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Groomer Discourse: A Transgender-sensitive Critical Discourse Analysis of Queerphobic Hate Speech on Twitter

William Evans

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Groomer Discourse: A Transgender-sensitive Critical Discourse Analysis of Queerphobic
Hate Speech on Twitter

by

William Evans

A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
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of Honors Requirements

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ABSTRACT

In recent times, online internet hate speech has received more and more attention due to its adaptive and mutative nature, emerging not in a vacuum but instead sprouting from the seeds of social inequity. A specific form of queerphobic hate speech known as groomer discourse or predation libel has taken new form in online spaces. This recent development, targeted almost exclusively towards the queer community and their allies, is uniquely situated at the intersection of transgender rights and sexual education in the United States. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, this study expands Spallaccia's gender-sensitive critical discourse analysis (CDA) into a transgender-sensitive CDA, utilizing concepts adapted from Van Dijk's socio-cognitive CDA. The research process resulted with a symbolic map of queerphobic hate speech centered around predation libel, created from a dataset of 557 tweets and 64 audiovisual files. Some of the most frequent codes found in tandem with predation libel included deliberate misgendering (of a transgender person), clinicalization (founded on the belief that transgender people are deluded), and reinforcing gender binaries through biological determinism and gender essentialism. Some less common but still interesting codes included the comparison of transness to blackface, ideology, and religion. Nearly every device used in these online hate speech crusades reflect existing social power dynamics between the in-group (straight and cisgender people) and out-group (queer people), drawing similar conclusions with scholars who have performed research detailing the androcentric dynamic between men and women. These findings and the methods used to reach them serve as a spearhead for launching future transgender sensitive CDA research and performing CDA on social media sites.

Keywords: discourse, hate speech, transphobia, Twitter

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis firstly to Dr. Brent Hale and Dr. Laura Alberti for introducing me to the amazing world of rhetoric. The research you so kindly allowed me to take part in during my sophomore year was pivotal in determining my thesis topic. Working with you both was such a pleasure, and I fondly look back on our short time together.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLESxi

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONSxii

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONSxiii

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION1

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW7

Groomer Discourse as Predation Libel7

Transgender-sensitive CDA8

CDA Using a Web Corpora10

Foundations in Grounded Theory11

The Free Speech Debate12

Previously Asked Questions12

Limitations14

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY16

CHAPTER IV: CASE #1, A TRANSGENDER WOMAN18

Results18

Discussion21

Unique Codes to this Dataset22

Violence and Voyeurism.22

Blackface23

CHAPTER V: CASE #2, A PRO-LGBTQ+ TEACHER24

Results24

Discussion27

Doxxing**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Typical, Stupid White Woman29

CHAPTER VI: CASE #3, A TRANSFEMININE TEACHER31

Results31

Discussion34

Keep Your Personal Life Personal35

Clinicalization36

Autogynephilia37

CHAPTER VII: DISCUSSION40

The Function of Sexual and Violent Threats40

Reality Checking Through the Clinicalization and Pejorative Categories42

Misgendering Through Costuming43

Transgender Women as the New Super Predators45

CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSION48

Future Directions48

APPENDIX A: Codebook51

REFERENCES55

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Examples of the most common codes in the first case.	19
Table 2 Examples of voyeurism in the first case.	23
Table 3 Examples of the most common codes in the second case.....	26
Table 4 Examples of the misogyny and whiteness codes in the second case.	30
Table 5 Examples of the most common codes in the third case.	34
Table 6 Examples of autogynephilia in the third case.	38
Table 7 Codebook.	51

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1 Count of categories for the first case.	20
Figure 2 Count of codes for the first case.	20
Figure 3 Count of categories for the second case.	25
Figure 4 Count of codes for the second case.	25
Figure 5 Count of categories in the third case.	32
Figure 6 Count of codes in the third case.	33
Figure 7 Categories of autogynephilia.	39
Figure 8 An image invoking the act of stoning.....	41
Figure 9 An image invoking biological determinism.	41
Figure 10 A Venn diagram depicting those who do not fit into the gender binary as mentally ill.	43
Figure 11 The first target of ridicule.....	44
Figure 12 The Two Ronnies, The Ministry of Sex Equality.....	44
Figure 13 A wolf in makeup, used as an allegory for the super-predator.....	46
Figure 14 A text-based image depicting transgender women as predators.	47

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APA	American Psychological Association
API	Application Programming Interface
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
SMS	Social media sites
TOR	Target of ridicule
US	United States

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there have been major strides increasing transgender visibility in the United States. This dynamic has proved a double-edged sword for transgender people, following previous trends in LGBT history. As transgender visibility increases, acceptance grows at the cost of backlash. GOP lawmakers from Michigan and Ohio stated their endgame as a complete elimination of gender-affirming care for all transgender people, regardless of age (King, 2024). Florida state policy spearheads transphobic legislation, as a recent Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles released a new rule preventing transgender people from changing the gender listed on their driver's license. In my home state of Mississippi, House Bill 1607 (deceptively titled "Mississippi Women's Bill of Rights") passed the house vote on March 13, 2024 which legally integrated the definition of sex and gender (Mississippi Women's Bill of Rights, 2024). In other words, one's sex assigned at birth both legally and immutably reflects their gender. Put this way, transgender and nonbinary people no longer exist in the eyes of the state, opening a Pandora's box of legally defensible transphobic discrimination.

These policies reflect the undercurrent of transphobic discourse in America. Florida's novel Parental Rights in Education Act (commonly known as the "Don't Say Gay" law) helped resurrect the archetype of the gay pedophile, first entering the public consciousness in battles for worker protection in California Public School District during the 1970's (Cameron, 2022). Tom Ammiano, a gay teacher in California during this social upheaval 50 years ago, found many similarities in modern transphobic rhetoric with the queerphobic rhetoric he experienced in the 70's. The archetype of the queer

pedophile, corrupting the mind of innocent children, deeply resonates in the conservative conscience. Chaiya Raichik, owner of the Twitter account Libs of TikTok (@libsoftiktok), found a large audience (upwards of 3 million at the time of writing) providing a steady stream of videos depicting LGBT people using an incendiary frame to induce outrage (Lorenz, 2022). Raichik's success inspired many copy-cat accounts, featuring many of the same targets of ridicule alongside inflammatory framing. She reached such highs with Libs of TikTok that her videos were featured regularly on FOX news broadcasts, even making several TV interview appearances (Lawton, 2022).

While invoking the LGBT pedophile archetype is not a new phenomenon, it has taken a novel form in contemporary discourse, and at the center of this symbolic map resides the term "groomer." The common cultural understanding of pedophilia as an unjust, deplorable act of sexual depravity is used interchangeably not only with LGBT people, but also those on the ideological left. Right-wing conservative pundit Rod Dreher provides a working for the term in an article written for The American Conservative. In the article titled "Democrats: Part of Groomers," he states,

About the term "groomers": it's usually used to describe pedophiles who are preparing innocent kids for sexual exploitation. I think it is coming to have a somewhat broader meaning: an adult who wants to separate children from a normative sexual and gender identity, to inspire confusion in them, and to turn them against their parents and all the normative traditions and institutions in society. It may not specifically be to groom them for sexual activity, but it is certainly to groom them to take on a sexual/gender identity at odds with the norm. (Dreher, 2022)

This quote offers a lot of meaning to unpack. He first acknowledges the broadening of the term's meaning, allowing for the coexistence and interchangeability used in either context. Secondly, Dreher operates on the assumption that a non-normative sexual and gender identity can only be experienced due to the presence of an outside influence. In other words, he views queerness as a choice. We can understand Dreher's view of non-normative sexuality and gender like how one might view an introduction to substance abuse. Burgeoning drug addiction in youths can be avoided entirely if a child is separated from the situation whereby others could influence them to first partake. Similar to the fall of man in Genesis, the devil (LGBT people and allies) tempts children with original sin (queerness), leading them to a state of guilty disobedience (against their parents, traditions, and societal institutions). While he acknowledges this grooming is not necessarily sexual in nature, it remains an applicable term due to its broader societal implications.

These transphobic undercurrents often translate into tangible acts of queerphobic violence. An arson-fire destroyed Georgia gender-affirming care clinic on October 30, 2023 (Wiggins, 2024). While nobody was injured and the fire was extinguished, the destruction of a gender-affirming clinic renders medical care for transgender people more unobtainable and dangerous. A similar case occurred in Hattiesburg, where the only private gender-affirming institution in the state was forced to cease all in-person operations due to threats and harassment (*Spectrum*, n.d.). Similarly, the University of Mississippi Medical Center shuttered their LGBTQ+ clinic due to political pressure (Harrison, 2023). These are only a handful of instances whereby rhetoric intersects with policy to create harmful impacts on the queer community.

What is to be done to address these frightening developments in recent times? One action to take, addressed in this paper, is to first understand how queerphobic rhetoric operates. Specifically, the main research question is as follows: what rhetorical devices are partnered with the term groomer, and how can we use this information to form a symbolic map of predation libel? This can be achieved using Van Dijk's socio-cognitive critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a foundation to launch a mixed-method qualitative/quantitative study into "groomer discourse." CDA is a field of communication studies primarily focused on social emancipation, establishing a relationship between academic theory and practice. This approach to rhetoric has received much attention in recent times, later expanding into a more inductive corpus-linguistics approach (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Furthermore, scholars such as Beatrice Spallaccia have expanded CDA into a gender-sensitive approach to interpret misogyny in online spaces (Spallaccia, 2017a). An inductive approach is prioritized in this study to reveal novel relationships between queerphobic devices in social media sites (SMS), specifically the site X (formally Twitter).

There is a distinct lack of transgender sensitive CDA research in academic literature. Most cases focus on high school sports (Sharrow, 2021) and bathrooms (Schilt & Westbrook, 2015). With the exception of Selvaraj's recent thesis from Nova Southeastern University, the term "groomer" has received little attention in the academic realm (Selvaraj, 2023). This academic weakness requires a deep exploration, affording the same care past scholars have given to topics such as online misogyny. This thesis expands Spallaccia's gender-sensitive CDA into a transgender-sensitive CDA, using an

inductive approach to classify how the term intersects with other transphobic devices in everyday use.

