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RESEARCH ARTICLE



(Re)producing sex/gender normativities: LGB alliance, political whiteness and heteroactivism

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ABSTRACT

LGB Alliance, as a prime example of gender-critical feminism, argues that the 'sex-based' rights of those who are 'same-sex attracted' are threatened by the inclusion of trans individuals, and trans lesbians especially. In seeking to exclude trans women from gay/queer spaces by presenting them as a threat to (cis) lesbians, LGB Alliance can be understood as deploying strategies of heteroactivism and political whiteness. Sex/gender normativity is discursively framed through specific configurations of gender, race and class, including visual codes determined by biological and cultural standards that are, ultimately, a product of colonial/racial science. Trans lesbians, gay men and bisexuals whose bodies are *not* regarded as sex/gender normative, who are perceived as queering the male/female binary, and who are understood as falsely and dangerously claiming a label of homosexuality, are subjected to suspicion and surveillance, their bodies rendered inferior and denied social and cultural recognition. Although LGB Alliance claims its advocacy is intended to support and advance the interests of the (cis) lesbian, gay and bisexual community, the article argues that the organization can be read as (re)producing and engaging in harmful discourses related to heteronormativity, racism and classism, and which, overall, seek the restriction and limitation of broader LGBTQ+ equalities.

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Introduction

In recent years, the UK has seen significant increases in anti-trans hate crimes and the weaponization of trans rights by trans-hostile lobbying groups (Baker, 2022). Self-described 'gender-critical' feminism, a movement that campaigns to exclude trans women from cis women's spaces, is now hugely influential in British politics and culture (Thurlow, 2022; Zanghellini, 2020). Public toilets, changing rooms, refuges and other spaces deemed 'female-only' have become contested grounds: gender-critical feminists argue that some predatory men masquerade as women merely to access these spaces, requiring the exclusion of trans women to protect (cis)¹ women's safety (Hines & Santos, 2018; Jones & Slater, 2020). Set against this backdrop, this article focuses on LGB Alliance, as a prime example of gender-critical feminism, and which claims that the 'sex-based' rights of those who are 'same-sex attracted' are threatened by the inclusion of trans individuals, trans lesbians especially. The article examines how particular bodies are categorized as sex/gender normative through specific configurations of gender, race and class. I argue that LGB Alliance not only reinforces trans-hostile imaginaries, seeking to exclude trans women from queer spaces by presenting them as a threat to

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(cis) lesbians, it also functions as an example of the mechanisms through which trans lesbians and trans gay men are constructed as 'falsely' claiming a label of homosexuality. The article contributes to feminist analyses by exploring how despite its stated goal of advocating for LGB rights, LGB Alliance can be read as (re)producing harmful discourses related to heteronormativity, racism and classism, ultimately, hinder progress towards LGBTQ+ equality. I suggest that further research is needed to explore how these narratives may be deployed by gender-critical feminism more broadly.

Background to LGB alliance

Formed in 2019, LGB Alliance argues that the sex-based rights of those who are same-sex attracted are threatened by the inclusion of trans people. Founded by Bev Jackson, Kate Harris and other prominent self-identified LGB individuals, LGB Alliance gained charitable status in 2021, reports 4,502 subscribers to its monthly newsletter, and states that it does not receive financial support from any large organization. Kathleen Stock (2021), a British philosopher and leading gender-critical feminist, is a key supporter of LGB Alliance, and spells out its main argument: that homosexuality, previously understood as a stable attraction to people of the same biological sex, is now repackaged by 'gender ideologists' to refer to an attraction to the same 'gender identity'. This, she contends, results in same-sex attracted children being encouraged to think of themselves as born into the wrong body. Although its mission statement claims it 'exists to provide support, advice, information and community to men and women who are same-sex attracted²', LGB Alliance remains almost entirely trans-focused. The organization has been accused of demonstrating little interest in defending core LGB rights. Indeed, it has connections to the US religious right, including the Heritage Foundation and Alliance Defending Freedom, groups that have long campaigned against LGBTQ+ equality, and its original signatories include individuals who have campaigned against equal marriage, queer parenting and broader legislative reforms for gay rights (Abraham, 2019; Homfray, 2021).

