

Chapter 11

Claiming Victimhood: Victims of the “Transgender Agenda”

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Abstract

Transgender people have received substantial attention in recent years, with gender identity being a focal point of online debate. Transgender identities are central to discussions relating to sex-segregated spaces and activities, such as public toilets, prisons, and sports participation. The introduction of “gender-neutral” spaces has received criticism because some argue that there is an increased risk of sexual violence against women and children. However, little is known about the implications that these constructions have for whom is able to claim a “victim status.” In this chapter, I provide a critical analysis of the techniques used by individuals to align themselves with a “victim status.” These claims are presented and contextualized within varying notions of victimization, from being victims of political correctness to victims of a more aggressive minority community. This feeds into an inherently transphobic discourse that is difficult to challenge without facing accusations of perpetuating an individual’s “victimhood.” Transphobic rhetoric is most commonly expressed through constructing transgender people as “unnatural,” “sinful,” or as experiencing a “mental health issue.” This chapter argues that the denial of transphobia and simultaneous claims of victimization made by the dominant, cisgender majority are intrinsically linked.


Keywords: Transgender; victimhood; discourse analysis; transphobia; gender neutral; sex-segregated; cisgender

Introduction

Transgender identities have attracted significant academic, political, and social attention in recent years. Indeed, there is an ever-growing body of research that

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explores issues relating to, and affecting, transgender communities (Pearce, 2018; Roen, 2001; Shuster, 2017). Transgender identities are also the subject of discussion, “debate,” and de-legitimization across various social media platforms including YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook (Colliver, Coyle, & Silvestri, 2019). While it is acknowledged that transgender people have long existed within and across societies globally (Jamel, 2018), it is only more recently in the United Kingdom that such intense public visibility has been centered upon issues affecting transgender communities.

The structural visibility has meant that the lives of transgender people have come under public scrutiny. Simultaneously to this increasing structural visibility, the United Kingdom has seen an annual increase in hate crime targeting transgender people (Home Office, 2019). In an online context, progressive protections and formal acknowledgment of transgender people are regularly contested on a number of apparent binary “trade-offs,” including “sex vs gender,” and “science vs subjectivity.” As will be demonstrated in this chapter, it is common for individuals to claim that their “sex-based” rights are diminishing in light of “gender-based” rights. Yet, the ways in which cisgender people claim victimhood has not yet attracted significant academic attention. Instead, research into “claiming victimhood” has primarily focused on racial oppression (King, 2015; Kolber, 2017) and “men’s rights” movements (Coston & Kimmel, 2013; Girard, 2009).

The term “transgender” has been defined in a number of different ways, offering different levels of inclusivity of identities, experiences, and expressions that fall outside contemporary Western gender binaries (Davidson, 2007). In this chapter, the terms “transgender” and “trans” will be used interchangeably and are defined as denoting:

A range of gender experiences, subjectivities and presentations that fall across, between or beyond stable categories of “man” and “woman”. “Transgender” includes gender identities that have, more traditionally, been described as “transsexual”, and a diversity of genders that call into question an assumed relationship between gender identity and presentation and the “sexed” body. (Hines, 2010, p. 1)

The term “cisgender” describes a person whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth. The use and implications of this term have been contested as a result of the enforcement of another socially constructed binary (Jamel, 2018). Despite the complexities associated with this term, it is used within this chapter as a useful identity marker and to challenge dominant representations of both cisgender and trans people.

This chapter draws on a discourse analysis of 1,756 online comments made in response to YouTube videos regarding transgender people’s access to public toilets, and more specifically, the implementation of “gender-neutral” toilets. Existing literature shows that public toilets can be sites of anxiety, policing, and abuse for trans people (Browne, 2004; Faktor, 2011). Public toilets often receive such high levels of attention as they are conceptualized as being the ultimate gender-segregated space (Doan, 2010). Access to a number of sex-segregated spaces, including public toilets, fitting rooms, changing room, prisons, and hospital wards

has gained significant social and political attention in recent years and are often core to the debates relating to “sex-based” vs “gender-based” rights. Gender-neutral spaces have been engaged with both politically and socially. Within the United Kingdom, media attention has been paid to the introduction, or discussion, of gender-neutral toilets in a range of public spaces including schools, restaurants, and train stations (Davidson, 2019; Middleton, 2019; Noor, 2019). This has coincided with online debate on social media platforms regarding the implementation of and access to gender-neutral toilets.