This thesis offers predation libel as an alternate term to “groomer discourse” or “#okgroomer” to examine the queer-pedophile archetype rooted in public consciousness. Predation refers to the sexual exploitation of minors, and libel refers to a publicized falsehood. This term functions to separate the term from actual cases of pedophilia, allowing future CDA researchers to distinguish more easily the two in their research. This separation is necessary, as focusing the study on such a muddy term proves difficult when considering its double meaning. During preliminary research, it was found that nearly every paper utilizing CDA to analyze “groomer discourse” functioned to examine actual pedophilic discourse, exploring the discursive methods by which predators groom minors. By centering the study around this queerphobic device, its intersections with other devices can be explored and interpreted.

Following the introduction, the study will enter a literature review to provide an overview of existing scholarly research and where it falls short. A section dedicated to describing the inductive CDA methodology is then provided to outline the approach for creating and analyzing codes in the dataset. Three cases are then analyzed, all from the same Twitter account @EITC_Official, first featuring a transgender woman, then a queer-allied teacher, and finally a transgender teacher. Each case has a devoted bar chart reflecting code frequencies, as well as a discussion section to interpret the case-specific results and less frequent or one-off codes. A final discussion section then serves to compare results between cases to interpret the statistical findings and provide explanations for the uncovered devices and relationships between them. Finally, a

conclusion section is reserved to repeat the study's findings and provide weaknesses and recommendations for best practices.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Groomer Discourse as Predation Libel

A working definition for groomer discourse is necessary for this thesis, and future analysis in the field. By situating our rhetorical analysis of case studies around this term, we can find other examples of transphobic hate speech online and examine their interactions. The term groomer discourse provides a contradictory understanding, as most academic research focusing on groomer discourse is geared towards examining actual cases of child predation. Some papers, such as “OK, Groomer” by Selvaraj, uses the hashtag #okgroomer to better describe this phenomenon (Selvaraj, 2023). However, I argue that this term still does not encapsulate its usage fully. Conservative political pundit Rod Dreher describes the term groomer as appropriate for a double-meaning, both for pedophiles preparing children for sexual exploitation and an adult who wants to separate children from their normative sexual and gender identity (Dreher, 2022). With this perspective in mind, I offer the term predation libel as an alternative to groomer discourse and #okgroomer. This offers a more expansive understanding of this rhetorical framework. Predation refers to the sexual exploitation of minors, and libel refers to a published false statement damaging to a person’s reputation. The second word, libel, requires inclusion because these accusations have no basis in reality. There is no evidence to support that any people in this paper’s case studies ever participated in pedophilia. Child predation is considered one of the most heinous crimes possible. These accusations function by eliciting morally charged reactions. Thus, predation libel serves our purposes twofold, (1) specifying that these accusations are used synonymously with child predation, and (2) that these accusations are false.

The term predation libel also draws inspiration from a historically common antisemitic canard: the Jewish blood libel. Blood libels are accusations for ritualistic murder, typically of children, and typically targeted towards Jewish people (Kende, 1995). While not exclusively an antisemitic trope, it has been used in the past as justification for pogroms. In the case of predation libel, the widespread grooming of children serves as the stand-in for ritualistic sacrifice. This predation libel similarly serves as a justification for a vitriolic hatred towards transgender people, and in some cases, horrific acts of violence (Murphy, 2024).

Transgender-sensitive CDA

The primary goal of this thesis is to expand the scope of gender-sensitive CDA (Lazar, 2007; Spallaccia, 2017b) to include a transgender-sensitive perspective. These scholars follow Van Dijk's CDA approach which operates on examining the relationship between dominant and dominated groups. Discourse is used by dominant groups to reinforce existing power dynamics between themselves and the dominated (van Dijk, 1993). In this way, cultural hegemony is upheld, and can be analyzed in rhetoric. Feminist CDA hones van Dijk's more general approach into a gender-sensitive perspective, resting patriarchal systems of control as the system of dominance which is reinforced by misogyny. In Spallaccia's analysis, misogyny operates in a wide rhetorical spectrum, represented from seemingly innocent anti-woman jokes to rape and death threats. The societal power imbalance between men and women can likewise be observed with regard to the imbalance not only between cisgender and transgender people, but heterosexual and queer people. This broadening of CDA in this way is relatively straightforward because transitioning from one's gender assigned at birth is considered an

affront to the dominant cisgender and heteronormative paradigm. Both Spallaccia and Lazar's works examine hegemonic western patriarchal structures, and how women (especially those who speak out against or threaten established norms) receive vitriolic backlash. Likewise, the act of transitioning prompts a vitriolic reaction due to its perceived threat to the status quo.

Critical discourse analysis is a field of study primarily motivated by social critique and emancipation, rather than the deconstruction of discourse for its own exclusively academic means. A feminist critique of gendered social practices contests the social status quo in favor of a humanist version of society, where gender does not determine our interactions with others or influence who we are or might become (Lazar, 2007). This feminist line of justification situates itself perfectly with regards to transgender issues. The broader aim of this thesis is to find a relationship between theory and praxis; to understand transphobic and hate-based discourse online and suggest practices to remediate its prevalence. Rather than writing off online hate speech as the incoherent ramblings of an ignorant populace, it requires great academic care and understanding. In Kenneth Burke's rhetorical analysis of *Mein Kampf*, he preliminarily stated that, "Already, in many quarters of our country, we are 'beyond' the stage where we are being saved from Nazism by our own virtues" (Burke, 1941, p 192). In a similar vein, the US cannot rely on its fundamental bourgeois liberal tenants nor history of revolutionary civil rights to automatically resolve the subjugation of queer people. The relationship between theory and practice is necessary for the emancipation of subjugated people, and meaningful social change requires active social participation. In an article with *VICE*, the Trevor Project's senior fellow Casey Pick described that youth reaching

out to the 24/7 hotline and forums reflect their worries surrounding anti-queer legislation. Online “groomer discourse,” alongside its horrific connotations, reflects these legislative movements to eliminate queer people from public life. In the *VICE* article, it is revealed that many queer youths consider self-harm and suicide due to this harmful environment in which they find themselves (Joseph, 2022). Alongside the worrying statistic that 41% of transgender people have made an attempt on their own life (Virupaksha et al., 2016), it becomes clear we are dealing with a lethal social pathogen. Queerphobic hate speech may not hold a causal relationship with suicide, but its presence reflects the material and social conditions this rate emerges from. By understanding how androgenic and heterosexual power dynamics are upheld, alongside its intersections with race and class, we can put theory into practice.

CDA Using a Web Corpora

I approach this topic with a mixed method approach: combining critical discourse analysis (CDA) with qualitative and quantitative analysis, sourcing information from the web. The web holds a vast amount of textual data ready for processing and analysis, and allows the researcher to make more generalizable statements about patterns discovered in their corpus (Mautner, 2005). The web is also a massive repository of authentic data, which offers a “...freshness and topicality unmatched by fixed corpora.” (Fletcher, 2004, p. 191). For their data source, scholars typically utilize Twitter’s application programming interface (API) (Torregrosa et al., 2022). Unfortunately, following Elon Musk’s acquisition of the company in 2023, free access to the Twitter API was revoked. In fact, the ‘Academic Tract’ was also revoked, which will likely have rippling effects in academia. Before, Twitter allowed users to register with the free API program to allow

100,000 tweets processed monthly at no charge. Following this, public access to the app itself was revoked in June 2023, meaning that users have to login to the app to view tweets. Revoking public access greatly limited every popular option for web-scraping, such as *snsrape* (JustAnotherArchivist, 2023). Unfortunately, this occurred during my preliminary research phase. Despite these limitations, a healthy amount of data (557 text-based tweets and 64 audiovisual files) was collected using Twitter’s “embedding” function (typically reserved for block quoting tweets in online news articles or other websites). Fortunately, this approach remedied a common critique of coding in CDA, that codes are analyzed separately from their context. As will be seen in the analysis chapter, the important context of the tweets was preserved. All these events follow a disturbing trend private social media site (SMS) companies have been following, which is the limitation of public API access.

Foundations in Grounded Theory

While a CDA focused on a specific device, predation libel, may not allow for general conclusions, it can still provide a strong launching pad for future analysis in the field. The methodology followed takes inspiration from grounded theory, allowing for the discovery of new and emergent trends perhaps not included in existing frameworks (Hadley, 2017). However, it is more appropriate to classify this academic approach as inductive, rather than grounded theory exclusively. The methodology outlined by Hadley is typically reserved for applied linguistics and best suited for researchers at the post-graduate level (Hadley, 2017). The intent is to critically analyze online queerphobic hate speech to contribute to its scholarly discussion, rather than developing an entire novel social theory to describe it. Such a Herculean task is better suited for a Ph.D. dissertation,

rather than an undergraduate thesis. Regardless, using an existing framework may not provide as novel of insights when compared to an inductive approach.

The Free Speech Debate

A research topic predicated on hate speech cannot be separated from the debate between freedom of speech and the right to equality and non-discrimination. In the United States, the First Amendment to the Constitution has been the focal point of the fight against hate speech prohibition, while the Fourteenth Amendment guarantees a right to equality. Similar dichotomous constitutional amendments can be observed in other liberal countries. The United States and social media sites have laws and policies in place to prevent online hate speech, however as Spallaccia (2017) notes, “... a major problem in combating cyber harassment is the difficulty in applying such policies” (p. 35). Twitter, by necessity, offers some form of hate speech protection in its Terms of Service (*X’s Policy on Hateful Conduct*, 2023). However, with the widespread use of the application, and complicated dynamics produced alongside constantly evolving hate-speech, enforcement is rendered quite difficult. This can be seen most obviously in the high prevalence of predation libel in the selected cases for analysis.

Previously Asked Questions

Literature on discourse analysis in social media sites (SMS) typically focus on dissecting false truths rooted in politics (Hameleers, 2020), or trends in political discourse situated in a specific time and place (Torregrosa et al., 2022). Furthermore, CDA focused specifically on issues concerning transgender people are usually limited to the two most contentious topics of discourse in the struggle for transgender rights: bathrooms (Schilt & Westbrook, 2015) and sports (Jakubowska, 2023). Both instances utilize tactics of

criminality with the supposed intent to protect real women and girls from dangerous sexual predators. Despite their differences, predation libel is a present rhetorical device in both of these contexts, situated itself in the intersection of political speech and hate speech, both a political pejorative and transphobic bile. This transphobic bile relies on latent cultural hegemony that does not accept queer people.