It is this particular background that this article seeks to examine: how can an organization which claims to advance gay rights, engage in strategies that, ultimately, are exclusionary and may even limit more extensive LGBTQ+ equalities? In the following sections, I approach this question by focusing on the wider structural backgrounds of heteronormativity, racism and classism, and the discourses of cisness, transness and whiteness. I begin by outlining the theories of political whiteness (Phipps, 2020) and heteroactivism (Nash & Browne, 2021). These theories are used to analyse statements from the LGB Alliance website, selected for their ability to highlight discourses of gender, race and class, with my reading of these statements situated within an intersectional feminist framework. The specific ways that LGB Alliance 'speaks' about cisness, transness, and whiteness are considered, and then read within wider discourses to examine how they interrelate and cross-reference. Particular attention is paid to exploring how discourses vary and remain constant.

Political whiteness

The first theory to be discussed is Phipps (2020) concept of political whiteness. It considers how particular white subjectivities are produced through the structural power of white supremacy, although, crucially, the privileges enjoyed by white individuals are complicated by intersectional factors such as gender, class and other social relationships. Here, 'whiteness' is not simply a phenotype or racial identity. It operates as a form of property, in which unearned social, economic and material benefits awarded to particular groups of white people are jealously guarded as possessions, their privileges and rewards reconfigured as 'natural' entitlements to justify their accumulation and bequeathment to succeeding generations (Harris, 1993; Lipsitz, 2018). Whiteness, therefore, operates as a set of power relations, its hegemony maintained through constant re-enactment (Hook, 2011). Even non-white individuals can become passive participants in this system of white supremacy: individual people of colour who benefit from particular institutional and organizational power may be coded white (Ward, 2008). As Daniel HoSang (2010) argues,

the performativity of whiteness operates as a racialized subjectivity, continually denying its presence and asserting its innocence, creating norms, expectations and interests for white people and those coded white.

Phipps (2019) extends HoSang's concept of 'political whiteness' to trauma narratives of white feminism, arguing that while white women are all too frequently victims of men's violence, their whiteness may recentre their victimization at the expense of non-white communities. It is here that white feminism operates, a movement positioning whiteness as the norm, upholding so-called 'feminist' values through a lens of white subjectivity, ignoring other factors such as race, ethnicity and social class (Eddo-Lodge, 2017). This is a politics that is, at its core, exclusionary, discriminatory, and structurally racist. By refusing to acknowledge intersections of racism, imperialism, and nationalism, along with racialized capitalism and economic exploitation, white feminism enables particular groups of white women to ignore their role in socio-cultural violence (Phipps, 2021). The privileges experienced by white women, although unevenly distributed, are gained in some measure by being complicit in white supremacy and its system of unearned racial rewards. However, when these racial advantages are pointed out, white women may exhibit defensiveness, using 'white tears' to emphasize their sense of victimization. This 'white fragility', a term coined by Robin DiAngelo (2019) to refer to the discomfort white people feel when discussing racism, is a distortion of reality, as white women recentre themselves as the 'real' victims, simultaneously denying racial traumas experienced by people of colour.

Phipps (2020) further argues that the gender-critical feminist demand that trans women should be excluded from (cis) women's spaces is situated within these strategies of political whiteness and claims of victimhood based on the experiences of white bourgeois women. Primarily, the possibility of having a sex/gender normative body, which is anatomically correct and which is sexually attracted to other appropriately marked sex/gender normative bodies, draws upon biological models developed by colonial/racial scientists (Phipps, 2022). The background to these particular 'scientific' models can be traced, in part, to particular Western/imperialist models of human evolution, in which Europeans were positioned as the culmination of progress, and only white bourgeois women could properly claim the category of 'womanhood' (McClinton, 1995). To justify slavery, black women's bodies were reduced to being a 'thing' without social or cultural worth, their minds violently inferiorised (Spillers, 1987). This reasoning required supporting evidence, rooted in observable and physical difference. By experimenting on black women slaves, racial scientists argued that women's anatomical features, especially genitalia, held visual keys to predicting human intelligence, behaviour, and social value (Stepan, 1993). The pelvis, buttocks, labia and clitoris were all scrutinized in efforts to pathologise black women's bodies, considered capable of indicating black women's supposedly poor temperament, reduced morality and voracious sexual appetite (Somerville, 2000).

