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Contribute**Support Vox’s journalism.****Clear, concise inform
has never been****The rise of anti-trans “radical” feminists, explained**

Known as TERFs, trans-exclusionary radical feminist groups are working with conservatives to push their anti-trans agenda.

By Katelyn Burns | Updated Sep 5, 2019, 11:57am EDT



Activists and members of the transgender community gathered outside the Stonewall Inn on February 23, 2017 in New York City to denounce a Trump administration announcement that rescinds an Obama-era order allowing transgender students to use school bathrooms matching their gender identities. | Spencer Platt/Getty Images

Aimee Stephens had been working in funeral services for 20 years, nearly six of which were at Harris Funeral Homes, when she came out to her boss as transgender.

She had known since she was 5 years old that she was a girl and had been living as a woman outside of work for some time. Though she loved her job at Harris, where she had worked her way up from apprentice to funeral director, she felt she had to hide who she was there. Until she couldn't any longer.

In 2013, she gave the funeral home's owner, Thomas Rost, a note that she also shared with friends and colleagues. “I realize that some of you may have trouble understanding this. In truth, I have had to live with it every day of my life and even I do not fully understand it myself,” she **wrote**. “As distressing as this is sure to be to my friends and some of my family, I need to do this for myself and for my own peace of mind, and to end the agony in my soul.”

After he read the note, Rost simply said, “Okay.” Stephens was fired two weeks later. Rost told her that it was “not going to work out.”

Stephens sued, claiming her dismissal was discrimination on the basis of her sex, setting off a flurry of legal activity. According to **court documents**, Rost testified that he fired Stephens because “[she] was no longer going to represent [herself] as a man. [She] wanted to dress as a woman.”

Last March, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals **ruled in her favor**. “It is analytically impossible to fire an employee based on that employee's status as a transgender person without being motivated, at least in part, by the employee's sex,” the court said in its decision. “An employer cannot discriminate on the basis of transgender status without imposing its stereotypical notions of how sexual organs and gender identity ought to align.”

Harris Funeral Homes appealed to the Supreme Court, which **took up the case** and will hear oral arguments on October 8.

How anti-trans “radical feminist” groups could affect the outcome of a civil rights discrimination case

In recent weeks, a flurry of amicus briefs have been filed in the case *R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes v. EEOC and Aimee Stephens*. Major medical organizations, advocacy groups, and legal experts have **weighed in** mostly in favor of allowing trans people to be free of discrimination at work. Meanwhile, a slew of conservative and religious groups have claimed the right to fire anyone for being trans.



Aimee Stephens sued her employer, Harris Funeral Homes, for firing her for being transgender. Now the Supreme Court will hear her sex discrimination case. | Charles William Kelly/ACLU

Even President Trump’s Department of Justice filed **a brief** in August arguing in part that Stephens was fired by Harris Funeral Homes not for her gender identity but because she refused to follow her employer’s dress code, which requires men — and by “men,” the DOJ means men of “biological sex” — to wear a suit with pants and women to wear a dress or a skirt. The ACLU attorneys representing Stephens, in turn, argued that their client was fired because Stephens failed to perform the sex role her employer expected of her, violating the legal precedent established in 1989 in ***Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins***.

In that case, Ann Hopkins was denied promotions and a partnership because she didn’t look, dress, or behave in a stereotypically feminine enough manner. Her bosses instructed her to wear more makeup and skirts to work in order to get the promotion. The court sided with Hopkins, establishing a legal standard for sex stereotyping that has fundamentally transformed the workplace for women for the past 30 years.

Now that precedent is being put to the test. And joining the Trump administration and conservatives in the fight over sex-based discrimination and stereotypes are several somewhat unexpected allies: so-called “radical feminist” groups with long records of opposing the rights of transgender people.

In their amicus brief to the Supreme Court, the Women’s Liberation Front, or WoLF, **writes**, “Simply, Aimee Stephens is a man. He wanted to wear a skirt while at work, and his ‘gender identity’ argument is an ideology that dictates that people who wear skirts must be women, precisely the type of sex stereotyping forbidden by *Price Waterhouse*.”

