Twitter Thread by Alex Bryant



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The anti-trans rhetoric masquerading as philosophical inquiry and political philosophy in our field is both intellectually vacant and manifestly harmful.

From an academic perspective it is an embarrassment to the profession that trans lives are "up-for-debate."

It should a matter of professional legitimacy taken up by our learned societies that people engage in and are rewarded for the kind of vapid pseudo-scholarship that I see crop up in the field around trans lives.

I have a chapter in my thesis about the problem of anti-trans propaganda which focuses on the *central* argument in that propaganda: that trans women, by virtue of their socialization as men, pose a credible threat to cis women if allowed in to gender-regulated space.

I'm going to tweet out some of the points below.

Canada has a data problem when it comes to sexual violence perpetrated against anyone other than cis people.

As Waite and Denier (2019) point out, various factors (including especially the size of the community) impede the effective estimation of how many trans people, non-binary people, Two-Spirit people, and people of other gender identities are found in the Canadian population.

Even where sensitive data collection methodology is adopted (as in the case of the SSPPS), the small size of these communities impedes researchers' ability to collect a sample size that would allow for extrapolation to claims about the national population [...]

[...] let alone samples that include enough respondents with identities that intersect in ways that make them especially vulnerable to sexual violence (e.g. black women who are trans).

While the experiences of sexual assault by trans, Two-Spirit, and other women (as well as non-binary people) are not effectively captured by the GSS and SSPPS, the testimony of these women provides good reason to think these populations also experience [...]

[...] systematic sexual assault that constitutes a credible social threat situation. Recent work by the Trans PULSE Canada project bears this out in the Canadian context.

The Trans PULSE project, a community-based survey of trans and non-binary people, has recently expanded from a provincial to a national level. The initial findings of the Trans PULSE Canada 2019 survey (n=2873 for the national data; aged 14 and older) shed considerable light[...]

on the experiences of trans, non-binary, Two-Spirit, and other persons not captured effectively by the GSS and the SSPPS in Canada. Of those surveyed, approximately 24% self-ID as women/girls, 25% men/boys, 48% non-binary, and 2% as an "Indigenous or cultural gender" including 2S

While 26% of Trans PULSE Canada respondents experienced at least one sexual assault in the preceding five years, that figure approaches the lifetime prevalence of experiencing at least one sexual assault for self-identified women in Canada in the SSPPS, which is 30%.

In fact, in the United States the 2015 "U.S. Transgender Survey Report" by the National Center for Transgender Equality (USTS) found that 10% of respondents were sexually assaulted in the preceding twelve months while 47% were sexually assaulted at least once in their lifetime.

While this data is drawn from the United States rather than Canada, these figures provide a rough illustration of the higher risk of sexual assault faced by trans, non-binary, Two-Spirit, and other persons who are not cisgender: [...]

more than 3 times the likelihood of being sexually assaulted in the previous year (10% on the USTS compared to 2.9% of self-identified women on the SSPPS), and [...]

[...] more than 1.5 times the likelihood of being sexually assaulted at least once in their lifetimes (47% on the USTC compared to 30% of self-identified women on the SSPPS).

If my argument regarding cisgender women's oppression by systematic sexual assault holds then trans, non-binary, Two-Spirit, and other gender variant persons clearly face an environment of systematic sexual assault, unlike cisgender men.

In this respect, all self-identified women face sexual assault as a form of direct material oppression, while only some self-identified men (men who are trans, non-binary, Two-Spirit, or otherwise gender variant) do.

Please reread the above tweet.

On trans men:
Unlike the data available through the GSS and the SSPPS at this time, however, the Trans PULSE Canada data do not report on the perceived gender of perpetrators of sexual assault.

This means that we do not (yet) have the same empirical ground to make the credible social threat claim about cisgender men's role in the systematic sexual assault of trans, non-binary, Two-Spirit, and other non-cis persons. Despite this [...]

the 2015 USTS data show that trans men also face extreme rates of sexual assault even when compared to the rest of the trans community (51% prevalence of lifetime sexual assault among transgender men, with rates as high as 71% for racialized trans men).