Colonial relations of power established gender differentials in societies that had not conceived of sex/gender through biological and anatomical models of the male/female binary. Many previously understood local variances were violently erased, destroying Indigenous practices and subjectivities (Lugones, 2007). Consequently, the ideology behind sex/gender normativity and the male/female binary (that men and women are distinctly anatomically marked) echoes so-called 'scientific' models saturated with racialized meaning (Markowitz, 2001). Even the very concept of sexual orientation (that individuals can be divided into discreet sexual categories) reflects underlying theories of the sexual races: that humans can be divided into distinct groupings, their bodies operating as legible texts revealing the truth about their nature (Halperin, 1990).³ This concept of political whiteness is particularly useful when employed alongside the theory of heteroactivism.

Heteroactivism

Heteroactivism, a theory developed by Kath Browne and Catherine Nash, refers to strategies promoting heteronormativity and resisting gay/trans equalities (Nash & Browne, 2020). It takes a geographical approach to consider global circulations of anti-LGBTQ+ activisms, working to

identify transnational networks, interactions and exchanges (and the variants and nuances within these) through which opposition to diverse sexualities/genders operate (Nash et al., 2021). 'Equal rights' are understood as excessive, moving from the 'public' sphere of the state, into the 'private' sphere of the home, with schools becoming 'cultural battlegrounds', invaded by 'dangerous' values that challenge family life (Nash & Browne, 2021). Heteroactivists attempt to restrict LGBTQ+ equalities in ways that enable them to deny accusations of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia, claiming instead to be concerned about freedom of speech, religious liberty, parental authority, and children's safety (Browne & Nash, 2014). Instead of presenting homosexuality as deviant or morally abhorrent, heteroactivists assert the primacy of heterosexual, cisgendered, binary and monogamous relationships for functioning societies and rearing children (Browne et al., 2018).

As these resistances are not typically framed as criticisms of LGBTQ+ people, with exceptions surrounding the often personal attacks on trans rights, Browne and Nash (2018) identify increasing public support for heteroactivism. Although the strategies are neither inherently left or right wing, the political right are particularly mobilizing against inclusive models of sex/gender, as large shares of the electorate oppose more culturally progressive societies (Abou-Chadi et al., 2021). For anti-genderists,⁴ traditional understandings of sex/gender are under attack from multiple and often contradictory sources (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018). Actors from elite institutions, including the United Nations and European Union, are understood as imposing secular laws on reproduction rights, family law reform, and legal protections for diverse sex/gender identities, all of which are perceived as threatening to destroy human beings as male and female (Faundes, 2019). Gabriella Kuby (2015) argues that 'gender ideologists' (those who seek to impose 'new' definitions of gender) have succeeded in 'mainstreaming' gender policies, resulting in the subversion of male and female identities, and an acceptance of diverse sexual practices.

As well as delegitimising women's rights and LGBTQ+ agendas, such anxieties operate as a 'point of convergence' between anti-genderists with opposing politics (Mayer & Sauer, 2017). From this point of view, 'gender ideology' is reimagined as a Western imposition, forcing itself on uninformed global masses, and operating as a colonizing force that weakens hegemonic masculinity, family values, and the gender binary itself (Andrine & Evang, 2022). Anti-genderists rework the language of anti-colonialism to portray themselves as fighting for the vulnerable and oppressed, battling to sustain 'authentic' forms of gender that are seen as engulfed by globalization (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). Across Europe, anti-gender and anti-EU actors warn that the political ideologisation of gender, enforced by global institutions, will result in the denaturalization of the sexual order, societal instability and a decrease in long-established beliefs (Garbagnoli, 2016).

In the UK, these sentiments are echoed within many anti-gender and gender-critical feminist campaigns, reflecting, in part, the wider cultural wars that have encouraged group conformity and increased fear of the Other (Slater, 2023). The financial crisis of 2007–2008, the rise of populist and far-right politics across Europe, and the disruption of the neoliberal order, have amplified societal unrest, and heightened anxiety towards those who are different (Prentoulis, 2022). As Phipps (2020) points out, the Brexit referendum focused on the need to defend and reassert British geographical and ideological borders, with migrants often portrayed as potential rapists who seek to 'invade' women's spaces. Anxieties surrounding the perceived need to protect national identity from 'outside' threats dominates contemporary British politics, with arguments for Brexit largely considered to be a battle between the familiar 'us' and the unfamiliar 'them' (Sobolewska & Ford, 2020; Tudor, 2019). Alongside a growing loss of global power, Britain's current wave of trans-hostility can be partially situated within a generalized concern that its national strength and worldwide reputation is under attack (Horbury & Yao, 2020).