Analysis of online harassment and hate speech against dominated groups often use Gamergate as a golden example. Occurring nearly a decade ago, Gamergate is a well-documented misogynistic hate campaign targeted against women under the guise of ethics in game journalism (Braithwaite, 2016). This guise was transparent at best, as it instead reflected the hegemonic power reactionary white males possess in the online landscape (Braithwaite, 2016; Spallaccia, 2017). The most outspoken women in video game journalism such as Anita Sarkessian, Zoë Quinn, and Brianna Wu received the most vitriolic backlash, including death and rape threats, seriously impacting their careers and safety. The more a dominated group questions the dominant power structure, the more negatively their actions are perceived, and the extent of their harassment amplified. In this case specifically, the harassers' misogyny is uniquely labeled "geek masculinity," (Braithwaite, 2016; Salter & Blodgett, 2012; Spallaccia, 2017) characterized by an interest in technology and computer games, social ineptitude, and relating to incelism. This form of masculinity is understood by its adherents based on its relationship to different forms of womanhood and dominant masculinity. Put in other words, men characterized by geek masculinity find community in both demeaning women and self-deprecatingly comparing themselves to men who rank higher on their perceived socio-

sexual hierarchy. These women were perceived as people meant to receive punishment for stepping out of place and speaking on a topic that ought not concern them.

Limitations

While prioritizing critical analysis on a specific rhetorical device - predation libel - can develop a good starting point in analysis, drawing holistic conclusions that consider all queerphobic discourse will prove more difficult. However, to give the vast spectrum of queerphobic hate speech an equal seat at the analytic table would imply a thesis scope so broad it would demand an ongoing CDA journal reserved exclusively for this topic, or at the very least, a multi-hundred-page long dissertation reserved for doctoral candidates. The history of queer rights is long, multifaceted, international, and intersectional. Asking for a wider array of focus would prove a Herculean ordeal, especially for an undergraduate's thesis.

The scope of this thesis will also be reserved for case studies in the United States. This was done for several reasons: (1) Modern predation libel uses the English language in a peculiar way; muddying the differentiation between sexual predators and queer people, and (2) the unique culture of American school boards and conservative parenting that predation libel is situated in may not apply generally to other predominantly white bourgeois democracies (like countries in Europe). This is a complex problem that is not unique to Americans, but situating the thesis' scope specifically in this context can allow for more in-depth discussion of queerphobic hate speech in a specific time and place. Hopefully, future research in the topic can allow for cross-cultural comparisons in other nations, especially non-post-industrialized ones.

While a focused CDA may not allow for general conclusions, it will provide a strong launching pad for future analysis in this field. As the analysis will show, many queerphobic discursive practices are used alongside one another. The thesis will not be limited to only analyzing predation libel, but other discursive practices used in tandem. This inductive research approach - similar to Grounded Theory - can allow for emergent trends that may not have been included with existing frameworks (Hadley, 2017). The intent is to critically analyze queerphobic hate speech and contribute to its scholarly discussion, rather than develop an entirely new general theory of its understanding.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Coding this dataset relied on an inductive approach, largely rooted in grounded theory. Since this study primarily focuses on predation libel and its interaction with other devices, this inductive approach is adopted to discover novel relationships not discussed in previous literature. Furthermore, the codebook can serve as a baseline for future transgender-sensitive research into CDA. Once a novel code was discovered, backtracking was implemented to ensure accuracy in every case. Some tweets possess many codes, some of which overlap. Others possess no codes at all. The aim was to find frequency rates for categories and codes in each case and compare the results between them. The codebook used for analysis can be found in Appendix A.

@EITC_Official is a Twitter account like Chaiya Raichik (@libsoftiktok), in which instances of queer and left-leaning people are found online and ridiculed was chosen to find case studies. This account was chosen for a few different reasons. First, in-depth coding for every tweet in a thread started by a more popular hate mongering account (like Raichik's) would prove too time consuming when compared to @EITC_Official. Threads started by Raichik often have thousands of responses, which greatly exceed the dataset developed from the three threads found on @EITC_Official's account (557 tweets and 64 audiovisual files).

The format for @EITC_Official commonly follows a simple formula: (a) The presence of a target of ridicule (TOR) who created the original content and (b) a snappy summary sentence explaining the TOR's transgression, thus justifying their ridicule for the observer. Since each summary sentence is unique and dependent on the TOR's content, there will exist different code frequencies by case. By comparing code

frequencies between cases, a relationship can be drawn between @EITC_Official's TOR and their most prevalent codes. Combining all cases for frequency analysis would not provide as much insight as this case-by-case approach, due to each case's unique context. The frequency of each code and category is provided visually on a simple bar chart. Examples of the three topmost codes (in one case, four due to a tie) are provided to further the reader's understanding of the code, how it operates in context, and how they are used alongside other codes.

Following frequency analysis, each case has a reserved discussion session to interpret and explore the most prevalent frequencies in their respective context. The lion's share of discussion goes to the top codes, although space is reserved for infrequent or atomic. These infrequent codes still warrant discussion due to their uniqueness, rhetorical potency, and/or functionality in context. Most of the insight gleaned from this study occurs in each case's discussion section, as frequency analysis alone would prove inefficient.

CHAPTER IV: CASE #1, A TRANSGENDER WOMAN

In the first case, the target of ridicule is a transgender woman. She begins the video with a question to the audience of transphobic people and allies who want to deepen their understanding of transgender issues. Afterwards, she asks the audience what it would take to convince them (transphobes) that transgender people are normal and healthy individuals instead of the deviant sexual predators coming after children they are often made out to be. This is an interesting target of ridicule, because it seemed like the responses would gravitate heavily towards misgendering and predation libel based on the dichotomy set up by @EITC_Official, “Man dressed up in woman face wants to know what it would take to convince you that he is a woman and not a groomer.” The dialogue is constructed around a mutually inclusive frame whereby being a transgender woman necessitates also being a groomer.

Results

Predictably, the plurality of categories in this dataset goes to misgendering (36.5%) composed entirely of the deliberate misgendering code (35.6%). Far behind in second was the perversion category (17.3%) with predation libel as its most frequent code (16.3%). Close behind perversion, the last category with over a 10% code rate is clinicalization (15.9%) with delusion reinforcement (6.3%) as its most common code. In descending order, the three most common codes were deliberate misgendering (35.6%), predation libel (16.3%) and biological determinism (6.73%). Below are some examples of the most common codes in context.

Table 1 Examples of the most common codes in the first case.

Code	Coded Area
deliberate misgender	<i>Woman face? This is a dude wearing make-up.</i>
	<i>Your sex will always be XY no matter how much expensive surgeries you get.</i>
	<i>As far as accepting you as a woman, that will not happen</i>
	<i>he a men not a women</i>
	<i>You are not an adult human female, therefore not a woman.</i>
predation libel	<i>Try not grooming</i>
	<i>Stay away from kids</i>
	<i>The term applies to people who pursue performing sexually (including drag shows), as well as those who talk about their sex lives or distribute sexually explicit books, TO CHILDREN</i>
	<i>Purge the pedos in ur movement</i>
	<i>One way I can be convinced that they aren't groomers is if they stop trying to fuck children</i>
biological determinism	<i>Get pregnant first and than [sic] we'll talk.</i>
	<i>plastic surgery,boobjob, hormones, and dick snip makes not a woman.</i>
	<i>Just take a quick glance in the mirror or better yet a quick glance downstairs. Women don't have balls.</i>
	<i>You could convince me you're a woman by never having a dick and/or balls and/or an XY chromosome pattern at any point in your life</i>
	<i>He has to show us that he has large Gametes.</i>

COUNTA of Id vs. Category

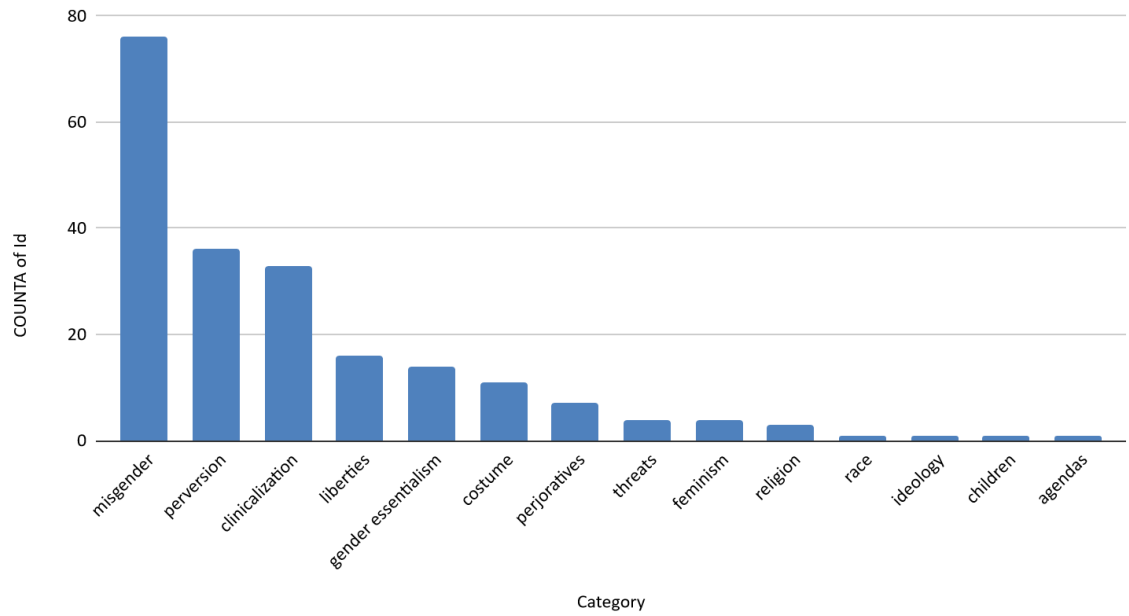


Figure 1 Count of categories for the first case.