Groups like WoLF are commonly referred to as “trans-exclusionary radical feminists,” or TERFs. They alternate among several theories that all claim that trans women are really men, who are the ultimate oppressors of women. Most of their ideas — like that trans women are a threat to cisgender women’s safety — are based on cherry-picked cases of horrific behavior by a small number of trans people. Above all else, their ideology doesn’t allow for trans people to have self-definition or any autonomy over their gender expression.

“Sex is grounded in materiality, whereas ‘gender identity’ is simply an ideology that has no grounding in science,” WoLF told Vox in a statement. “The redefinition of the word ‘sex’ to mean ‘gender identity’ would have myriad harmful effects on women and girls, and women and girls as a distinct category deserve civil rights protections.”

The key to understanding why a self-proclaimed radical feminist group would side with conservatives arguing for the right to force cisgender women into skirts at work is to understand who TERFs are and what they’ve been up to for the past 50 years. Because now, under the Trump administration and a conservative-majority Supreme Court, their alliance with these far-right groups could have lasting, widespread consequences for trans civil rights — and for the rights of women in general.

TERFs, explained

Online roots of the term TERF **originated** in the late 2000s but grew out of 1970s radical feminist circles after it became apparent that there **needed to be** a term to separate radical feminists who support trans women and those who don’t. Many anti-trans feminists today claim it’s a slur, despite what many see as an accurate description of their beliefs. They now prefer to call themselves “gender critical,” a euphemism akin to white supremacists calling themselves “**race realists**.”

In the early '70s, groups of what would now be called “gender critical” feminists **threatened violence** against many trans women who dared exist in women’s and lesbian spaces. For example, trans woman Beth Elliott, who was at the 1973 West Coast Lesbian Feminist Conference to perform with her lesbian band, was **ridiculed onstage** and had her existence protested. In 1979, radical feminist Janice Raymond, a professor at the University of Massachusetts, wrote the defining work of the TERF movement, “Transsexual Empire: The Making of the Shemale,” in which she argued that “transsexualism” should be “morally mandating it out of existence” mainly by restricting access to transition care (a **political position** shared by the Trump administration). Soon after she wrote another paper — this one published for the government-funded, Health and Human Services-linked National Center for Healthcare Technology — the Reagan administration cut off Medicare and private health insurance coverage for transition-related care.

After those early flashpoints, the dispute between trans people and gender-critical folks simmered for the next 20 years. One exception is the high-profile conflicts at the **Michigan Womyn’s Folk Festival**, or MichFest, which caught plenty of attention. In the 1990s and early aughts, pro-trans festival attendees organized “Camp Trans,” a space specifically welcoming to trans women who were otherwise banned from attending the event. The two groups clashed for a number of years, until more artists and organizations boycotted MichFest and organizers chose to end the event in 2015.

However, in the past several years, TERFism has found new life and fostered fertile recruiting ground in many online spaces. Though trans people experienced a dramatic increase in visibility with the rise of trans actress Laverne Cox and Caitlyn Jenner’s headline-grabbing transition, that visibility has resulted in a growing cultural backlash. While the majority of that backlash is simply a continuation of the conservative-driven culture war, some extremist “feminists” have decided that trans rights go too far.



Time

TERF ideology has become the **de facto face** of feminism in the UK, helped along by media leadership from Rupert Murdoch and the **Times of London**. Any vague opposition to gender-critical thought in the UK brings along **accusations** of “**silencing women**” and a **splashy feature** or **op-ed** in a British national newspaper. Australian radical feminist Sheila Jeffreys **went before the UK Parliament** in March 2018 and declared that trans women are “parasites,” language that sounds an awful lot like Trump speaking about immigrants.