This chapter seeks to challenge the dominant framework that allows for cisgender identities to remain uninterrogated. While my previous research has identified the ways in which transgender people are constructed in an online context (Colliver et al., 2019), this chapter seeks to present the ways in which cisgender people construct themselves online, more specifically in relation to transgender people.¹ This chapter responds to the gap in academic research by providing a critical expose of the ways in which “they,” the transgender “other,” and “us,” the cisgender majority are constructed as being in constant opposition in the quest for a greater level of “rights.” The chapter explores the ways in which “victimhood” is worked up and constructed on social media platforms. It will be argued that any progression for transgender people in relation to human rights, protective legislation, and acknowledgment is constructed in direct opposition, and ultimately, at the cost of, cisgender people’s rights.

The rise of the internet, and in particular, social media has seen a rise in text posted online which may be considered problematic for a number of reasons, including the anonymity of online interactions. A growing body of literature has been developed recently that considers the similarities and differences between online and offline hate speech (Awan & Zempi, 2016; Brown, 2018). It is vital to address transphobia and hate speech more broadly in an online context as this can have very practical offline implications if these views (re)gain unchallenged political traction. These implications include the legitimization of transphobic hate crime and an uncontested call for a rollback of protective legislation. As a result, the need to address issues of discrimination, prejudice, and violence that transgender people face can be minimized and deflected. Addressing prejudicial and discriminatory speech in an online context is important as research has shown that those who engage in these behaviors “provide links to one another, and expressly attempt to encourage both recruitment and discussion among like-minded people” (Sunstein, 2007, pp. 57, 58). The analysis of text and talk from online platforms provides an opportunity to move away from attitudinal scales, which are often decontextualized within the life of the participants and provides a more subjective overview of the ways in which people construct minority groups. The analysis of naturally occurring text and talk demonstrates that views vary depending upon the function of the text at that point in time. Talk and text is therefore contextual, situational, and relational (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). It is important to note that it is not the intention of this chapter to judge the authenticity of claims made, nor to “debate” the authenticity or existence of transgender people. Despite the data presented in this chapter, this work is firmly grounded in the position that transgender people are valid and authentic.

Method

The data and analysis presented in this chapter are taken from a larger research project that examines “everyday” experiences of discrimination, abuse, and hate crime targeting transgender people (Colliver et al., 2019). Ethical approval was received from Kingston University in November 2016. The data used within this chapter formed part of a larger online element of the research project that explored the ways in which transgender people were constructed in an online context in relation to videos that focused on “gender-neutral” toilets. The dataset consisted of 1,756 comments posted by YouTube users on 10 randomly-sampled videos that were identified using the search term “gender-neutral toilets.”

All videos were sampled on May 1, 2017, and a total of 431 videos were collated. A number of inclusion criteria were set that determined whether videos were eligible to be sampled, including the relevance of the video content to the topic, not being a duplicate of another video, and having had elicited a minimum of five user comments from viewers. After the inclusion criteria were applied, 100 videos were identified as suitable for the study. All videos were assigned a number, and an online random number generator was then used to select a manageable sample of 10 videos. Similar sampling methods have been used in other online studies exploring narratives of international travel described in online personal blogs (Snee, 2013). Despite the wider research project having a focus on the United Kingdom, the online element of the study was not restricted to UK videos to be able to explore the globalization of online communities. It is important to note, however, that the specific geographical location of each commenter could not be established.

Three videos featured news coverage from the United States, of President Obama’s instruction to schools to allow transgender students to access the toilet that aligned with their gender identity. One video featured a short clip from the *Jimmy Kimmel Live* show which featured US citizens being asked to comment on gender-neutral toilets, more specifically, their opinion on potential visual indicators that a toilet was “gender neutral.” One video featured a transgender woman who resides in the United States asking members of the public if they would have concerns over sharing a public toilet with her, before disclosing her trans identity. The other five videos were face-to-camera videos, three of which were produced by cisgender people (two from the United Kingdom and one from the United States) and two produced by transgender people (one from the United Kingdom and one from the United States) sharing opinions on “gender-neutral” toilets.