COUNTA of Id vs. Codename

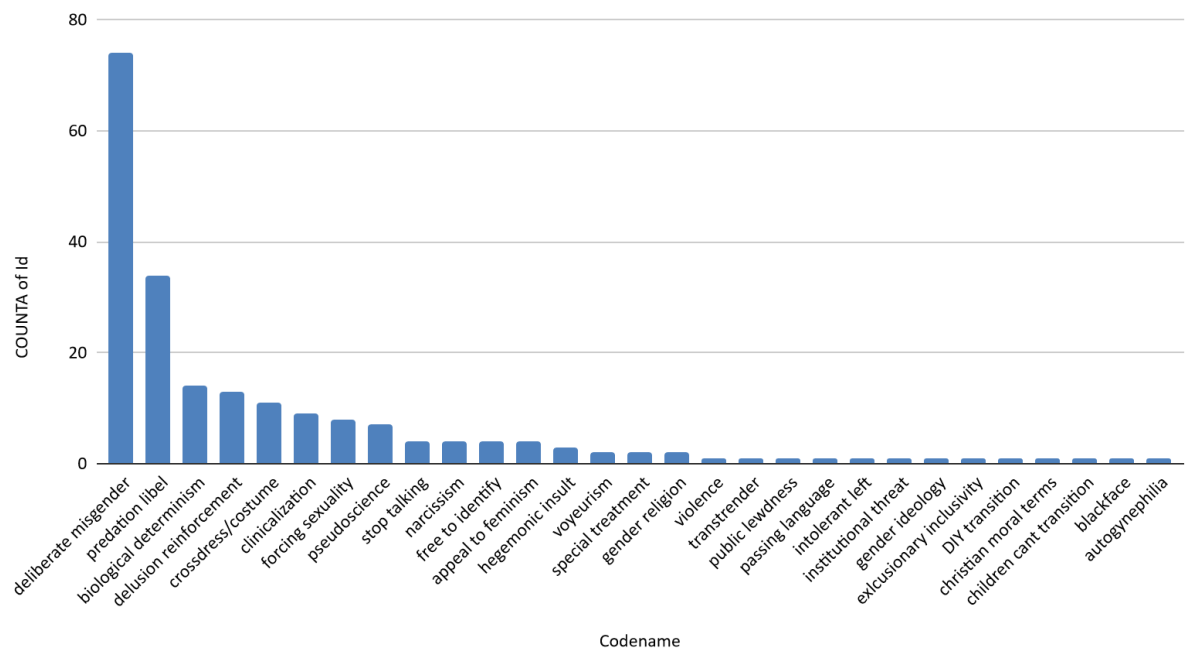


Figure 2 Count of codes for the first case.

Often, misgendering would be accompanied by other codes, and there existed a common frequent relationship between three codes in this dataset. Between predation libel and deliberate misgendering, there exist 30 common files. Between deliberate misgender and biological determinism, there exist 15 common files. Between biological determinism and predation libel, there exist 6 common files.

Discussion

As could be expected by how the video was framed, the most frequent code was deliberate misgendering. One reason for its high prevalence in the dataset is that the dichotomy by @EITC_Official set up responses for misgendering and predation libel as mutually inclusive codes. Additionally, when users would deliberately misgender their target of ridicule, they would often do it multiple times to drive home the point that they do not think she is a woman. However, filling the above table with isolated *he's* does not provide good material for discussion. The selected codes are displayed because of their poignancy and intersection with each other. For example, misgendering often occurs with an appeal to biological essentialism, suggesting that people cannot change their genders because these categories are rigid, unchanging, and exterior from the whims of humans. Also interesting to note was the intersection of misgendering and predation libel: Not only can transgender women never be women, but the very nature of their being transgender makes them sexually deviant. This could also explain the presence of other accusations of sexual deviancy. The simultaneous denial of womanhood paired with the misunderstanding that transgender women are motivated by perversion creates a dangerous combination that prevents any semblance of normal inclusion into society. The end goal is complete extermination from public life, sometimes through violent and direct

means, e.g., “If enough trans ate bullets, i would have no choice but to be convinced” (@ConcreteBigot).

Unique Codes to this Dataset

There existed some unique codes in this dataset not present or as present in the other two cases interesting enough to warrant discussion: voyeurism and blackface.

While some only reflect one or two instances of use, they still require some interpretation based on their rhetorical potency and how they reflect the negative societal sentiments of transgender people.

Violence and Voyeurism. While continuing the thread from the previous section, violence also played a major role in this dataset. User @JP3167 implored the target of ridicule, or TOR, to “take birth control pills,” referencing one of the many ways transgender women follow methods to transition in a way colloquially known as do-it-yourself (DIY). Many transgender people, especially internationally, do not have access to more widely accepted gender-affirming medication (such as a routine of prescribed estradiol in transgender women). One way transgender women increase the level of estrogen in their bodies is through taking birth control pills to achieve their desired transition results. This is a very dangerous process, especially when compared to medically accepted methods of transition (Santora, 2020). There existed two instances of users saying that if the woman in the video could show them her sexual organs, then they would be more inclined to accept her womanhood. Surprisingly, these were the only direct mention of the target of ridicule’s sexual organs in the dataset. This is surprising because two of the three cases analyzed involve a transgender woman. It is interesting to note how voyeurism goes alongside misgendering. User @RicoLebrun referred to the

TOR as “sparky,” after demanding she pull down her pants. In the United States, this is used as a generic name for a male dog (possibly a reference to Sparky the Fire Safety Dog). Assuming this is the case, we can observe a deliberate instance of not recognizing the TOR as fully human, thus deserving of sexual degradation.

Table 2 Examples of voyeurism in the first case.

Code	Coded Area
voyeurism	<i>Well, if you could...show..that you have a vagina, that would go along way.</i>
	<i>Pull down your pants sparky.</i>

Blackface. There were some infrequent or one-off codes that are interesting enough to warrant discussion. Race was only invoked one time in this dataset, where user @TimeToRise6 considered transitioning as a morally reprehensible act, “just as bad as blackface.” This is a common device used against transgender people, and can be observed in online hate campaigns against famous transgender women such as Dylan Mulvaney (Crimmins, 2023). Online conservative pundit Jordan Peterson accused Mulvaney of portraying women in a “way that makes blackface appear loving,” (Burton, 2023). It is important to note that this device is not employed as a condemnation of blackface per-se. Rather, its use instead serves as an act of moral posturing against the hypocrisy of the left for allowing, and even encouraging, this seemingly vile and sexist act. Uncritically, it is an appeal to both feminism and racial equality. Instead, blackface is used as a device that seeks to instead frame transitioning as a morally reprehensible act whereby transgender women rob cisgender women of their uniquely real womanhood.

CHAPTER V: CASE #2, A PRO-LGBTQ+ TEACHER

The second case involves a quick 5-minute book review covering *This Book is Gay* by Juno Dawson. The book is reviewed as part of her series “I’m With the Banned,” which covers books commonly put on ban-lists to be prohibited in certain school districts. The target of ridicule is an English teacher, lauding the work as a great handbook both for young people questioning their gender identity and sexual orientation as well as their parents. For context, *This Book is Gay* is a sex-positive sexual education book geared towards LGBTQ+ youth who do not have the same information and resources their straight peers might possess.

Results

The most frequent category was perversion (35.7%), with its most common code as predation libel (23.0%). Following perversion are threats (11.91%), with the most common threat being a call to arms (8.51%). The third most common category concerns children (9.8%), with its most frequent code imploring readers to think of the kids (8.51%). In descending order, the top four most common codes were predation libel (23.0%), clinicalization (8.9%), a call to arms (8.51%), and think of the kids (8.51%). A call to arms and think of the kids have an equal amount of codes.

COUNTA of Category vs. Category

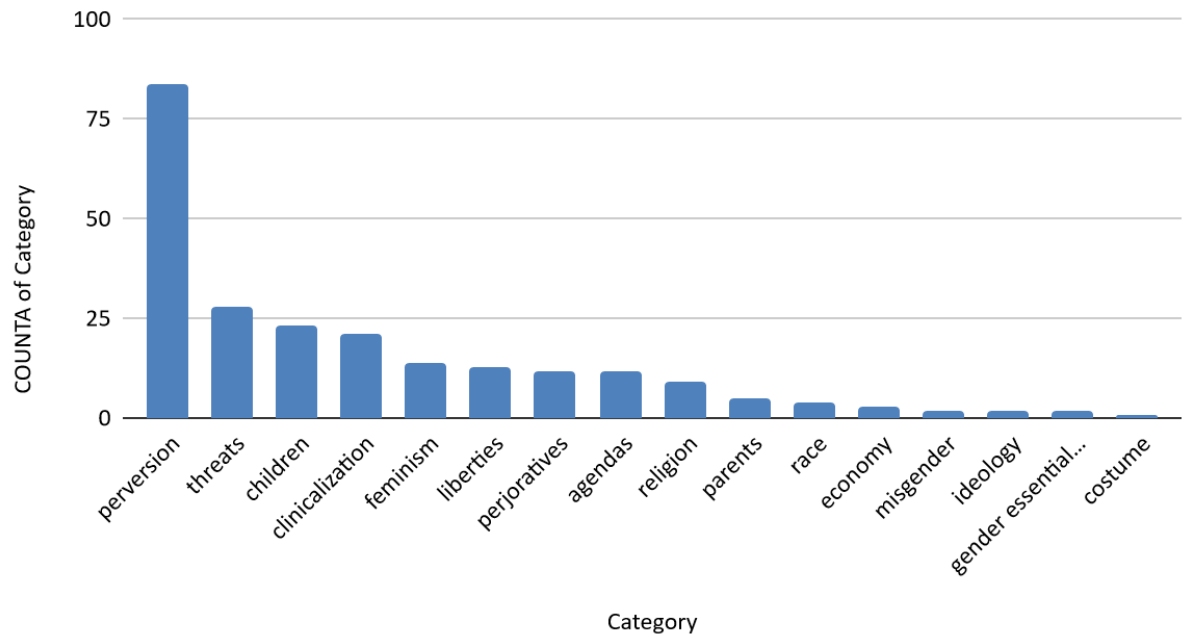


Figure 3 Count of categories for the second case.