According to Heron Greenesmith, who studies the modern gender-critical movement as a senior research associate with the social justice think tank Political Research Associates, gender-critical feminism in the UK **grew out** of a toxic mix of historical imperialism and the influence of the broader UK skeptical movement in the early aughts — which was hyper-focused on debunking “junk science” and any idea that considered sociological and historical influence and not just biology. Those who rose to prominence in the movement did so through a lot of “non-tolerant calling-out and attacking people,” Greenesmith said, much like gender-critical feminism. “Anti-trans feminists think they have science on their side. It is bananas how ascientific their rhetoric is, and yet literally they say, ‘Biology isn’t bigotry.’ In fact, biology has been used as bigotry as long as biology has been a thing.” (See scientific racism, eugenics, and the **justification for slavery** that black people were intellectually inferior to white people.)

Though TERFism got its start in the US in the ’70s, the ideology has largely fallen out of favor as the country’s mainstream feminist movement has continuously battled against the religious right for abortion access and LGBTQ rights. In a country where political coalitions on the feminist left are crucial to the survival of basic women’s rights, it doesn’t make much sense to spend time oppressing a tiny population who are otherwise valuable allies in the culture war.

Anti-trans rhetoric, though, has power, and anti-trans harassment certainly exists. While the hardcore in-person gender-critical organizing is largely run by a small handful of people, it has become sport for these self-proclaimed feminists to harass and mock trans people and their allies on Twitter and other social media platforms. Check out some of the 80-plus replies to a **tweet last month** by prominent feminist writer Sady Doyle promoting **a piece** she wrote denouncing TERFs (some accused Doyle of being a **handmaid** of the patriarchy, a common insult lobbed at cis women who ally with trans people), or check the inevitable replies to my tweet sharing this piece when it goes online.

But probably where “gender critical” feminism has the potential to wield the most influence is in government. US-based “gender critical” feminist groups like WoLF and **Hands Across the Aisle**, which sent a letter to the Department of Housing and Urban Development in favor of barring trans women from women’s homeless shelters, are happy to work alongside conservatives to limit the rights of trans people — even if those same conservatives want to pass legislation limiting their reproductive rights.

TERFs treat trans women as predators and trans men as victims of the patriarchy

Gender-critical feminism, at its core, opposes the self-definition of trans people, arguing that anyone born with a vagina is in its own oppressed sex class, while anyone born with a penis is automatically an oppressor. In a TERF world, gender is a system that exists solely to oppress women, which it does through the imposition of femininity on those assigned female at birth.

“Legally redefining ‘female’ as anyone who claims to be female results in the erasure of female people as a class,” WoLF wrote in its SCOTUS brief. “If, as a matter of law, *anyone* can be a woman, then *no one* is a woman, and sex-based protections in the law have no meaning whatsoever.”

This conception of gender as a system would be relatively sound if not for the existence of LGBTQ people. Gender- and sex-based oppression can be imposed on a range of people who were assigned male at birth, like gay men and, of course, trans women. In practice, however, the movement more closely resembles an organized hate campaign against a marginalized community — whether that’s through online harassment or filing briefs in landmark civil rights cases.

Adherents to TERF ideology treat trans women, trans men, and nonbinary people much differently. Gender-critical feminists blame the patriarchy for deluding trans men into thinking they can identify out of female oppression, or blame structural homophobia for convincing trans men they can become straight men rather than lesbians.

“The women in our coalition chose to set aside their differences and work together after we saw firsthand the deeply negative and downright dangerous consequences of ignoring bodily sex,” **Hands Across the Aisle**, an organization that **connects** radical feminists with anti-LGBTQ groups to campaign against trans rights, said in a statement to Vox. “We watched as doctors enabled irreversible damage to our daughters’ bodies, we sat stunned as boys took away our sisters’ sports opportunities, and we wept as our lesbian friends poisoned their bodies with testosterone in an attempt to appear male.”

For anti-trans activists, establishing a narrative that trans men are really just lesbians attempting to identify out of womanhood is absolutely essential. By doing this, transitioning can be positioned as a form of “conversion therapy,” whereby a lesbian is forced into a male identity and de facto heterosexuality. It opens a pathway for anti-trans activists to ban trans-affirming health care through “conversion therapy” bans.