Such men thus also face systematic sexual assault.

Now, there are two ways anti-trans writers argue that trans women and other non-cis women should be theoretically and politically excluded from feminist movements. One is a biological move, the other is a socialization thesis.

In Thornhill & Thornhill's (1992) words, the biological hypothesis is that "sexual coercion by men reflects a sex-specific, species-typical psychological adaptation to rape."

On such views, human evolution has led to people born with the primary sexual characteristics associated with being man either having (1) an overlap of a number of psychological traits that function as a drive to sexual violence, or [...]

(2) a specific adaption in the form of a psychological drive to sexual violence (especially rape).

If true, the biological thesis looks good to anti-trans writers. But it's junk science.

. In their review for Nature, Jerry Coyne and Andrew Berry (2000) note that, in the clearest articulation of the biological hypothesis by Thornhill & Palmer in A natural history of rape (2000), [....]

the evidence provided in favour of the hypothesis "either fails to support [the view], is presented in a misleading and/or biased way, or equally supports alternative explanations" and that the "evidence that rape is a specific adaptation is weak at best."

Despite the existence of the hypothesis, that is, there is little scientific reason to accept it.

Lionel Tiger also has sociobiological thesis about this in "Men in Groups" (old! 1969) but Raewyn Connell (2005) has *trounced* it.

In summary from Connell:
""[t]here is no evidence at all of strong [biological] determination in [Tiger's] sense" and "[t]here is little evidence even of weak biological determination of group differences" with respect to propensity for sexual violence at the individual level.

Having said all of this, Stock does not take up the sociobiological thesis as I read her arguments. Rather, her arguments are mostly about socialization.

In an article for The Economist, Stock writes:
The category "female" is […] important for understanding the particular challenges its members face, as such. These include a heightened vulnerability to rape, sexual assault, voyeurism and exhibitionism; to sexual harassment;[...]

to domestic violence; to certain cancers; to anorexia and self-harm; and so on. If self-declared trans women are included in statistics, understanding will be hampered."

I have already argued that due the population size of the trans community such concerns are unfounded and so do not take this point further. Stock goes on:

A male's self-identification into the category of "female" or "women" doesn't automatically bring on susceptibility to these harms; nor does a female's [self-ID] out of those categories lessen it. In a sexist world which often disadvantages females, as such, we need good data"

On this point, Stock could mean that self-identification on its face is not connected to the higher prevalence of experiencing sexualized and gender-based violence.

This is, at the most rudimentary level, true: as a cisgender man, I might insincerely self-identify as a woman and face no subsequent consequences. But I do not believe this is the claim Stock is making, because this is not a realistic notion of how genuine self-ID takes place.

Rather, Stock seems to be making the claim that trans people's self-identification does not connect up with such people's experiences of gender-based violence. As I have argued above (with "good data") this claim is decisively false:

such people face rates of gender-based violence, especially sexual assault, that meet or exceed those faced by cisgender women.

In the case of women who have previously lived as men, their self-identification as women appears to multiply their likelihood of experiencing sexual assault in their lifetime more than four times, from 8% for men (SSPPS) to 37% for trans women (USTS).

Transwomen do face a specific form of sexism, transmisogyny, that is characterized by conceptions of trans people as "deceivers." To the claim that people whose gender expression differs from their sex assignment do not "bring on susceptibility to" the harms Stock notes is false.

Finally, Stock writes:
"The problem here is male violence. The category of self-declared trans women includes many with post-pubescent male strength, no surgical alteration of genitalia, and a sexual orientation towards females. […]

Note that this is emphatically not a worry that self-declared trans women are particularly dangerous or more prone to sexual violence. It's rather that we have no evidence that self-declared trans women deviate from male statistical norms in relevant ways" (Stock 2018)

The claim in this excerpt is that because there is "no evidence" that people with the primary sexual characteristics associated with males "deviate from statistical norms," such people should be treated as statistically normal—

That is, of a kind with cismen insofar as they are likely to perpetrate sexual violence against women.