Changes in UK equality legislation have also prompted more recent anti-trans activism: In 2004, the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) was enacted, coming into force in 2005. Although often described as a 'great leap forward' for trans communities (Sharpe, 2009), being trans remains medicalized and framed as a disorder. To achieve a gender recognition certificate, individuals must receive a diagnosis of gender dysphoria and have lived in their acquired gender for at least two years (Hines, 2019). For

many, this process is lengthy, costly, invasive and inaccessible (Hines & Santos, 2018). In 2018, the Conservative government, under Theresa May, launched a consultation on de-medicalizing the GRA process, including the ability for trans individuals to 'self-identify' as their adopted gender, removing the medicalized criteria, and making the process faster (Hines, 2019). Although trans people have always been able to use public toilets that match their gender identity, these proposed amendments supercharged a toxic moral panic that (cis) women's dignity and safety was at risk from men self-identifying as women (McLean, 2021). Four years later, acknowledging high-profile protests by gender-critical feminists, the government, now under Boris Johnson, argued that current provisions in the GRA 'adequately' supported and protected trans people, and that legislative changes were *not* required (Women and Equalities Commission, 2022).

In what follows, I apply the theories of heteroactivism and political whiteness to key statements from the LGB Alliance website. First, I set out the heteroactivist strategies employed by the organization, considering how it operates to (re)produce categories of exclusion and belonging. It is important to note that while heteroactivism typically seeks to restrict *all* LGBTQ+ equalities, reshaping opposition to gay/queer communities as 'concern' for societal well-being and children's safety, LGB Alliance can be read as employing a tactic akin to heteroactivism but repackaged for slightly different ends. That is, by claiming to advocate for the (cis) LGB community, the organization seeks to exclude bodies it perceives as non-normative and reinforce the male/female binary. As I will argue, this highlights a contradiction at the heart of the organization: while claiming to support (cis) lesbians, gay men and bisexuals, LGB Alliance appears to embolden homonormative, racist and classist discourses that may, ultimately, limit more extensive gay/queer equalities.

Second, I contextualize LGB Alliance's concept of sex/gender normativity within a framework of political whiteness, exploring how the organization borrows from 'scientific' understandings of sex/gender that are, ultimately, a product of colonial/racist legacies. For clarification, I am not suggesting that LGB Alliance intentionally deploys racist narratives. Indeed, one of its key members, Allison Bailey, is a woman of colour. Yet, I will suggest that the organization draws upon racialized metaphors (Stepan, 1993), enabling particular groups of (cis) lesbians to (re)produce strategies conducive to heteronormativity and white supremacy. The argument is made that LGB Alliance, despite claiming to support LGB rights, engages in strategies that, in effect, advance restrictions on LGBTQ+ equalities.

LGB alliance, sex/gender normativities, and heteroactivism

Despite its stated objective of supporting the interests of (cis) lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals, LGB Alliance remains predominately trans-focused. Although the organization does not identify itself as feminist or gender-critical, the discursive framing of its key terms reflects its ideological stance. It states:

We advance the interests of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals, and stand up for our right to live as same-sex attracted people without discrimination or disadvantage . . . We uphold the legal and scientific definition of homosexuality as sexual orientation towards people of the same sex . . . We recognise that sex is binary, female and male, and that (for the vast majority of people) sex is determined at conception, observed at birth (or in utero), and recorded. (LGA Alliance, 2023)

LGB Alliance avoids using the word 'gender', since it is used with such a wide variety of meanings in public discourse that its use sows confusion. (LGB Alliance, 2023e)

First, 'sex' is framed as biologically determined and scientifically verifiable, whereas 'gender' is perceived to be mutable and unfixed, with a variety of meanings in different circumstances. The quotes reflect how LGB Alliance regards 'sex' and 'gender' as two fully independent categories. The socio-cultural and political amalgamation of the two terms ('sex/gender') is understood as falsely equalizing 'sex' (regarded as unambiguous bodily components that are scientifically defined and empirically measurable) with the catch-all term of 'gender' (considered highly subjective and fluid,

shaped by personal feelings and cultural norms). LGB Alliance argues that this is important because without the specificity of sex, there can be no means of preventing trans women from entering 'female-only' spaces, including, as discussed below, lesbian communities.