However, trans men themselves have pointed out that the argument fails to take into account the bodily autonomy of transmasculine people and it is therefore not a feminist position. Trans author Jay Hulme recently **described** in a recent blog post why and how gender-critical feminists work to get trans men to “return to womanhood” and ultimately detransition.

“As a trans man, I am, and always will be, belittled, disrespected, spoken down to, and patronised, by transphobes,” wrote Hulme. “After all, they think I have been brainwashed and fooled into ‘thinking I’m a man,’ what could I possibly know? What value could my words or experience possibly have? ... This is, again, anti-feminist — the idea that trans men are just foolish women whose words cannot have any value is deeply troubling, and mirrors patriarchal behaviours towards ‘silly girls,’ no matter how old or how accomplished the women in question actually are.”

Nonbinary people, meanwhile, are often dismissed in discussions by gender critical feminists. “Nonbinary people muddle the scientism that anti-trans feminists rely on to justify their gender essentialism, so they choose not to acknowledge [nonbinary] existence or agency,” said Greenesmith. When not **erasing them entirely**, TERFs will often parrot right-wing rhetoric by mocking nonbinary people, suggesting they are attention seekers who don’t understand their birth sex.

How fear is weaponized against trans women

Gender-critical propaganda is almost entirely focused on the supposed depravity of trans women, citing rare cases to paint trans women as threats to women and children.

TERFs often point to **the case** of Karen White. White was in prison for sexual assault when she came out as a trans woman and applied for a transfer to a women’s prison. Once there, she allegedly raped several fellow prisoners before she was eventually caught. Prison officials **later admitted** that they did not follow existing safeguarding procedures in granting the transfer.

As a rape survivor myself, I find White detestable and am outraged that prison officials were so lax with their procedures and allowed White access to a vulnerable population of women. Where I differ from gender-critical feminists is I don’t agree that White is representative of all trans women; gender-critical feminists essentially believe the existence of trans women’s penises in a women’s space represents an automatic risk of rape.

“These are how stereotypes are weaponized against marginalized groups,” Gillian Branstetter, media relations manager at the National Center for Transgender Equality, told Vox. “Given transgender people’s relatively recent rise to public life, and the fact that many people still don’t know a transgender person, we’re very vulnerable to being mischaracterized, to being maligned, and to being drowned out by dog whistles.”



LightRocket via Getty Images

Many gender-critical feminists refuse to contend with the fact that 47 percent of trans women **have been** victims of sexual assault in their lives, instead **questioning the survey methods** used to reach the conclusion. However, many trans people don’t see how such questioning is any different from cis men who claim women are falsely accusing men of rape in ever-larger numbers.

This supposed concern for cis women and children has become the primary method for radicalizing gender-critical feminists, similar to how Islamophobes **play up threats** of gang rape of white women by Muslim men, or white supremacists have historically painted black men as sexual threats to justify segregation. Defending the purity of white womanhood has always been a significant axis of common bigotries, and gender-critical feminism operates in the same fashion. With “stranger danger” drilled into the heads of women and girls from a young age, anti-trans feminists can easily paint “the other” as a constant sexual threat —

despite the fact that **studies have repeatedly shown** that women are most likely to be sexually assaulted by someone they already know.

If trans people are given anti-discrimination protections, WoLF writes in its brief, “it will mark a truly fundamental shift in American law and policy that strips women of their right to privacy, threatens their physical safety, undercuts the means by which women can achieve professional and educational equality, and ultimately works to erase women and girls under the law.”

With its hyperfocus on the supposed threat of trans women in women’s spaces, gender-critical feminism ultimately lets misogynistic men slide under the radar. If everyone is watching for deviant trans women or men claiming to be trans women, who is watching for the respected public figure perpetuating horrific sexual abuse against women and girls?

Online TERFism has infiltrated academia and often manifests into more harassment

While gender-critical feminism has long had roots in academia — extending back to Raymond and her cohorts in the 1970s — renewed public interest in trans discourse has created opportunities for academics to make a name for themselves. Recently, a small handful of gender-critical philosophers have managed to leverage media coverage to gain a mainstream platform from which to express their transphobic views.

