

Super Straights: Heterosexuality, White Supremacy, and Transphobia without Transphobes

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This article turns to super straights—a sexual identity adopted by straight people who claim that they are not attracted to transgender people—in order to more broadly examine discourses around how people engage in transphobia without wanting to be seen as transphobic. In analyzing over 200 online discussion threads on Reddit, this article documents how in this moment of trans visibility, some people are using bioessentialist frames of biological sex, “born this way” ideologies of sexual identity, and personal preference discourses to construct heterosexuality as superior and to position their desires and ideologies as not transphobic. Notably, as constructions of biological sex, inherent sexual identities, and personal preferences have meanings rooted in racism and eugenics, this article situates these super straight discourses and strategies within this white supremacist history. Ultimately, this article argues that understanding more covert, and at times progressive and liberal, ways that transphobia operates is crucial in addressing trans antagonism and working toward gender liberation.

KEYWORDS heterosexuality, white supremacy, transphobia, sexual identity, personal preferences

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“I made a new sexuality. It’s called super straight,” stated TikTok user KyleRoyce. “Straight men like myself get called transphobic because I wouldn’t date a trans woman. But that’s not a real woman to me, I want a real woman. So now I’m super straight.” A 20-year-old, white and Asian heterosexual, KyleRoyce is credited for coining the term “super straight.” As he goes on to explain in his now viral TikTok video, “I only date the opposite gender—women that are born women. So, you can’t say I’m transphobic now because that’s just my sexuality.”

In this article, I turn to the super straights (SS) in order to more broadly examine strategies and discourses around how people engage in transphobia without wanting to be seen as transphobic. Super straight is a sexual identity adopted by some straight people who claim that they are not attracted to transgender people (Costello 2021). This sexual identity began from KyleRoyce's viral TikTok video in February 2021. The concept of super straight then diffused all over social media from Twitter to Reddit to 4chan (Costello 2021). In asserting SS as a sexual identity, super straights such as KyleRoyce argue that their sexual desires are not transphobic. It is their sexuality. They were born that way. It is just who they are.

Specifically, I explore how the super straights assert a particular heterosexual identity politics in this historical moment of both an anti-trans backlash and as there is an increase in visibility and support for trans people. Indeed, as gay and lesbian people gained more rights and visibility in a "post-closet" culture, heterosexual people could not as easily rely on explicit homophobia and heteronormative assumptions that everyone is heterosexual in order to assert their straightness (Dean 2014). In turn, many heterosexual people deployed various strategies such as announcing their heterosexuality and foregrounding traditional understandings of gender within their relationships to make their heterosexuality visible and to avoid being seen as gay (Dean 2014). Now, within this moment of trans visibility, some heterosexual people are once again finding strategies to reassert a distinct type of superior straightness as ideas around gender and sexuality are continuing to shift.

To figure out the super straights, I analyzed over 200 online discussion threads on Reddit about dating or not dating trans people. As I will show, the super straights are not a monolithic group. There are many tensions, conversations, and contradictions with them trying to figure out heterosexuality in relation to desires for trans people. But through these conversations, posters on Reddit engage in several discursive strategies—biological essentialist, "born this way," and "personal preference" discourses—to both maintain their heterosexuality and to claim that they are not transphobic.

I examine, then, these discursive strategies through building on the work of Bonilla-Silva (2010) who documented how people used various frames and discursive strategies to perpetuate racist ideologies, while simultaneously seeing and constructing racial inequality as a result of non-racist processes. For instance, the frame of naturalization allows white people to explain away how racist policies and practices created racial segregation through white people seeing segregation as just people of different racial backgrounds "naturally" wanting to live together and by each other (Bonilla-Silva 2010). This study turns to the super straights to document several discursive strategies on how people use logics around their identity to claim that their sexuality is a natural occurrence, and hence, their identity, their sexuality, and their practices cannot amount to discrimination—cannot be transphobic. This examination of these discursive strategies will both illuminate and challenge how straightness utilizes various transphobic rhetoric and tactics to assert its superiority.