COUNTA of Id vs. Codename

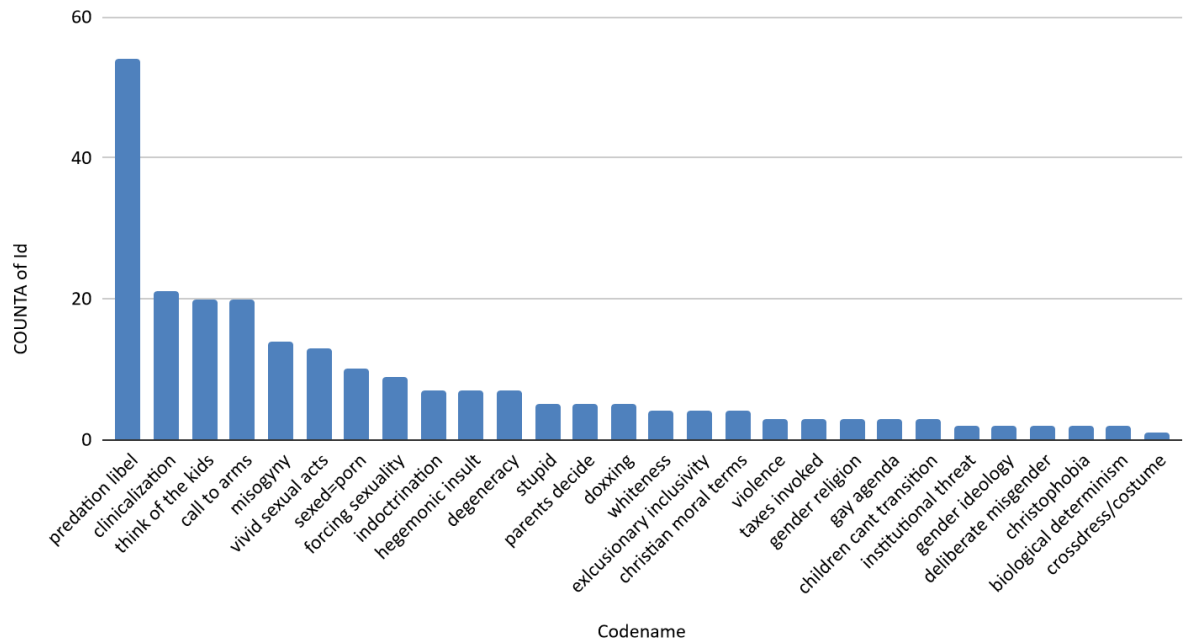


Figure 4 Count of codes for the second case.

Table 3 Examples of the most common codes in the second case.

Code	Coded Area
predation libel	<i>theyre groomers...getting them ready to accept pedophilia as the norm...</i>
	<i>She looks like she has already fondled a few children in her time..... Don't take advice from her!</i>
	<i>No minor should have a book that teaches them how to meet adult men for sex. And how to have sex with those adult men. That is the very definition of grooming.</i>
	<i>This is disgusting, disturbing, and pedophilish.</i>
	<i>Hmm... It's a manual alright. A manual for how to groom children to make them accessible to adults.</i>
clinicalization	<i>Seriously? What is wrong with these people? Lunacy gone to seed</i>
	<i>Mental health problems are a concern everywhere.</i>
	<i>She is sick. Absolutely sick. Should NOT be a teacher.</i>
	<i>You should be sent to an institution</i>
	<i>They're in the abnormal realm for a reason, yearly abnormal person they have normal group the less than 5% of society who is mentally deranged</i>
think of the kids	<i>Come on. Leave the kids alone.</i>
	<i>The problem of preserving the innocence of childhood in todays [sic] world</i>
	<i>I CARE about children.</i>
	<i>I pay taxes for my child to get an edjucation [sic] not for you to push a sexual agena [sic] on children!!!</i>
	<i>Leave the kids alone lady and stop tiring to indoctrinate these your minds</i>
call to arms	<i>Oh dear. I wonder what's to be done</i>
	<i>This woman should be fired immediately</i>
	<i>@oconschools you know what to do. This type of shit has NO PLACE in the classroom.</i>
	<i>Make her famous so parents in her area are aware of her grooming their</i>

	<i>children.</i>
	<i>How about this groomer lose her job and be prosecuted.</i>

Discussion

The Twitter users leaned heavily towards predation libel in this thread, making up the plurality of responses. This is quite the predictable outcome, considering the touchy subject of not only sexual education, but sex-positive sexual education (especially queer inclusive sexual education). In the debate between small and big government approaches to public education, a point of contention has always involved the federal government's role in sexual education. There has always been resistance against this topic taught in public education, and in recent years, a more queer-inclusive lens has been adopted to (very limited) curricula. *This Book is Gay* is one now infamous example of this newly inclusive lens. Sexual education is already a sensitive topic for some, and coupled with recent inclusions, doubles its reactive potency. Objections against even heteronormative sexual education in the past resemble those in the current day, with the added vitriol caused by the queer-inclusive challenge against the dominant culture. Since the 1990s, in response to welfare reform, abstinence only until marriage (AOUM) sexual education was adopted as the singular approach to adolescent sexual education (Hall et al., 2016). Sexual education in the United States is by and large abstinence-only. This means that while children are taught about sex, they are encouraged to avoid it at all costs. This reflects the underlying taboo of discussing sex with minors – “if we have to, we’ll do so reluctantly, but only to steer them away from it.” The even sparser presence of LGBTQ+

inclusive sexual education reinforces both this taboo and reinforces heteronormative dominance.

By adopting predation libel as a dominant rhetorical device in these responses, it makes light work for respondents to “debunk” their target of ridicule. Any well-intentioned approach to educate and accommodate queer youth in the classroom is only met with the vitriol of an angry mob, scorned by their perceived sexual exploitation of children. We see this with the large frequency of respondents imploring readers to “think of the kids.” Any sort of sexual education is perceived as malicious, and a means to sexually corrupt and confuse their otherwise “normal” children. Simultaneously, the water is muddied by implying the presence of political agendas. Thus, sexual exploitation is conveniently politicized for the sake of arguing the point that queer inclusive sexual education has no place in educational institutions.

What is to be done about these dangerous sexual predators wreaking havoc on a generation of impressionable and vulnerable youth? Specifically for our target of ridicule, we have many solutions proposed by respondents, including institutionalization, prosecution, and firing. For institutionalization, we observed a similar sentiment in the previous case. These people cannot be cured or fixed, and simultaneously like a murderous psychopath with no moral compass and a helpless psychotic patient who needs institutionalization for their own safety, complete exclusion from society seems a fit solution. For clarity, it must be iterated that no target of ridicule in these datasets has any evidence or allegations against them for any legal wrongdoing. Regardless, other users suggested criminal prosecution, regardless of any broken laws. Most of these inferences serve to drive home a sense of general moral outrage. Finally, most users

seeking a solution not falling into the previous two demand her immediate firing and revocation of her teaching license. All these solutions are founded on baseless accusations, and only serve to reinforce a general sense of moral outrage.

Doxing

Due to the teacher's position in education, and her threat to hegemony, many of the respondents called for direct action against the teacher. This explains the high prevalence of the threat category (11.9%) when compared to the previous case (1.9%). @EITC_Official did not tag the teacher's school district, @oconschools, by accident. Other respondents tried to get the school district's attention on Twitter, and another asked to make her "famous" so that parents can take direct action against her. As previously discussed, the topic of sexual education in US school districts remains an incredibly divisive topic. Not only this, but sex-ed with a queer-inclusive lens threatens the established heteronormative hierarchy. The repeated invocation for the audience to "think of the kids," only strengthens participants' zeal.

Typical, Stupid White Woman

A transgender-sensitive lens of analysis necessarily follows a gender-sensitive lens. Put in other words, this analysis would not be complete without examining how sexism played a role in people's responses. The teacher's intelligence was repeatedly insulted, and her sanity questioned. The vitriol was not saved for her intelligence, but her morality as well; she was called a "sick bitch." In many cases, respondents drew on commonly held misogynistic perspectives to explain her irrational behavior as expected and befitting of a mentally ill woman. The teacher's whiteness was also invoked quite a few times among the e-bile, which is interesting when considering that she was not only

belittled for being a woman, but a white woman, suggesting the infantilization of all women, regardless of race. Future research could investigate the phenomenon of the infantilized woman and how this intersects between races. Unfortunately, an in-depth exploration lies beyond the scope of this project.

Table 4 Examples of the misogyny and whiteness codes in the second case.

Code	Coded Area
misogyny	<i>there are two genders you stupid bitch and regardless of how a mental person feels inside, they are still the gender they were born as</i>
	<i>What's happened to women have they lost their minds completely their sense of dignity their understanding that children are so persuadable.</i>
	<i>It's always the women pushing this shit</i>
whiteness	<i>Always a white woman</i>
	<i>Fucking white women.</i>

CHAPTER VI: CASE #3, A TRANSFEMININE TEACHER

The final thread examined in this thesis targets a transgender teacher who asks her TikTok followers for advice when coming out to her students. This is a short video, targeted towards fellow transgender people who have been in similar situations. Other than the deliberate misgendering in the @EITC_Official's framing, the target of ridicule is not put in any mutually inclusive "transgender-groomer" frames unlike the first case. The poster relays what was said by the target of ridicule, with the inclusion of deliberately incorrect pronouns.

Results

The most frequent category was misgendering (27.6%) with its most frequent code as deliberate misgendering (24.1%). The second most common category was an appeal to individual liberties (15.99%) with its most common code as personal life (40%). Finally, the third most common category was clinicalization (14.97%) with clinicalization (10.54%) as its most frequent code. In descending order, the most frequent codes were deliberate misgendering (24.1%), personal life (13.61%), and clinicalization (10.54%). Below are the categories and codes displayed in descending order, as well as some examples of the most frequent codes.