“Historically speaking, issues around sexuality and gender have been of relatively marginal importance for philosophy departments, and relatively significant importance for humanities departments and the literary or cultural studies,” Grace Lavery, a trans woman and professor of 19th-century British literature at Berkeley, told Vox. But “that distinction, or that institutional boundary, has begun to fray.”

Gender-critical philosophy has become a sort of cottage industry where previously unheralded academics can achieve an online following by reciting the theory du jour in online radical feminist spaces. British philosopher Kathleen Stock, a self-identifying gender-critical feminist and one of the group’s more authoritative figures, has written perhaps half a dozen different manifestos over the past few years on trans exclusion and the definition of womanhood.

“One of the things I find interesting to watch is the changing in their positions,” said Lavery of gender-critical academics. “I think they imagined that the questions they were asking would have easier answers than they did. I think, for example, they imagined earlier on that it was going to be quite easy to use chromosomes as a basis for a kind of biological sex

distinction, binary sex distinction. And they’ve now more or less entirely abandoned chromosomes as a singular determinant, as far as I can tell.”

Graduate philosophy student Christa Peterson has spent quite a bit of time tracking the positions and social media activity of gender-critical philosophers, and she explained why these philosophers seem to change positions so frequently. “What’s happening here is a popular movement that’s coming *into* academia, rather than these people having philosophical projects on this stuff that gives them these conclusions,” she told Vox. “They’re getting what they’re representing as philosophical conclusions from the gender-critical subreddit and other people on Twitter.”



Samuel Kubani / AFP via Getty Images

Earlier this year, Lavery decided to step into the debate because, as a tenured professor, she felt like she was one of the few trans academics in a position to push back on the growing anti-trans rhetoric she was seeing around her. After **initially** dipping her toe into the discourse, she wrote a piece that was critical of Stock. Two gender-critical journalists shared Stock’s response, and that’s when Lavery really started feeling the heat.

“It led to a massive explosion of online harassment, which I just didn’t see coming at all,” she said. “People in the seemingly hundreds started trying to find me and just write insulting things about me. And that escalated to the degree that it was totally out of

control. At one point, people were posting the names and contact details and photographs — not only of me but also of my colleagues at UC Berkeley — online.”

Generally, among academics, the work of their gender-critical peers is viewed as legitimate academic work, trusting the credentials of the philosophers who have jumped into the issue. However, when Stock was invited to speak on her views on gender and sexuality at the Aristotelian Society in early June, her speech drew protests online.

“In recent years and months, attacks on the trans community have been led by a number of prominent philosophers and are made to seem legitimate due to the unwillingness of the wider community to speak up and protect its most vulnerable members,” read a **joint statement** by Minorities and Philosophy UK and Minorities and Philosophy International. “Not every item of personal and ideological obsession is worthy of philosophical debate. In particular, scepticism about the rights of marginalised groups and individuals, where issues of life and death are at stake, are not up for debate.”

Yet this hasn’t stopped Stock from being published. Her work is cited in several amici briefs to the Supreme Court in the Stephens case, showing how gender-critical academia is assisting to legitimize anti-trans policy positions. In effect, gender-critical academics are laundering the whims of online TERFs into official policy.

Groups like WoLF may have “liberation” in their name, but they have ultraconservative ties

This brings us back to how TERFism can wield great power in policy and politics — and who they will align with to push their ideology forward.

WoLF has made no bones about partnering with misogynistic and anti-LGBTQ organizations like the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) in order to oppose the livelihoods of trans people to the Supreme Court. In fact, the Stephens case isn’t the first time the two groups have worked together on an anti-trans Supreme Court case. In early 2017, WoLF submitted an **amicus brief** opposing trans student Gavin Grimm’s lawsuit to use the boys’ bathroom at his school. That case was eventually remanded back to the lower court, which just recently ruled in Grimm’s favor once again.