The dataset was subjected to critical discursive psychology, a form of discourse analysis (see Coyle, 2016 for an overview of this approach). This form of analysis is strongly grounded within a social constructionist philosophy and assimilates with the epistemological stance of the wider research study. This particular type of analysis has also been used effectively in other research exploring prejudice and discrimination (Goodman & Burke, 2010a, 2010b; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). In this chapter, the focus is on what is *accomplished* by comments posted in response to the sampled YouTube videos. As such, the analysis is centered around the

text’s action orientation, meaning the data are not analyzed or interpreted in a manner that speculates or attempts to establish the motivation or intentions of the commenter. In particular, the analysis seeks to identify some of the key discursive resources that are drawn upon to construct and position cisgender people as the victims of a “transgender agenda.” The excerpts presented are verbatim from YouTube, so all spelling and grammatical errors remain, as does the use of italics and upper-case letters.

Thematic Overview

A central theme developed from the data was “gender-neutral toilets as sites of sexual danger,” and notions of sexual danger formed a fundamental part of the case that was put forward against the implementation of gender-neutral toilets. In particular, male sexuality was constructed as uncontrollable, animalistic, and overpowering, and commenters regularly drew upon graphic descriptions of sexual violence to contextualize their claims of risk. Child imagery was routinely invoked and functioned to transform a logistical issue into a moral debate. Comparisons were made and distinctions were drawn between public and private spaces in the construction of gender-neutral toilets to emphasize the inherent risk associated with these spaces. These specific constructions that were regularly mobilized problematize gender-neutral toilets in socially recognizable ways. In doing so, these constructions function to sustain the status-quo of sex-segregated toilets while reinforcing gendered stereotypes and norms of male dominance.

The second theme developed from the data related to “the de-legitimization of trans people,” and these constructions often occurred simultaneously to the construction of gender-neutral toilets as sites of sexual danger (see [Colliver et al., 2019](#) for a detailed analysis). A variety of motifs were drawn upon to achieve this de-legitimization, including commenters invoking notions of science, biological essentialism, and “naturalness.” These notions functioned to construct transgender people as a “scientific absurdity,” and clearly establish boundaries between the significant “natural” majority – cisgender people – and the “unnatural” minority – transgender people. These claims also provided a foundation for transgender people to be de-legitimized through claims of religious morality.

Another significant motif that was drawn upon by YouTube users was that of “mental health,” and recurrent claims were made that “transgenderism” is a “mental illness.” Finally, conspiracy-like claims were made that wider societal structures and institutions are responsible for the emergence of a new “trend” of “transgender” as a category. Social media is regularly discussed, and a significant amount of responsibility is assigned for the emergence of transgender people.

Claiming Victimhood: Gender Neutral Toilets as Undermining the Rights of Cisgender People

The discursive resources that are used within talk and text that constructs trans people in negative, problematic, and challenging ways is a growing area of

interest within academia (Colliver et al., 2019). However, little attention has been paid to the ways in which cisgender people construct the risk that they deem to be associated with gender-neutral toilets and the self-identification of one's gender. Attitudinal studies toward transgender and gender non-conforming people have found correlations between negative or discriminatory attitudes alongside age and gender, with some studies reporting higher levels of negative attitudes in women and older people (Hill & Willoughby, 2005; Tee & Hegarty, 2006). On the other hand, some studies have found higher negative attitudes toward transgender and gender non-conforming people among men (Norton & Herek, 2013). However, it is not clear whether attitudes toward transgender people change when specifically looking at transgender women, of whom the focus of much debate around public toilets is focused.

Doan (2010, p. 635) suggests that transgender people experience a “special kind of tyranny – the tyranny of gender – that arises when people dare to challenge the hegemonic expectations for appropriately gendered behavior in Western society.” When people challenge hegemonic expectations of gender, they also challenge deeply engrained ideas around which bodies belong in which spaces. This may be most intensely felt within public spaces segregated by gender in which others are able to apply, and attempt to enforce cisnormative standards relating to gender expression and presentation. The level of gender-policing in these spaces may be intensified as a result of the spatial structure of public toilets which facilitates monitoring and surveillance (Cavanagh, 2010). Bodies and spaces “simultaneously (re)create one another,” and there are implications for how we navigate the spaces we occupy (Nash, 2010, p. 588). This chapter focuses on the ways in which cisgender commenters construct and position themselves as victims, which often surfaced through three sub-themes: “Victims of a political agenda”; “loss of rights, privacy, and safety”; and “the end of the world,” each of which is discussed below. It is argued throughout this chapter that these claims of victimization are intrinsically linked to the denial of transphobia and function to negate any requirement for a change in societal provisions for minority communities.