COUNTA of Id vs. Category

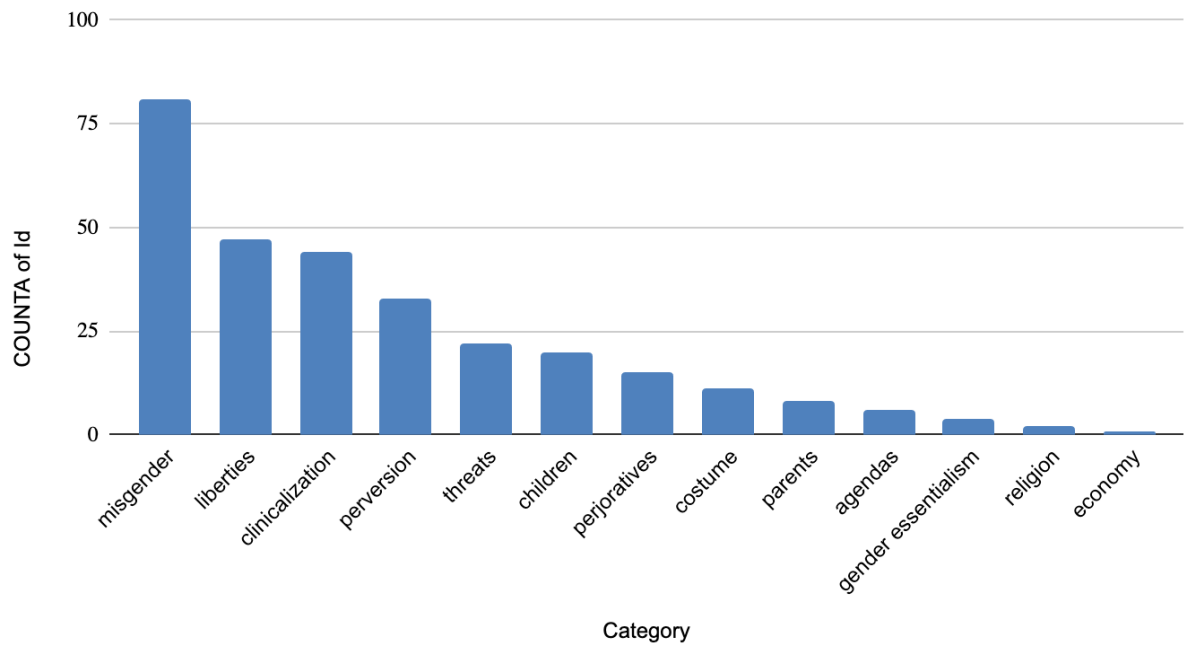


Figure 5 Count of categories in the third case.

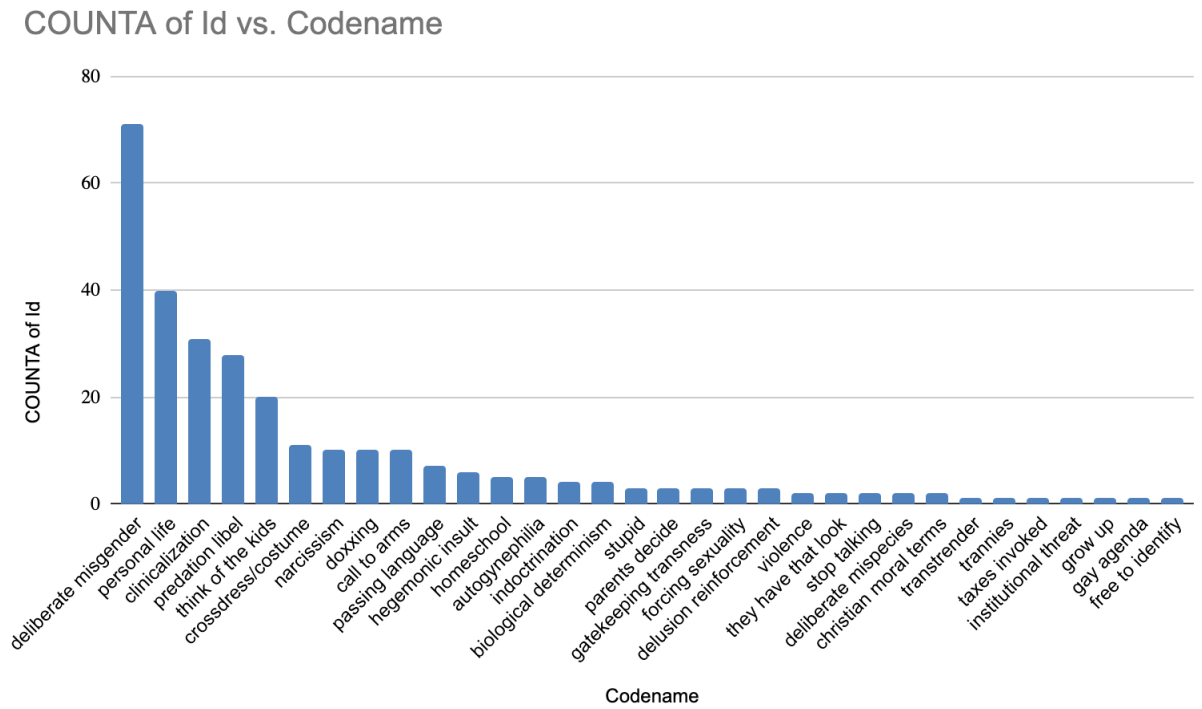


Figure 6 Count of codes in the third case.

Table 5 Examples of the most common codes in the third case.

Code	Coded Area
deliberate misgender	<i>I would in no way want a man that is pretending to be a woman</i>
	<i>They know dude...</i>
	<i>Nothing about this guy is feminine</i>
	<i>You already look a bit like a man so there is no explaining required.</i>
	<i>No way is this man forcing my kids to lie to him</i>
personal life	<i>That's the perfect solution. Keep your personal life.... personal.</i>
	<i>A person should not be talking about their personal life and sexuality with other people's children.</i>
	<i>Bruh what is yalls deal with having personal relationships with yalls students</i>
	<i>THEY DO NOT NEED TO LEARN YOUR PRIVATE BUSINESS THAT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THEM.</i>
	<i>When I was in elementary school we knew very little about teacher's private life and that's probably how it should be.</i>
clinicalization	<i>And he eventually killed himself. Affirming is not mental health help.</i>
	<i>Ask your employer for a leave of absence for health reasons and seek medical attention for dysphoria.</i>
	<i>Do teachers not have to pass any mental health assessment?</i>
	<i>craving and seeking constant validation is a personality disorder.</i>
	<i>Ask your students if any of their parents are psychiatric doctors</i>

Discussion

Interestingly, even though the target of ridicule is both transgender and a teacher, predation libel did not have as high a presence in this dataset (9.52%) compared to the first (17.3%) or second case (35.7%). This is due to a combination of different reasons. First, @EITC_Official's framing did not include the mutually exclusive "groomer-

transgender” concept present in the first case. Secondly, the target of ridicule does not directly target transphobic people nor invoke predation libel herself. Thirdly, and most importantly, the subject area of the video does not include as many overt possible predation libel triggers. One trigger we can infer from the previous case compared to the first and third is queer-inclusive sexual education. Importantly, the presence of predation libel is still high in this dataset, coming in at the fourth most invoked code. A transgender woman cannot be separated from this association. As a dominated group, their very existence in public life is a challenge to the heteronormative paradigm and cisgender male hegemony.

Keep Your Personal Life Personal

This dataset had a large presence of respondents imploring the target of ridicule to keep their sexuality and gender identity behind closed doors, making an appeal to the “normality” of cisgender and heterosexual teachers for doing this as well. This genuine plea for queer people to keep their sexualities to themselves exists as a clear appeal to hegemony, despite the double standard that exists between what constitutes oversharing in a non-queer context. For example, say a cisgender female teacher announces her marriage or pregnancy. These are both examples of important announcements that oftentimes must be made to explain the presence of novel societal or biological phenomena respective to the individual, such as the changing of a last name, the wearing of an engagement or wedding ring, or the very visible act of carrying a child to term. Regarding heterosexual and cisgender people, these processes fundamentally rest on the subject matters of sexuality and gender. Whether the person is a teacher, a coworker, a friend, or an acquaintance, these announcements are accepted as normal and oftentimes

positive developments. I argue that the problem does not lie in preserving the sanctity of privacy in the classroom. Instead, the dominated group (in this case, a transgender woman) is demanded to keep silent because her very existence is a perceived threat to hegemony. We would not see these codes in such full force when compared to a Twitter thread of a teacher announcing her marriage or pregnancy.

Clinicalization

The first (15.87%) and third case (14.97%), with transgender women as the targets of ridicule, possessed the highest rate of the clinicalization category when compared to the second (8.94%). The existence of transgender people is commonly written off as people with mental health issues who live in desperate need of psychotherapy. No respondent in any dataset suggested that this would result in any positive change or benefit for the recipient. One user asserted that gender affirming care does not constitute an effective mental health treatment plan, using an anecdotal experience of a transgender woman who committed suicide as evidence. Transgender people are considered spiritually, sexually, and morally sick. As discussed previously, the very existence of transgender people is a threat to the established heteronormative structure of dominance. Deeply internalized transphobic beliefs, rooted in this dominance structure, make it easier for adherents to write off transgender people as mentally deranged when compared to accepting their very real existence and valid experiences. Explaining away transgender people as mentally deranged serves hegemony because it implies that nobody in their right mind could ever break from these commonly held beliefs - to do otherwise implies insanity.

Also present in these datasets was the commonly held belief that queer people possess narcissism or other personality disorders. The first (1.92%), and third (3.40%) case invokes the narcissist frame in non-negligible frequency rates. When compared to the third case, where the target of ridicule is not transgender, this device is not invoked a single time. As previously discussed, it is perfectly normal and accepted to talk about one's gender or sexual identity in indirect terms, such as announcing a pregnancy or marriage. Discussing matters of gender and sexuality outside of the dominant framework is considered unacceptable. Queer people's characters are degraded to an almost irredeemable point for the very reason of discussing their own gender or sexual identity. Again, the very existence of transgender people serves as a perceived threat against cisgender hegemony. Only those with serious mental health disorders could challenge this paradigm, thus invalidating both the transgender experience and their existence.

Autogynephilia

Understanding male-to-female transition as a means to fulfill a sexual fetish is a long-held transphobic device. Autogynephilia is a term coined and popularized in Ray Blanchard's transsexualism typology (Moser, 2010). For those well-versed in transgender discourse, Blanchard is a household name due to his contributions to the widespread misconceptions of and active discrimination against transgender people, creating unnecessary and harmful barriers to transition and reinforcing the already difficult relationship between transgender people and medical institutions. In Valerie Solonas's 1967 radical feminist work, *SCUM Manifesto*, she states that, "When the male accepts his passivity, defines himself as a woman, [...] and becomes a transvestite he loses his desire to screw (or to do anything else, for that matter; he fulfills himself as a

drag queen) and gets his cock chopped off.” Much debate surrounds *SCUM Manifesto*’s role in feminist literature, and an in-depth discussion of its inclusion lies beyond the scope of this paper. I chose this inclusion as an example that, for many decades in the US, autogynephilia is wrongly understood to be a common motivator for transitioning.