Gavin Grimm, a transgender teenager, sued his school for access to the boys' bathroom. | Nikki Kahn/The Washington Post via Getty Images

WoLF's relationship with ADF extends beyond just filing briefs in key cases. LGBTQNation **reported** that in fiscal year 2017, the most recent year for which the feminist group's financial records are available, WoLF applied for and accepted a \$15,000 grant from the ultraconservative group. The LGBTQNation report additionally revealed in 2017 that WoLF contracted with Imperial Independent Media for help with fundraising, promising a 20 percent commission. At the time, IIM was run by Zachary Freeman, who made a **name for himself** over a lawsuit to leak abortion clinic employee names to the Center for Medical Progress, an anti-abortion group **known for propagating** heavily doctored videos purporting to show Planned Parenthood profiting off the sale of fetal tissue.

WoLF defended its deal with Freeman in its aforementioned statement to Vox. “WoLF has never hired anyone who endangered the lives of abortion clinic workers,” it said. “WoLF did once enter into a contract with someone who had previously exercised his rights under the Freedom of Information Act, related to matters that had nothing to do with WoLF.”

Also in its statement, WoLF defended a recent blog post that attacked Planned Parenthood's commitment to trans-inclusive care. In fact, nearly every blog post on WoLF's site is anti-trans (posts arguing against trans women in women's prisons, trans girls in girls sports, trans women in women's homeless shelters). There is little call to any “feminist” issue that isn't an attack on trans people at its core.

Though it's unknown who funds another prominent gender-critical group, Hands Across the Aisle, one of its co-founders is Kaeley Triller-Haver, an anti-abortion conservative who has reportedly **admitted to committing statutory rape** of a teenage boy when she was a youth counselor.

Anti-trans alliances with conservative groups are by no means new for gender-critical feminists. During the Irish referendum on abortion rights in 2018, some British gender-critical feminists withheld support for campaigners who supported abortion rights, citing the trans supportive attitudes of Irish feminism, going so far as to schedule an **anti-trans meeting** in Dublin at the height of the campaign season. Irish feminists responded with a **scathing open letter** denouncing the event and reaffirming their support for the womanhood of trans women.

In January, the conservative Heritage Foundation held an event in Washington, DC, featuring members of WoLF to discuss the Equality Act and their opposition to trans rights. Two days later, prominent British anti-trans feminists Kellie-Jay Keen-Minshull (also known as “Posie Parker”) and Julia Long, who had been in town attending the panel, **stormed a Capitol Hill office** where Human Rights Campaign national press secretary Sarah McBride had just concluded a meeting between parents of trans children and legislators. (The Heritage Foundation told Vox it had “nothing to do with” Keen-Minshull and Long being in the US and had “no contact with them before or after our January 28 event, and have zero connection to anything they did afterward.”)

They filmed themselves yelling and taunting McBride with their personal gripes with the trans movement, accusing her of not caring about “lesbian girls.” McBride, to her credit, didn't take the bait, remaining stone-faced and focused on her computer screen while a coworker attempted to deescalate the situation.