Victims of a Political Agenda

A recurrent theme developed from the data was the concept of victimhood in relation to political correctness and wider political structures that seek to oppress the dominant majority. It has been argued that making claims of structural oppression is key for the “in-group” to maintain a positive moral group identity (Sullivan, Landau, Branscombe, & Rothschild, 2012). In this sense, making claims of structural and political oppression serve to construct the dominant majority as innocent and powerless in the face of structures that are more powerful. This type of victimhood was evident in the data sampled, in which “transphobia” is constructed as a politically correct term, functioning to limit the freedom of the dominant majority. In these discussions, the construction of transphobia as a politically correct term also serves to refute accusations of transphobia, while simultaneously claiming a victim status.

No one is afraid of gays. Homophobia and transphobia are made up terms used to bully people into a specific way of thinking. In reality those perversions are a mental disorder but the script has been flipped and now anyone who doesn't agree with those mental disorders must have a mental disorder or a “phobia” of them. (This comment was made in response to other YouTube users debating whether children would be safe in gender neutral toilets.)

Awww we are bigots because we don't want men in the ladies restroom lmao? Fuck off sicko. (This comment was made in response to a previous comment which suggested a separate bathroom should be made for bigots.)

In the extracts presented above, transphobia is constructed as a socio-political term. The use of inverted commas around the word “phobia” in the first comment and the direct claim that “homophobia and transphobia are made up terms” function to deny responsibility, accountability, or even the existence of discriminatory views. As a result, the commenter is positioned as the victim of “political correctness,” while simultaneously de-legitimizing gender and sexual minorities through claims of mental health and “perversion.” While the second comment does not construct transphobia as non-existent, it does construct the label “bigot” as assigned unfairly. The use of an acronym (lmao) to suggest extreme laughter within a rhetorical question also functions to maximize the absurdity of these labels and minimize the accusations of bigotry and the label that has been assigned by another YouTube user.

Not only are cisgender people constructed as victims of “political correctness” but also other YouTube users construct themselves as victims within the context of a wider, intentional political agenda. Commenters claim that issues of gender-neutral facilities and adjustments that may potentially ease the access for transgender people in public places are intentionally pushed by politicians and the media to mask the “real” issues that affect the dominant, cisgender majority. As a result, cisgender people are constructed as victims of a political system which fails to tend to their needs.

Wait, between all this shit, are we fucking fixing the economy?
(This was a direct response to the video commented on.)

We the people are given a “Toy” to play with while bigger things happen ... (This was a direct response to the video commented on.)

To me this whole thing just seems like a distraction from all the real problems in this country. (This was a direct response to the video commented on.)

The trans issue is way overblown, they are a small minority (Like less than 1% of our population) it seems like a huge expense nationally for us all to create bathrooms for them. (This was a direct response to the video commented on.)

The first three comments presented above highlight the “problems” that are not being attended to as a result of a political focus on gender-neutral toilets. In the first comment, a specific example is given and framed within a rhetorical question. The use of a rhetorical question within this comment functions to negate the need for any response. As such, the economy is firmly established as in need of “fixing.” In both the second and third comments, gender-neutral toilets are constructed as a side issue, unworthy of attention, and therefore a trivial matter. While both comments allude to more pressing “issues,” neither comment specifies any particular issue that is deemed to be more important. However, the general allusion to more significant “issues” that countries face functions to construct the dominant majority as victims of a failing political system. In the final comment, the dominant, cisgender majority are constructed as victims owing to the economic and financial implications associated with implementing gender-neutral toilets. These adjustments are constructed as unnecessary, and the commenter quantifies the transgender population which reinforces the unreasonableness of these adjustments.

Loss of Rights, Privacy, and Safety

Within the data, gender-neutral toilets were also worked up and constructed as presenting a “trade-off” in relation to the rights, privacy, and safety between transgender and cisgender people. This was presented in ways that position cisgender people as the victims of this trade-off and claims were often made that the implementation of gender-neutral toilets will result in diminished rights and safety for the dominant, cisgender majority.

