women's group... Also left out of Jeffreys' academic history.

Instead of being honest about this history, Jeffreys lies to her readers, gish-gallop style, pretending that WCLC was actually a TERF space, exemplified by a controversial speech delivered by the TERF, Robin Morgan. Jeffreys fails to inform her readers that the speech Morgan delivered at the WCLC was so bigoted, even Morgan herself censors the speech when it's recounted in the history books:

[Elliott], the same man [sic] who, when personally begged by women not to attend this Conference, replied that if he [sic] were kept out he [sic] would bring a Federal suit against these women on the charges of 'discrimination and criminal conspiracy to discriminate... The same fine sisters who have for months worked day and night to create and organize this event, have -- in one stroke, inviting this man [sic]... insulted every woman here. I'm afraid they owe us an apology on the grounds of divisiveness alone. My point is that if even one woman last night felt that he [sic] should go, that should have been sufficient. Where The Man is concerned, we must not be separate fingers but one fist. I charge [Elliott] as an opportunist, an infiltrator, and a destroyer--with the mentality of a rapist. And you women at this Conference know who he [sic] is. Now. You can let him [sic] into your workshops--or you can deal with him [sic]. - Actual unedited WCLC speech by Robin Morgan, 1973

It's telling that Jeffreys chooses to edit out of the "history" she's selling (again, for \$150 a pop) the fact that Morgan incited TERFs to violence, that TERFs began trying to physically assault trans women at the event after Morgan speech, or that TERFs physically beat cis Radical Feminist Lesbians like Robin Tyler for daring to protect trans women from TERF violence. Instead, Jeffreys claims:

Back in the 1970s there were men who cross-dressed [sic] and tried to enter lesbian spaces, but these were very few in number. They were isolated individuals such as the man [sic] who attended the 1973

West Coast Lesbian Conference in Los Angeles and created hugely damaging divisions. Robin Morgan gave a speech against what she called ‘the obscenity of male transvestism’ at the conference in honour of his [sic] presence. - Jeffreys, 2018

Certainly, it will come as no surprise that Jeffreys chooses to silence the contemporaneous anti-TERF words of the Radical Feminists who were there. Since Jeffreys seems happy to erase such voices in her quest for academic “truth,” what follows are the notes from Conference organizer², Barbara McLean as she listened to Robin Morgan deliver her TERF speech:

This woman is insisting that Beth Elliott not be permitted to perform because Beth is a transsexual. Beth was on the San Francisco steering committee for the conference, a part of the original group that gave birth to the idea.... She’s written some far-out feminist songs. That’s why she’s here. No. We do not, cannot relate to her as a man. We have not known her as a man.

“He [sic] has a prick! That makes him [sic] a man [sic].”

That’s bullshit! Anatomy is NOT destiny! There is a contradiction here. Do we or do we not believe that anatomy is destiny?

“[This is] the most bizarre and dangerous co-optation of lesbian energy and emotion [we] can imagine.”

I see The Gutter Dykes’ objection to transsexuals is that they have or had been socialized as men, male-identified, and therefore oppressive to women. Well what about the dykes who have been socialized as men, either by their families or that portion of the gay community which has (and had exclusively) in the past emulated straight society and its sex-role stereotyping? What about the former and current BUTCHES?

Did I hear [Robin Morgan] right. I did. She said that rather than call for unity, she chooses to call for polarity. I’m confused. I’m still confused. Especially since the announced purpose for the conference is UNITY... I’m angry. I somehow feel betrayed... Now she’s trashing Kate Millet. Now she’s trashing us over the transsexual thing. Now she’s trashing EVERYONE. I can’t believe she ever wrote anything about “sister-hood.” - Barbara McLean, 1973

An actual academic review of this history would honestly consider the clash between physically violent sex essentialists and actual radical feminist discourse. Evidently, Jeffreys isn’t interested in an actual academic review of history; instead, Jeffreys seems to need to rewrite history as a caricature of actual history, wherein WCLC was a TERF space, TERF violence is removed, and the trans-inclusive Radical Feminist Lesbian voices -comprising the vast majority of the Conference--are erased in service to a narrative wherein TERFs are the sad victims of powerful trans villainy. We’re left with a historical fiction wherein trans women are the problem a TERFs are the solution.

Nick Haslam of the Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences identified two types of dehumanization. Dehumanization occurs when “characteristics that are uniquely human and those that constitute human nature” are denied by certain groups:

Denying uniquely human attributes to others represents them as animal-like, and denying human nature to others represents them as objects or automata. Cognitive underpinnings of the “animalistic” and “mechanistic” forms of dehumanization are proposed.

This model proposes that there are two dimensions of humanness that may be denied to others. “Human Uniqueness” refers to attributes that are seen as distinguishing humans from other animals and involves refinement, civility, morality, and higher cognition. “Human Nature” refers to attributes that are seen as shared and fundamental features of humanity, such as emotionality, warmth, and cognitive flexibility. When Human Uniqueness attributes are denied to people, they are explicitly or implicitly likened to animals and seen as childlike, immature, coarse, irrational, or backward. When Human Nature attributes are denied to people, they are explicitly or implicitly likened to objects or machines and seen as cold, rigid, inert, and lacking emotion.