Second, LGB Alliance adopts a narrative that reduces homosexuality to a biological attraction to 'same-sex' genitals. It taps into so-called 'scientific' models, emphasizing the stability of sexual desire based on biological sex and the man/woman bifurcation. Although this framework institutionalizes heterosexuality, Susan Stryker (2008) highlights opportunities to identify as 'homo' or 'bi' while remaining within mainstream culture: sex/gender normative lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals (those who do not queer the male/female binary, and who reproduce 'homo-normative'⁵ codes of femininity and masculinity) can be accommodated into existing social, cultural, and political formations. This necessarily excludes individuals who identify as gay/queer but who sit outside established constructs of gender and gender expression and who are not easily included in dominant cultures. Consequently, and despite the fact that many trans people also identify as gay/queer, LGB Alliance reinforces its argument that only homo-normative (cis) lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals are 'properly' homosexual.

Additionally, LGB Alliance argues that the equalization of 'gender' with 'sex' has led to some men dishonestly and manipulatively claiming to be lesbians in order to access spaces specifically designated for same-sex attracted women:

Some people with male anatomy refer to themselves as lesbians. They present themselves as such on lesbian websites. Lesbians are being prevented from having any spaces of their own. There is a conflict between the rights of lesbians and the demands of males who are self-identified 'lesbians'. This sometimes leads to unacceptable pressure, known as the 'cotton ceiling'. (LGB Alliance, 2023e)

This is a key concern of LGB Alliance: trans women, who are sexually attracted to other women, are understood as deceptively pursuing 'female' bodies and experiences, denying 'real' lesbians their own communities in which they can be safely intimate. Janice Raymond (2021), well-known author of *The Transsexual Empire*, warns that 'natal' lesbians are routinely pressured into sexual relationships with trans lesbians, accused of 'vagina fetishism' if they refuse. LGB Alliance states that this sexual threat is so substantial that 'self-declared' women are seeking to break through the so-called 'cotton ceiling' (a reference to the cotton underwear supposedly worn by lesbians, and becoming a metaphor for lesbians refusing to have sex with 'male-bodied' persons). As Alex Sharpe (2021) notes, despite a lack of evidence that this actually occurs, claims of coercive sex dominate trans-hostile imaginations.

For LGB Alliance, therefore, the safety and legal protections of same-sex attracted people are fundamentally dependent on the exclusion of those who disrupt dominant models of sex/gender by existing outside conventional structures. Diana Richardson (2018) refers to this as the 'costs of recognition', arguing that the conditionality imposed by conferring sexual citizenship, rights, and protections on one body of people, necessarily requires the imposition of boundaries and the exclusion of others. Crucially, however, despite this stance taken against trans lesbians, LGB Alliance denies accusations of trans-hostility. In part, I suggest this is made possible through its heteroactivist deployments:

We fully support trans people in their struggle, for dignity, respect and a life lived free from bigotry and fear. We believe that the issues and priorities for people who are attracted to the same sex (homosexual/bisexual) are different from those of transgender people, and so, with a number of organisations focused on trans people and trans issues, our focus is simply on lesbians, gay men, and bisexual people instead. (LGB Alliance, 2023d)