I just think with this issue you need to decide who’s comfort level you are willing to side with is it a) the trans-gendered person who feels more comfortable in the opposite sexes bathroom or B) the female in the FEMALE bathroom who feels uncomfortable with MALES in the female bathroom...everyone has different comfort levels, so please keep that in mind. (This was a direct response to the video being commented on.)

We all have a right to be comfortable in a public bathroom facility. I don’t see why hundreds of people who identify as the gender they were born should be uncomfortable just so very few transgender people can use the bathroom that they want to. (This was a direct response to the video being commented on. One other YouTube user responded and compared gender-neutral toilets to pornography and that people will eventually get used to it.)

The argument you make should apply to the others as well that have a choice in how they want to live their life. Last I checked if someone that doesn’t want a sex change its their decision and their rights are just as important as a transgender. (This was in response to another comment which suggested if someone is transgender it is their choice, and if people don’t like it, it is their problem.)

The first comment constructs a “trade-off” in relation to rights and safety, in which one must decide whose rights are most important. The use of the phrase “opposite sex” and the capitalization of the words “Females” and “Males” functions to reinforce a rigid gender binary, de-legitimizes those who identify outside of that binary, and de-legitimizes the authenticity of “claimed” transgender identities. The de-legitimization of transgender people is crucial in raising the “worthy” victim status of cisgender people. The quantification of people in the second comment also functions to raise the “worthy” victim status of cisgender communities, as it highlights the significantly larger population of people who may be potentially harmed as a result of the implementation of gender-neutral toilets. However, this comment is also contradictory in nature, as it begins by claiming that “we all have a right” to be comfortable, yet the comment constructs comfortability as a significantly more fundamental right of cisgender people. In the final comment, “worthy” victim status is worked up by emphasizing the role of free-will, autonomy, and choice in the decision trans individuals make.

The role of choice in transgender people’s lives functions to decrease the “worthiness” of them as victims, as they are constructed as freely choosing to be in this particular position. The use of the phrase “a transgender” also functions to dehumanize transgender people, contributing to their inauthenticity as victims. In the three comments above, cisgender people are constructed as “victims” of advancing transgender equality. Similar techniques have been found in a study of “white victimhood” in which white people are threatened by racial equality movements (Wilkins, Hirsch, Kaiser, & Inkles; 2017).

The concept of privacy was also key in commenters exploring the “trade-off” between safety and rights. Anderson (2009, p. 91) argues that “anxieties about privacy violations while using a toilet are profoundly strong in Western culture.” Therefore, it is unsurprising that notions of privacy were present within the data.

For me it has nothing to do with trans people or the issue with weirdos in the bathroom. It’s hard enough trying to shit with women in the bathroom. It’s a lack of privacy. (This was made in direct response to the video being commented on.)

Why should I have to sacrifice my privacy and comfort just for the sake of 1% of the population? (One YouTube user replied asking how their privacy is sacrificed, to which they responded “Because I’m not really comfortable going to the bathroom with the opposite sex.”)

The issue of privacy is framed in a similar manner to that of safety and rights, as a “trade-off.” This is most evident in the second comment in which the commenter claims they would have to “sacrifice” their privacy to accommodate the needs of transgender people. This is also followed by a quantification of the transgender community to further highlight how it is the privacy of the overwhelming cisgender majority that will be sacrificed. On the contrary, the loss of privacy is constructed in a significantly more mundane way in the first comment, referring to the process of

excretion and positioning this bodily function as the key reason for their anxiety regarding gender-neutral toilets.

It is clear that the implementation of gender-neutral toilets is constructed as undermining the rights of cisgender people. In a similar way that claims of “white victimhood” were made in [King’s \(2015\)](#) study, claims of “cisgender victimhood” are present in this study and create a protective barrier of needing to directly address cisheteronormativity and therefore gender norms and the gender binary are maintained.

Beyond reasons of safety and privacy, themes of men’s convenience were positioned as a key reason against the implementation of gender-neutral toilets. Gender-neutral toilets are therefore constructed as inconvenient for men, representing a loss of practicality.

Don’t install urinals? They help things move faster. No ways. (That seems discriminatory.) (This comment was in direct response to another YouTube user who suggested not installing urinals would address issues of privacy in gender-neutral toilets.)

I’m against unisex bathrooms. I don’t know what women do in public bathrooms that leads to the long queues in front of them, and I don’t care. But I don’t want to have to queue because women are apparently unable to get rid of their body secretions in a time-efficient manner. (This comment was made in direct response to the video being commented on.)

