

How about we stop attacking trans people and address the REAL inequalities in the system?

-anonymous queer, cisgender woman

The co-option of feminism as mechanism for attacking trans rights makes me sick. I do not recognise the questioning of gender identity as a valid form of academic praxis that is without harm. I don't want to operate in an academia that condones academic methods that are rooted in colonialism and oppression of others. I thought we were trying to de-colonise our institutions, move away from out-dated modes of thinking and foster scholars to become qualified critical thinkers capable of contributing to wider society in a way that makes our world a better place? Perhaps that is naïve and idealistic, but it's the future I choose and a future I will continue to advocate for.

Women are a historically oppressed and marginalised group and the structural mechanisms that enable our oppression are widespread. These 'academics' and anti-trans activist organisations masquerading as 'women's rights' organisations, have invested time and money trying to address what they see as a structural mechanism for women's oppression – the rights our country (and others) afford to transgender people. This blog unpacked very clearly the arguments that proponents of gender-critical ideology cite as reasons we should restrict the rights of trans people. The rationale anti-trans people impose is that by restricting trans rights we will in turn

protect the rights of women (by which they mean cisgender women, not trans women, of course). This is despite countless evidence that shows if you enable trans people to have equal rights it does not have negative consequences for cisgender women. Their arguments that laws might be exploited by predatory men might be a valid question were the emphasis of the argument placed on how we understand and then prevent predatory behaviour by those men, as well as supporting survivors of said behaviour. Instead, they labour the misapprehension that predatory men are somehow equivalent to trans women. Their refusals to engage with real evidence, or the misappropriation of existing evidence, and their reliance on false equivalences make it impossible to have reasonable conversations with these gender critical believers, let alone have a proper academic discussion.

The existence of trans women and their presence in women's spaces is not a threat to me. However, after years of campaigning for trans equality and trans rights, I can't help but feel threatened by the presence of gender-critical people. That sick feeling in my stomach is a sign of discomfort. It's the warning sign that my trans friends and colleagues are at risk of being attacked for simply being themselves. If I feel this fear as a cisgender woman, how do my trans friends and colleagues feel? I remind myself that with any significant cultural change you are going to come up against those that hate what you're trying to do (usually because they also hate the people you're trying to advocate for), and they will rationalise their resistance as not hateful but reasonable because their rights matter too. These same arguments have applied by white supremacists against the civil rights movement, by various flavours of anti-gay activist in numerous countries past and present and by men's rights activists rallying against legislation to support equality for women, to name but a few. Admittedly some are upfront with their hate,

some are a little more covert, but it doesn't take much to recognise the shared tactics: the spreading of misinformation, the accusations of cult status on the marginalised group they're attacking and the fear-mongering about the danger to women & children.

I wish these people would consider redirecting their time and money into addressing the very real problems faced by women in the UK today. Maybe they could get angry about our sexist benefits system that penalises women with more than 2 children, and isolates those in abusive relationships as being dependent on their partner/spouse? Or how about our broken criminal justice system that is structurally failing survivors of sexual violence who are disproportionately women? Or maybe in our own institutions where the pay gap still needs addressing, particularly in senior positions? I want us to build a culture of mutual respect that is currently impossible when our trans colleagues and students are forced to justify their existence and defend their right to access spaces on a daily basis. These anti-trans activists keep accusing us of trying to silence them (despite their very vocal mouthpiece on a university platformed blog, and numerous events where their views go unchallenged), that we are refusing to come together but fundamentally why would someone willingly choose to engage with their oppressor? I'm not going to advocate for that. I will continue to advocate for equal rights for trans people because I know it does not threaten my autonomy as a cisgender woman. I know with greater equality there comes less oppression due to gender stereotypes. Including trans women in my understanding of womanhood only serves to expand what it means to be a woman. I will not be restricted to my biology and my capacity to reproduce – that's exactly what the patriarchy wants.