For LGB Alliance, by positioning itself as advancing the rights of same-sex attracted people, a particular order is reinforced: trans members of the gay/queer community are perceived as categorically *different* to (cis) lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. Consequently, it is able to argue that the concerns and needs of trans people, especially those who are regarded as 'falsely' claiming a label of homosexuality, are separate to the specifics of LGB activism. This can be understood as effecting a particular heteroactivist technique: although heteroactivism is typically geared towards

curtailing *all* LGBTQ+ equalities, LGB Alliance can be understood as implementing a modified strategy to achieve a slightly different objective. That is, to strengthen the male/female binary, and exclude trans lesbians and gay men whose bodies do not conform to sex/gender norms. By claiming to ‘support trans people in their struggle’, and, instead, merely campaigning on the grounds of distinct interests, LGB Alliance can robustly deny accusations of trans-hostility. It is not, they contend, that they are trans-exclusionary, but that their advocacy is focused on the specific needs of LGB people, rather than the separate concerns of the trans community. Through this heteroactivism, LGB Alliance argues that if ‘gender’ is allowed to continue its current equalization with ‘sex’, and if homosexuality is not re-established as an attraction to ‘same-sex’ genitals, a destabilization of longstanding and established orders may occur, with particularly dangerous consequences for children:

Efforts to reduce LGB rights are being made worldwide, as proponents of gender identity ideology push their plans to replace sex with gender in the law and blur all sexual boundaries including those related to age. (LGB Alliance, 2023d)

These tactics can be read as re-framing trans-hostile discourses as concern for children’s safety, protecting parental authority, and promoting healthy relationships. LGB Alliance claims that if the ‘natural’ boundaries between men and women are allowed to fail, other boundaries, including those designed to protect children, are also at risk. For example, in an extract from the website of the Welsh branch of LGB Alliance, which discusses the implementation of Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) that is compulsory in all UK schools, LGB Alliance states:

We have concerns about resources being used . . . Many resources are age-inappropriate. Some providers ignore or misrepresent the Equality Act, others actively work to dismantle boundaries – particularly but not exclusively in relation to female pupils. Most ignore issues of safeguarding. (LGB Alliance, 2023a)

Although RSE is intended to offer age-appropriate and inclusive advice on safe relationships, different family models, and diverse sexualities/gender identities, LGB Alliance advocates for parents to remove their children from these lessons, citing concerns about how gender identity is taught and the inclusion of non-normative models of sex/gender. This highlights an apparent tension within the organization: although LGB Alliance claims to support (cis) lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals, its opposition to RSE, which is intended to promote awareness of LGBTQ+ relationships, may be seen as conflicting with its core mission. As I go on to discuss, heteroactivist strategies may be particularly effective when deployed alongside those of political whiteness.

Sex/Gender normativity and political whiteness

Above, I argued that LGB Alliance deploys heteroactivist strategies, denying accusations of trans-hostility by defending normative relationships and ‘natural’ boundaries. In this section, I outline how tactics of political whiteness may be used to reinforce these strategies. To be clear, LGB Alliance does not mention matters of race or ethnicity and would strongly reject accusations of racism. Nevertheless, its argumentation can be read as operating through a prism of white feminism, in which whiteness is recentred and the so-called ‘feminist’ values are upheld through a lens of white subjectivity:

We believe the conflict between trans rights and the rights of LGB people – and women’s rights – has been exacerbated because of a radical change in the demands of trans people and the extraordinary widening of the definition of trans . . . Now the gender identity lobby defines ‘transgender’ so broadly and vaguely that almost any man can declare he is a woman and he is supposed to be believed. (LGB Alliance, 2023b)

Here, LGB Alliance returns to its argument that cis people and trans people are two independent categories, with divergent interests that are, fundamentally, in conflict with each other. The organization presupposes that ‘femaleness’ exists as a single ontological entity, with predefined and easily identifiable boundaries. It contends that the false equalization of ‘sex’

with 'gender', and subsequent weakening of biological sex, enables a mistaken belief that individuals can determine their sex/gender through their own internal gender identity. This is considered particularly dangerous when the specificity of sex is required to keep (cis) women safe.

The argument, then, is that 'real' women, and 'real' lesbians, are those who are biologically and anatomically marked as 'female', possessing, for example, breasts, a vagina, and clitoris. Trans women, conversely, whose bodies are not considered to be sex/gender normative, are denied their womanhood, their bodies violently inferiorised. As Phipps (2020) highlights, this model of 'femaleness' is ultimately a product of colonial/racial science, through which only white bourgeois women could properly claim the category of womanhood, and black women's bodies were denied socio-cultural worth. Consequently, LGB Alliance can be understood as reflecting how sex/gender normative models of femaleness, based on the possession of specific biological components, are determined, in part, through specific configurations of gender, race and class.