Male convenience is not a new concept. [Greed \(1995\)](#) found that in relation to public toilets, the convenience afforded to men was significantly higher than that afforded to women, and this was evident through the provision of two-thirds more public facilities. Further to inconvenience, the victim status of men is explicitly discussed in the first comment in which the commenter claims to be a victim of discrimination. This clearly highlights the victimization that cisgender people, particularly cisgender men, will experience as a result of gender-neutral toilets being implemented. In claiming discrimination, access to urinals is constructed as a fundamental right for men, and the implementation of gender-neutral toilets an infringement upon this fundamental right. In the second comment, there is also a construction of “difference” between men and women, with men being the main victims as a result of a loss of convenience.

Finally, in relation to a loss of rights, the gains of the broader lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) movement are often highlighted to position the dominant majority as accommodating, which is necessary to facilitate a discriminatory comment. Furthermore, victim status is also established through constructing the broader LGBTQI community as demanding, unfair, and “bullies.” Constructing the LGBTQI community in this way, positions the cisgender community as victims.

LGBTQ = BULLIES. (This comment was in direct response to the video being commented on.)

They talk about they being bullied, but sometimes when the victim gets lots of power they can end up becoming the bully they hate so much. So congrats LGBT and Liberals you became what you hated so much. (This comment was in direct response to the video being commented on.)

Some people suggested a Transgender bathroom. The LGBT didn't want it. They just want what they want. No negotiations. (This comment was in response to another YouTube user who claimed there should be a separate “transgender bathroom.”)

They want to annoy us. A Transgendered restroom would've been better cause that they they're not violating our space, but no. Only restroom I'll be using is in my house. (This comment was made in direct response to comment three above.)

A key part of establishing a “victim identity” is constructing a suitable offender. This is established in all of the comments presented above. In the first comment, the LGBTQI community is constructed as bullies. This comment is homogenizing, in that the comment does not function to differentiate between groups of people. As such, a clear offender is constructed. Widely accepted tropes surround the “abused” becoming the “abuser” is drawn upon to construct LGBTQI people, and “liberal” people more broadly as offending against cisgender, conservative people. Although largely accepted, these claims have been proven to be unfounded (Leach, Stewart, & Smallbone, 2016). The final two comments construct LGBTQI communities as irritating, boisterous, and demanding. The use of the phrase “no negotiations” functions to construct these communities as unfair and unresponsive to compromise. In addition, the use of the word “violating” serves to construct a clear incident of victimization that cisgender communities experience. Through implication, this constructs cisgender communities as victims of this unfairness, building up their identity as “victims.” Similar findings have been found in the study of men's rights movements, in which women who are perceived to be feminist are constructed as vicious and aggressive (Coston & Kimmel, 2013). In studies of the men's rights movements, men as the dominant group are often framed as in need of protection from women (Girard, 2009). A similar rhetoric was found in these data in which cisgender people are constructed as needing protection, and a “safe space” away from transgender people.

The End of the World

In light of the ways “victimhood” was developed within the data, slippery slope arguments are then developed, ultimately functioning to highlight the extreme harms facing cisgender communities if the “righteous” do not intervene. The result is that “the end of world” is constructed as imminent if cisgender communities do not unite and prevent the progression of transgender equality and rights. This is

most common throughout the data in extreme case formulations, in which extreme harm is speculated and predicted.

Marrying animals and then ultimately dead people are next! Watch!
(This comment was made in direct response to the video being commented on.)

If we lie to ‘transsexuals’ to make them feel better, who is the next group we have to lie to: animal sex lovers, pedophiles, necrophiliacs. Just how far down that rabbit hole do we want to go as a society.
(This comment was made in direct response to the video being commented on.)

In the comments presented above, specific reference is made to socially unacceptable practices, such as bestiality, pedophilia, and necrophilia. By drawing upon socially unacceptable practices, transgender identities are conflated with these concepts, while also constructing the existence and acceptance of transgender people as a pathway into moral social decline. In the first comment, a catalog of absurdity is established through claims of necrophilia and bestiality. [Pomerantz \(1984\)](#) argues that “extreme case” examples are drawn upon when attempts are made to justify a conclusion. Within this construction of “societal decline,” transgender people are also de-legitimized through the use of inverted commas around the word “transsexuals.” The function of the inverted commas is to present transgender people as inauthentic.