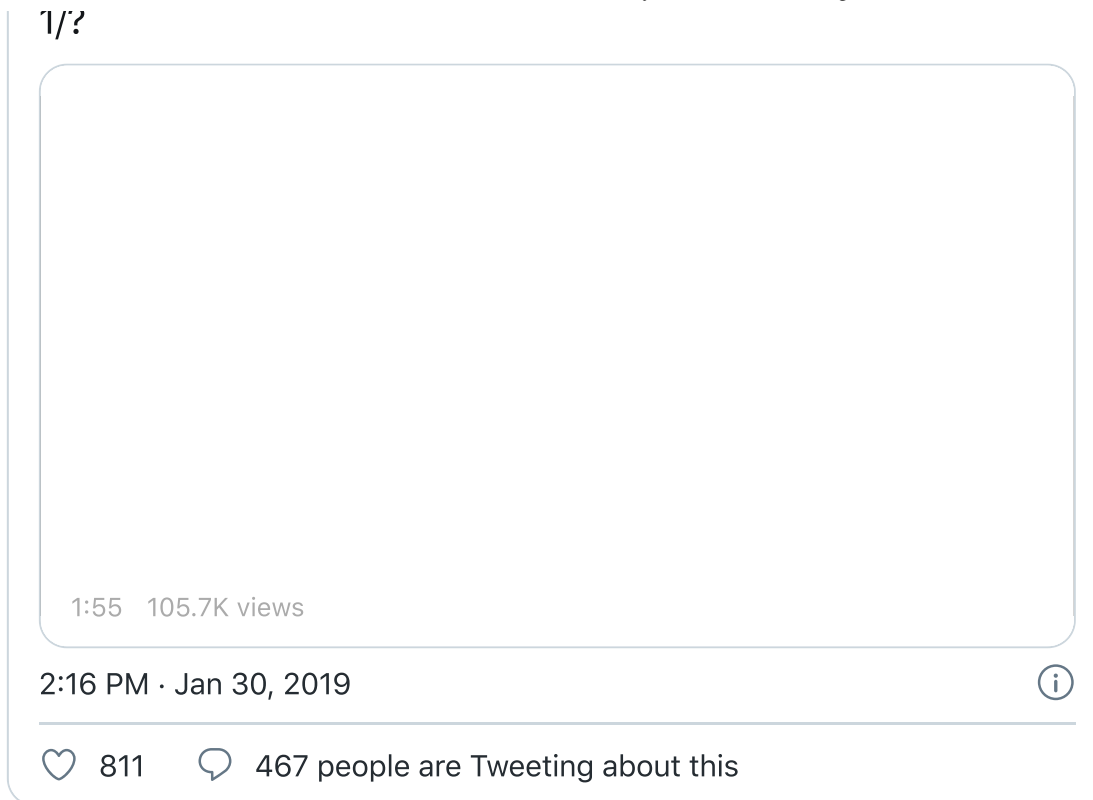
Joss Prior ...for my girls all around the world!
@joss_prior



Thread!

Kellie-Jay Keen Minshull (Posie Parker) and Julia Long have gone to a trans womans place of work to intimidate and bully her for her work at Human Rights Campaign.

In the US they have proposed an Equality Act, much like the one that supports and protects minorities.



Branstetter compares the deployment of so-called feminists to oppose trans rights to the white nationalist movement rebranding themselves as the “alt-right” to achieve a veneer of respectability. “When people call organizations like these TERFs, it’s doing that same job for them,” she said. “It’s portraying it as this divide within the progressive movement or this divide within the LGBTQ community that only serves to benefit people who hate women and the LGBTQ community, including Heritage, the FRC [Family Research Council], and the ADF. Certainly, we should not be shocked that they’re desperate to sort of put up decoys — I just can’t imagine how you can walk through the doors of the Heritage Foundation as a heralded guest and continue to call yourself an advocate for women’s equality.”

In the US, Baltimore gender critical feminist Julia Beck has made a name for herself in conservative circles, **appearing** on Tucker Carlson’s show on Fox News and **testifying** before the House against trans inclusions in the Violence Against Women Act and the Equality Act.

“I sat 10 feet from Julia Beck in the House Equality Act hearing and heard her say the violence faced by transgender women is a myth,” said Branstetter, who noted that anti-trans feminists, like their conservative partners, have begun pushing a claim that trans people do not face much discrimination and violence, an assertion without evidence. “Not 24 hours before she said that, not two miles from where she said that, Ashanti Carmon was

murdered on Eastern Avenue in DC. I think it’s telling that they have to promote this trans violence trutherism in order to feel justified in their own hatred.”

According to Greenesmith, Beck employed the diversionary tactic of spouting inaccuracies, forcing those engaged in debate to constantly refute them, rather than engage with the real issues. “Everything she was saying was a lie,” said Greenesmith, referring to Beck’s testimony. “We keep getting trapped in that cycle of proving what she says is wrong ... here you and I are saying, ‘But in fact, 24 hours earlier, a trans woman was killed!’ There will always be a trans person getting harmed because that is a reality, but instead of talking [about] why then we need the Equality Act, we’re forced to instead do what happened at the hearing. All the House Democrats and the other witnesses had to contradict Julia Beck. It worked. Having her there worked perfectly.”