Following this, and by stating that without making physical alterations to their bodies, 'almost any man can declare he is a woman', LGB Alliance recentres the importance of biology, and, crucially, the threat of 'male' physicality. The emphasis here is on the penis, and the anxiety that trans women may enter (cis) women's spaces, or seek to engage in (cis) lesbian relationships, with their penises intact. This is a dominant theme within essentialist branches of white feminism: that biological sex is the root cause of (cis) women's oppression; that 'male' power and 'female' subordination are determined by the possession of a penis or a vagina; and that biological femaleness is established through visual distinctions that are binary and immutable. As Phipps (2019, 2020) argues, trans women's penises, whether real or imaginary, are understood as emphasizing (cis) women's vulnerability to men's violence, resulting in a deep obsession with the surgical status of trans women.

This preoccupation with the penis, and its portrayal as causing particular distress among (cis) women, fails to consider the complex intersections of gender, race and class, and the unique experiences of women of colour. The supposed privilege held by trans women (i.e. maleness) is discursively framed as more threatening than any other form of privilege (e.g. whiteness and middle-classness). The argument that penises represent the ultimate anxiety for (cis) women fails to acknowledge that, for women of colour, white skin is an equal reminder of violence and oppression (Koyama, 2020). By constructing 'womanhood' through visual codes influenced by white cultural norms and standards, and positioning 'sex' as the root cause of (cis) women's oppression, LGB Alliance can be understood as recentring white women's experiences, and marginalizing the lived realities of women of colour. This recentring of whiteness is also present in the following quote:

Pointing out that males don't have vulvas and females don't have a penis invites accusations of transphobia. One can be accused of transphobia for asserting the truth that only an almost vanishingly tiny minority of people (less than 0.05%) could be said to be of indeterminate sex. One can be lambasted as 'transphobic' just for objecting to the use of the word 'menstruators' instead of 'women', as happened recently to JK Rowling. We do not accept that it is transphobic to back scientific reality or to ensure that the law reflects that reality. (LGB Alliance, 2023b)

Consequently, LGB Alliance can be understood as deploying strategies of both heteroactivism and political whiteness to argue that the mere act of speaking the 'truth' about biological sex is now depicted as leading to 'accusations of transphobia'. First, LGB Alliance recounts the anti-gender and gender-critical feminist concern that traditional understandings of sex/gender (that 'males don't have vulvas and females don't have a penis') are under attack from 'gender ideologists' who seek the eradication of human beings as male or female. Second, it reproduces the victimization discourses of white feminism, in which white individuals or groups employ tactics of political whiteness, downplaying or deflecting criticism and responsibility for their actions, and positioning themselves as the victim instead (Hamad, 2019). For example, JK Rowling is portrayed as an innocent victim of trans propaganda, 'lambasted' merely for objecting to the term 'menstruators', while the hurt and pain her

comments have caused to the trans community,⁶ and trans women especially, is hidden behind claims of her persecution and mistreatment.

We've seen how language is being manipulated to prevent women from discussing male violence, by using it as a powerful tool of social shame. The words bigot, transphobe, hater are being used to silence and prevent women from discussing the reality of their lived experience. Language is being used to gaslight women – and society – into capitulation. (LGB Alliance, 2023c)

As before, the quote demonstrates how heteroactivism and political whiteness may be particularly effective when operating together. Using a heteroactivist tactic, LGB Alliance denies accusations of trans-hostility by reemphasising its concern for (cis) women's safety, and highlighting its belief that the manipulation of language is eroding traditional understandings of sex/gender. Following this, through the deployment of political whiteness, LGB Alliance mirrors the language of victimization often present in white feminism, diverting accountability for its actions by highlighting its own victimhood. Consequently, both strategies may operate in tandem to (re)produce sex/gender normativities.