This point, I think, is the central premise of the anti-trans rhetoric from Stock and others of her ilk.

Stock's first point seems to be that being strong, having a penis, or being sexually attracted to women are causally connected to the prevalence of sexual violence perpetrated against women.

Stock's emphasis on "post-pubescent physical strength" seems to be a dog whistle for the real rape myth that a stranger will use or threaten the use of force against an "unsuspecting victim in an outdoor location" and that the victim will actively resist the perpetrator.

This kind of strength only matters if one presumes that sexual assault will involve over-powering a resistant victim, or threatening such.

It is not clear how genitalia factor into Stock's view other than to exclude from consideration many people assigned female at birth who have the "post-pubescent physical strength" Stock has in mind.

So let's leave aside all of the stuff above. Stock's central point, after all of this, is just an an echo of Janice Raymond's (1979).

That position is roughly that insofar as women who were raised as men were socialized as men, they are psychologically disposed to perpetrate sexual violence against women, hence the gendered difference in experiences of sexual violence.

In tweets above, I reminded the reader there is no necessary connection between the biological features which characterize male sex-assignment and a special propensity for sexual assault.

Instead, as I have said, there is significant research to show that trans people are at a high likelihood of experiencing physical and sexual violence that is akin, if often more extreme, than that faced by cis women.

On these grounds, we should reject the initial connection that Raymond (and Stock) make between biological features and sexual assault.

The second, more significant point, is that the social meaning of biological and physiological features has the effect that people born with such features end up being socialized (that is, being "located in this culture," as Raymond writes) as boys and men.

In this respect, one might say, biological and physiological features might not determine one's propensity for sexual assault as such but such features lead, in this world, ...

to one's being socially positioned as man in a way relevant to developing the psychological dispositions that lead men to sexually assault women.

On R's view, even people who "have the history of wishing to be a woman and of acting like a woman" do not have, as she might say, a personal history of being & acting like a woman in a social setting where women are oppressed as women that

would distinguish them from cis men.

Lori Watson, however, has really trounced this line of argument in her work on Raymond. And Watson's work is published--not just published, but good--not just good, but lauded across disciplinary boundaries.

First, it has long been accepted in the social sciences (yes, the ones with empirical research) that there is no specific experience of womanhood that could do the work Raymond hopes it could, especially in light of intersectional analysis of women's specific gender experiences

As with other women, trans women stand in an oppressed relation to male power and this oppression occurs on the basis of sex (that is, on the basis of trans persons' gender not aligning with their medically designated sex).

Even for the purposes of discussing the persistence of sexual assault perpetrated by men against women, trans women's experiences of gender do not align [...]

them with cisgender men in a way that might, as a matter of sheer social position, suggest they share with cis men a propensity for gender-based violence.

Second, and here I'm cautious because I'd like to do more work on this and I look to my trans peers testimony as I am a cis man, Watson points out that that "trans women's experiences of socialization to social masculinity was an uncomfortable and unhappy experience—[...]

an experience they reject and rejected," and in virtue of this trans women's pre-transition experience as men ought to be distinguished from that of cis men.

It seems likely that, prior to transitioning, trans women "experience[d] male privilege like the rest of us [women] do, as an exertion of power over us."

Dietert and Dentice's (2013) research on the youth experiences of people who later came out as gender variant show that such people's experiences of gender norms were those of rejection and conflict rather than coalescences.

So that the thinking I've done about this so far. There is a vast trove of very effective work out there that works against every aspect of the anti-trans rhetoric present in philosophy right now, much of which I haven't read because I am an early grad student.

I say this as a cisgender man training in this discipline, so please take it with a grain of salt. But,

It is manifestly obvious from an interdisciplinary perspective that the anti-trans work being done in philosophy does not stand up to the rest of the Social Sciences and Humanities research.

To ignore that vast literature, indeed to ignore the huge literature in our own field, to advance a position that is fundamentally at odd both with public safety and the standards of academic research is antithetical to every view of scholars should be

doing I can imagine.