There are several invocations of autogynephilia in the third case, and their text instances are listed below. There is also a poster-style text-based image for people to learn what autogynephilia is, and in what different forms it appears. This definition, alongside its different subtypes, is directly taken from Blanchard’s typology. In a very direct way, we can observe how Blanchard’s ideas of transgender people contributed to their negative perception. Transgender women are not motivated to transition from sexual pleasures alone.

Table 6 Examples of autogynephilia in the third case.

Code	Coded Area
autogynephilia	<i>Suggest they Google Autogynephilia?</i>
	<i>Keep your paraphilia out of the classroom.</i>
	<i>Kids don't want or need to know about your fetish.</i>

autogynephilia (AGP)

.ɔːtəʊˌɡaɪnəˈfɪli.ə

noun

The term for the specifically male fetish of being sexually aroused by the thought of being a biological female, considered a form of gender identity disorder or transvestic fetishism.

There are four distinct categories of autogynephilia:

Transvestic Autogynephilia: The arousal to the act or fantasy of wearing clothing regarded as feminine; crossdressing for sexual pleasure.

Behavioural Autogynephilia: The arousal to the act or fantasy of doing something regarding as feminine; behaving as a woman for sexual pleasure.

Physiological Autogynephilia: The arousal to the fantasy of having bodily functions specific to the female sex; fantasising about this for sexual pleasure.

Anatomic Autogynephilia: The arousal to the fantasy or reality of having female anatomic features, specifically female genitals; deriving sexual pleasure from this idea.

[youtube.com/thestatemedia](https://www.youtube.com/thestatemedia)

Figure 7 Categories of autogynephilia.

CHAPTER VII: DISCUSSION

While largely context-dependent, the previous case studies revealed that predation libel commonly coincides with deliberate misgendering most often in the cases involving transgender women, and clinicalization in the case involving the queer-positive teacher. Misgendering occurred alongside the costume category, depicting transgender women as ignorant performers who are not in on the joke and thus deserving of ridicule. Present in every case were threats to the TOR that were either sexual, violent, or invasive in nature. The high prevalence of the perversion category can also be interpreted by drawing an analogy from the super-predator thesis published in the 1990s.

The Function of Sexual and Violent Threats

While threats did not make up the plurality of any case, their prevalence still reflects how gender nonconformance and queerness is perceived as socially deviant and in need of correction. Similar revelations were revealed in studies involving #gamergate, specifically with Anita Sarkessian's harassment (Braithwaite, 2016; Spallaccia, 2017). In one image response, stoning was considered an acceptable form of corrective punishment for the transgender woman's perceived transgressions.

The presence of voyeurism reflects the hyper-sexualization of LGBT people. Spallaccia found that this hyper-sexualization in #Gamergate occurred by distorting video game characters to fit the heteronormative male gaze. The result differs in this context whereby users plead for transgender women to expose themselves; if not for the voyeurist's sexual pleasure, at the very least for the target's humiliation. This also possesses a double meaning not included in voyeuristic pleas targeted towards cisgender women: a desire to biologically 'prove' the maleness of transgender women through

viewing their sexual organs. Present in every case was the adherence to this biologically deterministic view of gender.

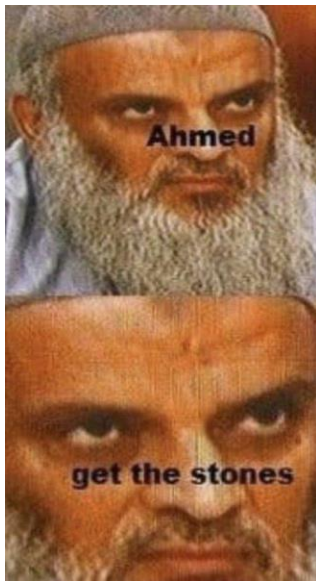


Figure 8 An image invoking the act of stoning.

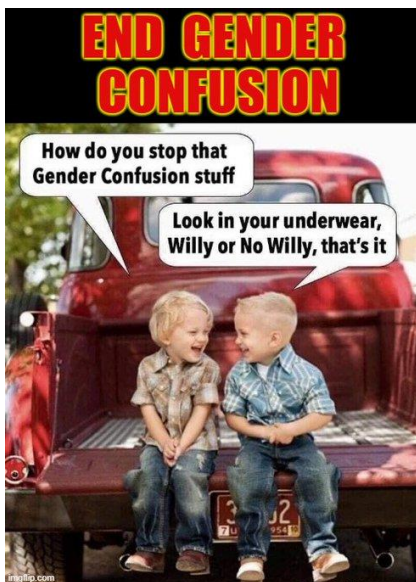


Figure 9 An image invoking biological determinism.

Reality Checking Through the Clinicalization and Pejorative Categories

Critical discourse analysis stands on the shoulders of the concepts of hegemony developed by Anthony Gramsci, which can be used to interpret the high prevalence of the clinicalization and pejorative categories. Gramsci describes hegemony as gained when societal dominance is presented as the general consensus (Gramsci, 1971). We can observe this phenomenon in this work's cases through the clinicalization and pejorative categories, both of which often describe the dominated group as delusional and unable to accept reality. They differ in their content, but clinicalization was often used to refer to every TOR as delusional. Likewise, pejoratives were often insults derived from the commonly held stance of what is normal (e.g., calling a transgender woman a “freak,” or “not normal”). In these instances, hegemony is expressed and upheld by how the dominated group's resistance to the dominant power structure is questioned on the basis of what is real. In this way, hegemony is considered reality. An image holding this sentiment can be found below, where nonadherence to the dominant gender binary is depicted as mentally ill through a crude Venn diagram. This reality checking is paralleled through the concept of Capitalist Realism, a concept described by Mark Fisher that refers to the inability of inhabitants of a capitalist society to imagine any form of existence that is not fundamentally capitalist (Fisher, 2009). In a similar vein, any form of existence not adherent to a rigid, biologically deterministic binary gender system is considered unimaginable and fundamentally at odds with reality. This serves as one explanation for the high prevalence of the clinicalization and pejorative categories, both of which rely on latent cultural hegemony to derive their rhetorical value.

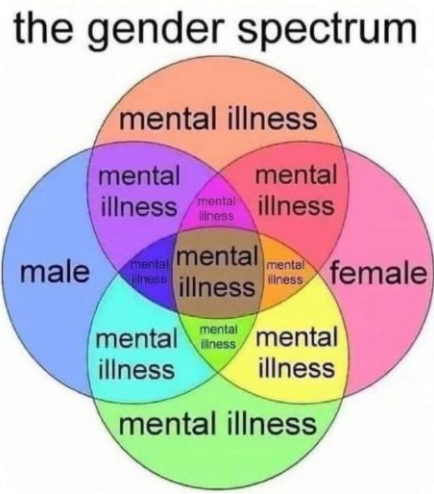


Figure 10 A Venn diagram depicting those who do not fit into the gender binary as mentally ill.

Misgendering Through Costuming

The cases involving transgender women relied heavily on misgendering, which intersected the costume category. The idea that these women are “men in costumes” occurred many times in each case, alongside an appeal to a binary gender system. In the first case especially, users utilized different comedy sketches depicting a “half-man half-woman” to invoke this costuming category, inspired by the TOR’s horizontally split styled shirt. An image of one of these scenes is depicted below, taken from *The Two Ronnies* and titled “The Ministry of Sexual Equality” (“The Two Ronnies,” 1976). There exists a distinct lack of commentary surrounding this “half-man-half-woman” trope in academic literature, despite a widespread cultural acknowledgment of its existence. At the time of writing, a Google search titled “half-man half-woman” reveals several Pinterest boards created to provide inspiration to replicate this trope in costumes. The original intent of the writers of *The Two Ronnies* likely was not to disparage transgender and intersex people at the time. However, its resurgence 50 years after the fact reflects

the novel way people interpret this act of performative and comedic cross-dressing. Alongside these half-man half-women images was the frequent use of the clown emoji, also reflecting the idea that transgender women are men in women's costumes. Both devices invoke not only a deliberate misgendering, but also a sense of comedic performance. These women, considered an affront to hegemony, are thus considered comedians who are not in on the joke, and whose existence is the punchline.



Figure 11 The first target of ridicule.



Figure 12 The Two Ronnies, The Ministry of Sex Equality.

Transgender Women as the New Super Predators

I propose that one explanation for the high prevalence of the perversion category is the idea that transgender women and pro-LGBTQ teachers are the new super-predators. The super-predator thesis was developed by John DiIulio in 1995, predicting that a wave of young, violent, and remorseless juvenile delinquents would increase crime rates across the US (Bogert, 2020; DiLulio, 1995; Froeling, 2007). The hypothesis was publicized in DiLulio's *Washington Examiner* article colorfully titled "The Coming of the Super-predator." He predicts an inevitable societal-wide increase in violence due to the moral poverty of minorities who lack a nuclear family and religion. Some scholars argue the thesis was disputed unfairly on ideological grounds, while others note the article's racist implications based on the vilification of minority youths. This idea both influenced and reflected the "tough-on-crime" political sentiments of the 1990s and early 2000s and contributed to the widespread dehumanization of minority youths. One infamous example of this dehumanization is the Central Park jogger case, in which a group of five teenagers (four Black and one Hispanic) were wrongly incarcerated and later exonerated for the rape and murder of Trisha Meili (Bogert, 2020). The vitriolic reaction to the murder of an innocent white woman also came alongside an appeal to western androcentrism, that the dominant class (men) ought to protect women from the dominated class (minority youths), depicted as evil beasts lacking any moral compass.

This dehumanization and accusations of moral bankruptcy of transgender women can be seen in full force in every case. In fact, a literal wolf in sheep's clothing is used as an image response to the transgender teacher in the third case. The device differs in that the sheep's clothing is instead represented as a face of makeup with an unmistakable wolf

underneath. The parallel to the media's depiction of the Central Park Five as a "wolfpack" is almost too on-the-nose. What differs also in the traditional interpretation of the super-predator is that these women and teachers are not depicted as violent murders. They are instead depicted as endangering the purity of children and cisgender women due to their perceived evil and animalistic sexual fetishes. Transgender women in particular are painted as invaders of women's spaces, invoking an androcentric need to protect them. Like the misogynistic invocations to protect women in response to the Central Park jogger case, we see how users invoke the super-predator archetype to describe transgender women and queer allied teachers.