However, as can be seen below, some commenters accentuate this moral social decline even further. Within these slippery slope arguments, apocalyptic claims are developed which prophesize the end of the world because of increasing trans equality.

Societal rot. We are on a very dangerous path. (This comment was made in direct response to the video being commented on.)

I can’t wait to see when this place burns like Sodom and Gomorrah.
(This comment was made in direct response to the video being commented on.)

These laws are feminism and LGBTQ run amuk, but, let it go down. It will be the great undoing of them all. When you begin to get into this level of confusion, you know you’re at the end. Let it burn. It’s time. (This comment was made in direct response to the video being commented on.)

The “end of the world” rhetoric that is present within these comments is framed in various different ways. In the first comment, the “end of the world” is constructed subtly, through implication. The use of the phrase “on a very dangerous path” functions to allow the reader to construct the outcome, but through using the word “dangerous” signifies that the outcome is inevitably negative. The “end of the

world” is much more explicit in the second comment where religious rhetoric is used to create an apocalyptic image through the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (mentioned in the Hebrew Bible and in the Christian New Testament). Within this passage, inhabitants are commonly assumed to have been destroyed because of homosexuality and other depravities, sins, and vices. The use of this rhetoric is central in condemning transgender communities, while also constructing an “end of the world” argument.

In the final comment, the “end of the world” is directly associated with gains made by LGBTQI communities. Unlike the other comments, the end of the world has already been occurred. This ultimately serves to heighten the sense of urgency for cisgender communities to intervene and regain societal control. Similar rhetorics have been found in the construction of homosexuality (Cragun, Williams, & Sumerau, 2015) and in this sense, transgender people are constructed as a social issue which forecasts the definitive obliteration of civil society. In this framing, cisgender people are constructed as the victims of a less social morality and civility. As such, transgender people are legitimate targets for abuse, discrimination, and oppression through the constructed risk they present to a wider societal moral decline.

Conclusion

This chapter identified the discursive themes that are used to construct and position cisgender people as “victims” in relation to gender-neutral bathrooms. The themes manifested in various ways, but most significantly cisgender people were constructed as victims of political correctness, a wider political agenda and victims of depreciating rights and privacy. The implications of these constructions culminate in an “end of the world” rhetoric in which significant and extreme harms will be experienced by cisgender people as a result of continuing transgender equality. These significant harms are framed within notions of severe moral decline. As such, transgender people are “othered” and problematized as those who are responsible for the harms cisgender communities face and are therefore positioned as offenders.

At times, similar rhetoric is drawn upon by YouTube users that have historically been invoked in the construction of homosexuality and heterosexuality (see e.g., Baker, 2004; Perone, 2014). In this sense, we are not witnessing anything new or innovative, rather a recycling of socially recognizable motifs in the construction of cisgender people as victims. It also becomes evident throughout this chapter that claims of victim status highlight how the construction of “the self” as a victim is often achieved within a collective framework, in which entire communities are positioned as victims, emphasizing the otherness of the minority group. It is argued that claiming a victim position is key in successfully opposing the implementation of gender-neutral toilets, while simultaneously deflecting claims of transphobia, bigotry, and hatred.

It is key to address transphobia in an online context as research has demonstrated the detrimental impact that online abuse can have on those targeted (Awan & Zempi, 2016). The online construction of cisgender people as victims

has significant, practical, and real-life consequences in the context of gaining political traction and therefore minimizing the need to address incidents of transphobia. To develop effective ways to challenge and combat transphobia and discrimination against transgender people, it is vital to identify barriers that exist in identifying incidents of transphobia. As such, understanding the discursive resources that are drawn upon to construct cisgender populations as victims of a wider political and social agenda is key. In this chapter, I have outlined that claiming a victim position is central in minimizing and deflecting accusations of transphobia. I hope to have made a contribution to understanding the discursive resources that are drawn upon to frame cisgender communities as victims that can be used in future research to develop effective interventions.

Note

1. It is important to note that there is no one specific construction of “cisgender.” Constructions of privileges or oppressions claimed to be experienced by cisgender people are dependent upon other social factors and characteristics including sexuality, race, and class. What it means to be cisgender and the assumed privileges associated with this identity are context dependant.

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