Gender-critical feminism doesn’t have the same traction in the US as it does in the UK, but groups still wield power

In fairness, several prominent gender-critical feminists have themselves denounced the movement’s cooperation with archconservatives, such as **Jean Hatcher**, who cited WoLF’s connection with the ADF in a blog post stating her opposition. But those appeals haven’t appeared to slow down the merging of TERFism with the larger conservative political apparatus.

Just this month, gender-critical feminists who have been banned from Twitter for extensive transphobic harassment have **recently organized** under the alt-right message board Gab to form “Spinster,” a social media platform for TERFs. It remains to be seen whether the British message board Mumsnet will remain the epicenter for gender-critical messaging, but the movement’s growing connections with anti-abortion and violent misogynist movements should concern both cisgender and transgender women.

According to Branstetter, the recent gender-critical wave has largely failed to gain traction in the US outside of the very far-right spheres. “I don’t think American women are buying it,” she said, pointing out that nearly every major US feminist advocacy group is vocally pro-trans rights and inclusion. “It’s because they understand what it means to be marginalized. They understand that any strict rules placed around gender are to the benefit of nobody.”

Conservative groups, in turn, have made a **conscious decision** to use feminist language and framing to oppose trans rights, which is how we ended up with some of the most vehemently anti-woman politicians in the House voting against the Violence Against Women Act in the name of “protecting women and girls.”

This unholy alliance — backed up with academic scholarship written by TERFs — could end up having devastating consequences to the standing of women and girls in the US and across the globe. In the Supreme Court case, WoLF is taking the side that claims employers have the right to mandate that women wear skirts by arguing that Aimee Stephens believes that only women can wear skirts. If WoLF truly believed in the abolition of gender, as it claims, it would be petitioning to allow Stephens to present at work in whatever gender she wishes without risk of being fired.

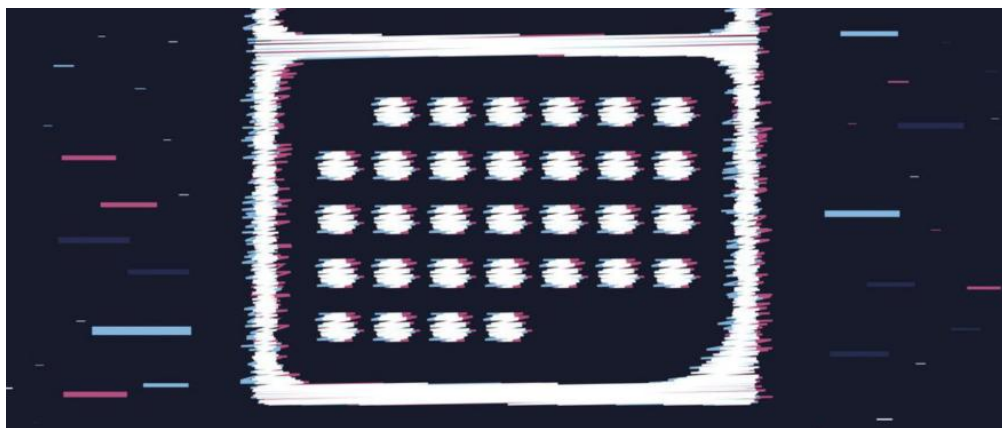
WoLF’s argument reveals the big gender-critical lie: It’s more important to TERFs to put cis women in a stricter box and enforce sex-based dress codes than it is to give trans women equal employment rights. And if TERFs prevail, then all women and nonbinary people lose.

Katelyn Burns is a freelance journalist based in Washington, DC. She was the first openly transgender Capitol Hill reporter in US history. Her other work can be seen in the Washington Post, Teen Vogue, Vice, and many others.

Correction: An earlier version of this story cited links that appeared on Hands Across the Aisle’s website. The links to various groups do not reflect any known ties. This piece has also been updated to include a statement from the Heritage Foundation and to clarify that the protests against Kathleen Stock were online.

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What day is it today?