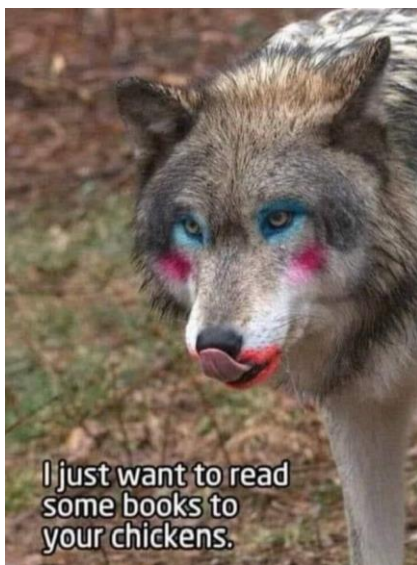


Figure 13 A wolf in makeup, used as an allegory for the super-predator.

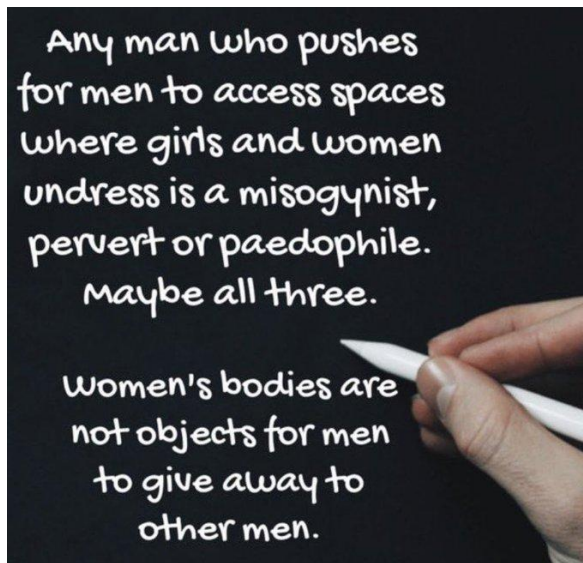


Figure 14 A text-based image depicting transgender women as predators.

CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSION

What rhetorical devices are partnered with the term groomer, and how can we use this information to form a symbolic map of predation libel? The study found that misgendering occurred alongside predation libel most frequently among cases involving transgender women, and threats for the case of the LGBT-allied teacher. Sexual and violent threats played a large role in every case, reflecting how queerness and queer acceptance is perceived as socially deviant and in need of punishment and correction. Reality checking and accusations of delusion functioned as recurrent themes and exist as an appeal to the gender binary dynamic, suggesting that non adherents to the dominant system must be either mentally sick and in need of treatment or hopelessly detached from reality. In this way, dominance can be directly observed by how the current gender dynamic is indistinguishable from objective reality. Misgendering also occurred through an invocation to performance and comedy, considering transgender women as men in women's clothing. This perceived costume, inseparable from their existence, justifies their ridicule in the public realm. Finally, parallels were drawn between queerphobic predation libel and the racist super-predator archetype. The dehumanization of transgender women and queer-allied teachers as beasts motivated by deviant and animalistic sexual fetishes, alongside with a masculine need to protect women and children from them, function to integrate these people into a novel version of the super-predator.

Future Directions

This study cannot conclude without stating its discovered shortcomings, including the weaknesses of the inductive approach, limited focus on differing perspectives and

identities, and how discursive practices differ by SMS. An inductive approach revealed unique findings and insight into queerphobic discourse but may not be suited for a general and descriptive social theory. The case studies, including one cisgender woman and two transgender women, were approached with the specific intention of examining people's responses to (trans)femininity. Finally, SMS sites have their own specific culture and languages due to factors such as character limits for posts, the company's ideological leanings, and user demographic.

One weakness of this study's inductive approach is that the inductive approach revealed novel insights into online transphobic discourse but may not be suited for a general and descriptive explanation for its presence. A generally applicable codebook would exceed the length of the one developed in this paper by multiple times. Despite this, the codebook still has potential when coding in similar contexts. It is the author's intention for this work to utilize the findings to contribute to a broader social theory when explaining transphobia and transphobic discourse.

The study's focus on two transgender women and one female teacher, all of which were white, likely influenced the data when compared to a hypothetical dataset composed of other queer and nonconforming folks. A honed-in focus on trans-femininity provided very useful material for analysis, but future studies would benefit by taking into consideration people of other genders (such as men, transmasculine, and nonbinary people) as well as those of different races. Comparing results from this study with a future study taking into consideration these different identities would result in new and insightful findings with regards to the intersection of sexuality, gender, and race in online discourse. Unfortunately, integrating this idea into this thesis proves much too broad in

scope, and is better suited for an entirely separate work. Additionally, the codebook provided in this study would prove useful when developing new categories and codes for analyzing discursive practices.

Twitter, alongside other social media sites, comes alongside a unique online culture and lingo. The devices found in this dataset may not translate directly to those found on another SMS, such as Reddit or Facebook. Twitter differs from a text-based SMS like Reddit in that there exists an upper character limit for respondents. The shorter the character limit, the more users are incentivized to provide short, succinct, and snappy posts. This also implies an increase in the inflammatory rhetoric of posts, as users are pressured to capture their immediate thoughts and reactions. A future study conducted analyzing the website specific differences between online queerphobic rhetoric on different sites could contribute to a holistic framework to analyze its presence.

APPENDIX A: CODEBOOK

Table 7 Codebook.

Category	Code	Description
agendas	gay agenda	Invoking a hidden gay or sexual agenda.
	indoctrination	Often the term is used directly. When brainwashing, controlling, or thought policing is invoked. Oftentimes children are the subject of these techniques.
	institutional threat	When the presence of left wing or queer people in social institutions, in a negative connotation, is invoked.
children	children cannot transition	Denying children the ability to transition or consent to gender affirming care.
	think of the children	An emotional plea to protect the innocence and purity of children.
clinicalization	clinicalization	When someone is considered mentally ill and in need of psychotherapeutic help, such as psychotherapy or institutionalization.
	delusion reinforcement	When someone is considered mentally deluded with a flawed grasp on reality, demanding others to "play along" or accept this false reality.
	narcissism	When someone is accused of having or possessing traits from a personality disorder, oftentimes narcissistic personality disorder.
	pseudoscience	When someone is accused of believing in pseudoscience.
costume	crossdress/ costume	When a transgender person is considered in costume, such as "a man dressed up in women's clothing."
economy	taxes invoked	Invoking taxes or the taxpayer.
feminism	appeal to feminism	Justifying transphobia through faux-feminist language, such as protecting woman's spaces from men.

	misogyny	Invoking a contempt for women to refute their credibility
gender essentialism	biological determinism	Treating gender as binary and unchanging, or subscribing to a rigidly biologic/scientific perspective of gender
ideology	gender ideology	Invoking the existence of a gender ideology
liberties	exclusionary inclusivity	When (seemingly) queer people exclude other queer people (e.g., "they do not represent the LGB community")
	forcing sexuality	When queer sexuality is forced onto people without their consent (e.g., when others are forced to utilize a transgender person's pronouns)
	free to identify	Adopting a hands-off approach to others sexuality or gender, without actually accepting them (e.g., "He can wear dresses all he wants")
	gatekeeping transness	Placing a high barrier to entry for being transgender, used to discredit a transgender person (e.g., "We are leaving people with actual gender dysphoria behind.")
	intolerant left	When the intolerance of the left is invoked
	personal life	Imploring people to keep their personal lives to themselves, often in reference towards queer sexuality or gender
	special treatment	When dominated groups are considered to have it easier than their dominant counterparts
misgender	deliberate misgender	Deliberately misgendering someone, such as using their incorrect pronouns or name
	deliberate mis-species	Deliberately referring to a person as "it," as one would an object or animal
	passing language	Referring to whether someone will be perceived as transgender by society
	trans-trender	The denial of transgender people from the perspective that their presence is a novel and transient phenomenon
parents	homeschool	Imploring others to homeschool their children

	let the parents decide	Imploring parents to make more decisions for the education or protection of their children
pejoratives	grow up	Demanding somebody stop acting childish, or to "grow up"
	hegemonic insult	A generic insult based on an appeal to hegemony (e.g., weird, freak, gross) or otherwise imploring someone to act normal
	stop talking	Demanding somebody to shut up or stop talking
	stupid	Questioning the intelligence of someone using intelligence-based pejoratives (e.g., stupid, dumb, moron)
	they have that look	Associating the perceived deviant actions of somebody through their outwards appearances (e.g., "These groomers all have the same look in their eyes.")
	trannies	A slur for transgender people
perversion	autogynephilia	An appeal to Blanchard's transsexualism typology; stating the reasons for transitioning (specifically for male-to-female transgender people) are motivated by the fetish of being a woman or possessing secondary female sexual organs
	degeneracy	A general insult relying on nonconformity to heteronormative sexual hegemony (e.g., hedonist, pervert), typically reserved for queer people
	predation libel	Baselessly accusing someone of grooming children without evidence; typically reserved for transgender people, queer-inclusive teachers, and sex-ed teachers
	public lewdness	Referring to gay pride events as inappropriate for public display based on its perceived inappropriateness
	sex ed is porn	Comparing or equivocating sexual education to pornography
	vivid sexual act	Describing some sort of sexual act in vivid detail
race	blackface	Comparing or equivocating the act of transitioning to blackface
	whiteness	Invoking somebody's whiteness
religion	Christian moral terms	Framing some phenomenon in terms of good (e.g., Christ) versus evil (e.g., Satan), or otherwise using the terminology of

		Christian salvation (e.g., "Protect your children's souls.")
	Christophobia	Invoking the existence of discrimination against Christians
	gender religion	Labeling left-wing or queer people as adherents to a gender religion, or invoking the existence of a gender religion
threats	call to arms	When a user puts forward actions to take against someone for a perceived wrong, or tagging a specific Twitter account to reprimand that person
	DIY transition	Imploring for a transgender person to DIY (do it yourself) their transition, often more dangerous than more medically accepted methods of transitioning
	doxing	Trying to find or posting personal information of someone (e.g., address, place of work, full name)
	violence	Invoking or threatening violence against someone
	voyeurism	Demanding someone expose themselves sexually, often directed towards transgender people

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