Being treated as incompetent, unintelligent, unsophisticated, and uncivilized results in aversive self-awareness and self-blame, leading to feelings of guilt and shame. On the other hand, denials of Human Nature constitute more severe forms of maltreatment. These kinds of dehumanizing experiences have implications for basic elements of a person’s identity, leading to cognitive deconstructive states and feelings of sadness.³

For academics like Jeffreys, trans people are constructed to be embodied caricatures of monstrous parasites, sucking the very history away from an oppressed people. Within TERF discourse, the notion that trans people are actually, as TERF academic Janice Raymond put it, “synthetic products” is academically debated. In Jeffreys’ iteration of Raymond’s *ad naturam* morality, trans people are deviant, violent liars, and betrayers whose sexual fetishes harm all women. Mary Daly, another TERF academic, noted that trans people are “Frankenstein” constructs, invaders bent on violating women’s boundaries:

Today the Frankenstein phenomenon is omnipresent not only in religious myth, but in its offspring, phallocratic technology. The insane desire for power, the madness of boundary violation, is the mark of necrophiliacs who sense the lack of soul/spirit/life-loving principle with themselves and therefore try to invade and kill off all spirit, substituting conglomerates of corpses. This necrophilic invasion/elimination takes a variety of forms. Transsexualism is an example of male surgical siring which invades the female world with substitutes. Male mothered genetic engineering is an attempt to “create” without women. The projected manufacture by men of artificial wombs, of cyborgs which will be part flesh, part robot, of clones - all are manifestations of phallocratic boundary violation. ⁴

Not only are the bodies of trans people mutilations, within TERF ideology, the bodies of trans people are smelly (as Jeffreys asserts) or “decaying” (as Janice Raymond asserts)⁵. The message TERF opinion leaders/scholars send is clear: trans women represent the wolf in sheep’s clothing; an enemy that’s anywhere and everywhere, but especially in authenticated women’s spaces. In fact, for Jeffreys, when a trans woman pees in a public restroom, it is a violation of an authenticated women’s human rights:

Dignity is an important principle in human rights law. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights opens with the words, ‘Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world’. The entry of male-bodied persons into women’s toilets is happening with increasing frequency in the United States in particular, and is being justified successfully with reference to gender rights. This subjects women to the potential for a range of sexually harassing behaviour by men that violates women’s right to human dignity.

The creation of a ‘right’ for men to enter women’s toilets has, potentially, a number of negative effects, such as the deterrence of women from using them, creating potential health problems, and the forcing of women into the intimate proximity of men, some of whom have a clear interest in the sexual excitements that they can access by violating women’s right to human dignity in such places.⁶

Such moral contextualizations of trans women contribute to a social climate wherein:

- Trans women are publicly beaten when merely attempting to use the restroom;
- Trans children are threatened with murder when attempting to use the restroom; and,
- Cis women are beaten just because they pass as trans.

Moral rhetoric designed to dehumanize trans people informs a specific type of behavior that is observable in both the historic and contemporary iterations of the TERF movement and I contend that any morality that seeks to separate a group of human beings from their very humanity is not, in any sense of the word, feminist. What Jeffreys has to offer is hate dressed up in lies so that it might be passed off to unsuspecting students as academic history.

Cherry-picking TERF rhetoric published after the publication of Raymond’s 1979 *Transsexual Empire*, Jeffreys cites TERF quotes that make use of Raymond-era rhetorical memes such as, “male-to-constructed female” (because, we are to believe, cis women do not construct their female phenotype, right?) to again make ad naturam claims designed to rhetorically exclude trans (and presumably intersex women) from the material condition that defines the political class “women” within our culture:

On Saturday night a formerly accepted ‘womin’ confessed... to being a transsexual (male-to-constructed female) - i.e. a man who has had his prick cut off!... I personally am not a humanitarian, I am a feminist, there’s a difference! ... It is a totally political issue.... which must ...be worked out once and for all.⁷

Jeffreys assigns progenitor status of TERF ideology to the “feminist philosopher” and academic Janice Raymond for her 1979 book, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the Shemale*. While Jeffreys claims that the “issue of the right of men who cross-dress to enter women’s spaces continued to be the subject of passionate commentary,” she fails to mention the hate and violence Raymond’s ideology inspired. Erased from Jeffreys’ academic history is the way TERFs harassed Radical Feminist collectives like Cell-16 and Sisters into closing for the crime of being trans-inclusive. Gone is the account of how Raymond’s ideology led to the attempted murder of Sandy Stone, an out trans women member of the Radical Feminist Lesbian Separatist Collective, Olivia.

The academic “history” offered by Jeffreys is one of silencing and censorship wherein the majority of trans-inclusive Radical Feminist Lesbian voices are erased from the historical record to support the lie that TERF ideology and Lesbian Radical Feminism is and always has been synonymous. In this way, the reason Feminist communities created “TERF” in 2008 becomes apparent: TERFs act to confuse TERF ideology with Radical Feminism, and Radical Feminists aren’t willing to have their movement colonized by what is essentially an anti-trans hate group.

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:

1. "This has been a bad week for trans-butches like me and my friends. A few days ago, right-wing groups and a psychiatrist warned American families not to watch a transgendered man, Chaz Bono, dance on TV. They say children will be confused by Chaz Bono." 9/6/11; Jeanne's signature: "Jeanne Cordova, author, activist, and trans gendered butch." 2/17/14
2. Gallo, Marcia M. *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006. 190.
3. Bastian, Brock, and Nick Haslam. "Experiencing Dehumanization: Cognitive And Emotional Effects Of Everyday Dehumanization." *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 33, no. 4 (2011): 295-303.
4. Greer, Germaine. *The Whole Woman*. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1999. 80.
5. "It would not replace gender suffering with an artificially prolonged and synthetic maintenance of the problem so that the transsexual becomes an uncritical and dependent spectator of his deeply decaying self." Janice Raymond, *Transsexual Empire*, p.167
6. Jeffreys, Sheila. *Gender Hurts: A Feminist Analysis of the Politics of Transgenderism*, 153-154. New York: Routledge, 2014.
7. London Women's Liberation Newsletter, 1/24/1979

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