Conclusion

Although its mission statement claims it 'exists to provide, support, advice, information and community to men and women who are same-sex attracted', LGB Alliance remains almost entirely trans-focused. It maintains that current attempts to weaken the importance of 'biological sex' by falsely equalizing 'sex' with 'gender', threatens the safety of (cis) women, and (cis) lesbians, enabling a mistaken belief that individuals can determine their sex/gender through their internal gender identity. For LGB Alliance, this is particularly dangerous when the specificity of 'sex' is required to keep (cis) women safe, and prevents 'real' lesbians from accessing their own communities in which they can be safely intimate. I argue that the organization constructs sex/gender normative bodies, and those who are properly lesbian, gay, and bisexual, through specific configurations of gender, race and class. Non-normative bodies, and those who 'falsely' claim a label of homosexuality, are excluded, their bodies subjected to suspicion and surveillance. This is made possible through strategies of heteroactivism and political whiteness:

First, I suggest that LGB Alliance incorporates a 'scientific' model of homosexuality to identify (cis) lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals as those who are attracted to 'same-sex' genitals and who do not queer the male/female binary. Trans lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals, whose bodies are non-normative, are denied social and cultural recognition, and considered to be a threat in gay/queer spaces. However, through its use of heteroactivist tactics, LGB Alliance denies accusations of trans-hostility, depicting itself as merely focusing on the interests of LGB individuals. It does this by portraying cis people and trans people as two separate groups, with competing interests, and different needs and struggles. Instead of appearing to be trans-hostile or trans-exclusionary, LGB Alliance is able to express its advocacy as concern for children's safety, protecting parental authority and promoting safe relationships.

Second, I suggest that heteroactivism is particularly successful when employed alongside political whiteness. LGB Alliance, and its argument that trans women should be excluded from (cis) lesbian spaces, is dependent on modern/western schemas of anatomically correct bodies. To be sex/gender normative, and to be 'properly' lesbian, gay, or bisexual, is reliant upon having an appropriately marked male or female body (to be in possession of a penis or a vagina) and to be sexually attracted to others with the same bodily components. Consequently, trans women, and trans lesbians, cannot claim the ontological category of 'womanhood' due to their unalterable physicality. This model, reliant on biological sex, is a product of colonial/racial science, in which 'femaleness' is restricted to white, middle-class European women. Moreover, LGB Alliance focuses on the threat of 'male' physicality, and the anxiety that trans women may enter 'female-only' spaces with their penises

intact. By positioning the penis as the foundation of (cis) women's oppression, the experiences of women of colour, and their lived realities of racism, are marginalized.

In sum, through the deployment of heteroactivism and political whiteness, LGB Alliance can be understood as reinforcing trans-hostile discourses by seeking to exclude trans lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals who are *not* sex/gender normative, and who are perceived as queering the male/female binary. Bodies are categorized as sex/gender normative or non-normative based on their ability to conform to certain norms and standards of gender, race, and class. Although the organization claims to advocate on behalf of (cis) LGB individuals, its discursive framing of cisness, transness, and whiteness can be perceived as facilitating the advancement of particular heteronormativities and limiting more extensive LGBTQ+ equalities. For future research, it would be useful to explore how these strategies of heteroactivism and political whiteness may be deployed by gender-critical feminism more broadly.

Notes

1. Gender-critical feminists regard the term 'cis' as derogatory, dividing 'womanhood' into artificial categories. Here, 'cis' is placed in brackets to highlight the hidden but always present gender-critical expectation that 'real' women are those whose gender identity matches the sex assigned to them at birth.
2. Although LGB Alliance claims to support lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals, it rarely mentions bisexuality and biphobia. Its main focus is on same-sex attracted women.
3. This is not, of course, to suggest that people who are black and/or trans sit outside Western/modern configurations. Indeed, trans/queer individuals and people of colour can also enact these sex/gender normativities (Snorton, 2017).
4. It is important to note the distinction between 'gender-critical feminism' and 'anti-genderism' more broadly. Although the two often blur in practice, gender-critical feminists are ostensibly concerned with (cis) women's dignity and safety. However, 'anti-gender' groups have diverse aims and objectives: they may be concerned with traditionalist, conservative, and religious values, seek to limit women's rights and bodily autonomy, reinforce the moral authority of fatherhood, and strengthen men's rights generally (Lewis & Seresin, 2022).
5. Stryker's concept of 'homo-normative' social codes is based on Halberstam's (1998) *Female Masculinity*, which highlights how expressions of masculinity in women are penalized by gender-normative expressions of heterosexuality and homosexuality.
6. Gwenffrewi (2022) notes that JK Rowling has presented trans women as potential sexual predators and a public threat. Rowling maintains that trans women are seeking to erode 'womanhood' as a political and biological class.

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