THE SCIENTIFIC RACIST ORIGINS OF SEX, HETEROSEXUALITY, AND PERSONAL PREFERENCES

The Western invention of sexual identities has a long history connected to race and racial formations (Vidal-Ortiz, Robinson, and Khan 2018). Before heterosexuality gets coined, white colonizers and imperialists justified violence, genocide, and colonization on Indigenous communities and people in the Global South because the colonizers saw people of color as having expansive expressions of gender and sexuality that went against the Eurocentric gender binary and the man-woman-reproduction nuclear family norm (Patil 2018; Morgensen 2010). Through the transatlantic slave trade, the Eurocentric gender binary also gets constructed in and through whiteness, whereby Black people became ungendered—seen as not having a gender but only seen as a slave—and whereby only white people were seen as being a man or a woman (Spillers 1987). Then, in the 19th and 20th centuries, heterosexuality becomes classified as an identity and cultural ideal alongside of white supremacist sciences, such as craniometry and eugenics (Ward 2021). It is no coincidence that heterosexuality and homosexuality get invented at the same time as the end of slavery and the beginning of Jim Crow. As biological models of race were being undermined, new models of classifying desires were formed where both interracial desires and homosexual desires were constructed as “abnormal” sexual object choices. Homosexuality—like interracial relationships—was seen as a threat to the perceived decline in white reproduction (Somerville 2000). Heterosexuality became the norm not only to discipline people into reproducing but also to keep white people in intraracial relationships—to reproduce for the white race (Ferguson 2005; Foucault 1976; Somerville 2000).

One way this history of race, gender, sex, and sexuality continues to intertwine, especially in relation to desires, is through the notion of “personal preference.” The term sexual identity itself privileges gender as one’s sexual object choice and promotes this gendered sexual attraction as biological, self-evident, and natural (Stearns 1995). While other social categories such as race are often not seen as part of defining sexual identity anymore, desires around race and other social categories still take on meaning, often through the discourse of “personal preference.” That is, like sexual identity and gendered sexual attraction, people use the notion of “personal preference” to claim that they are also inherently attracted to a particular race, body type, and/or some other social category. As Robinson (2015, 2016) has shown though, larger cultural ideas around race and racism and ideas around health and fatphobia shape these desires. Moreover, in the case of racial preferences, white people still maintain superiority and determine the value of racial erotic currency (Han 2021). For instance, under personal preference discourses, people of color are often not desired or only desired within fetishized and objectified ways (Han 2021; Robinson 2015). Race, then, comes to define someone’s worth as a partner (Han and Choi 2018). Moreover, views about gender and trans people can also shape the worth of someone as being a potential partner, as a recent study found that 87.5% of people would not date a trans person (Blair and Hoskin 2019). Importantly, desire is more than just partner selection, whereby lacking desirability also often negates a marginalized group of people and makes them seen as not worthy of attention or resources (Han 2021).

This article explores how super straights use discourses of biological sex and personal preferences to both construct their superior heterosexuality and to engage in

transphobia without wanting to be seen as transphobic. Notably, as biological sex, heterosexuality, and personal preferences have histories and meanings rooted in racism and eugenics, this article situates super straight discourses within this white supremacist history. Ultimately, this research both exposes how super straights further discrimination against trans people—while claiming not to do so—and substantiates the need to address how sexual identities, the concept of biological sex, white supremacy, maintaining the Eurocentric gender binary, and heterosexuality as a political institution all intertwine today.

BORN THIS WAY AND BIOLOGICAL ESSENTIALISM'S TRANS EXCLUSIONS

A strategy of the mainstream gay rights movement has been the adoption of the slogan “born this way.” Certain gay people argue that no one would choose a life of discrimination (i.e., choose being gay); therefore, homosexuality must be biological (Ward 2012). This “born this way” strategy hinged on an investment in biological authority to try to claim legitimacy and on legal authority of having an ascribed characteristic that should be a protected class (Walters 2014). Notably, turning to biology does not actually guarantee legitimacy. Biological arguments have been used to demean and subordinate marginalized groups through categorizing them as biologically and physically less than, through justifying medical experimentation, and through actively working to annihilate groups who are seen as biologically inferior (Walters 2014). That is, biological claims can just bolster eugenicist arguments. White cisgender men have often thought they were biologically superior to other groups of people and used biological arguments to justify their status and privilege (Schilt 2015). If gay, then, is biological, it could be classified as a disease to cure or get rid of, not necessarily to be accepted or celebrated (Walters 2014).

Given this context and history, it is critical for scholars to think empirically about “born this way” discourses and biological essentialism, especially as these logics shape everyday interactions around social difference (Schilt 2015). “Born this way” logic can do very different cultural work depending on the political contexts (Schilt 2015). It can reveal and try to address social inequality such as how gay rights have used the logic and how trans people have taken up this narrative as well in order to strategically challenge cissexism (Schilt 2015; Meyers 2019). But “born this way” can also entrench social inequalities such as the eugenic uses of the concept that work to justify that people of color are innately inferior and less intelligent than white men and that poor people and people of color should be sterilized (Schilt 2015).

Another part of the problem of “born this way” discourse, and even the concept of sexual identity, is the assumption of gender essentialism. To be born gay or straight or bisexual assumes not only that someone is biologically attracted to men, women, or both but that the categories of men and women are also natural, obvious, inherent, unchanging, and biological as well (Stearns 1995; Walters 2014). Gender essentialism has often led to the discrimination of people of color, as people of color have often been positioned as outside the dominant notions of masculinity and femininity (Collins 2005; Patil 2022). Moreover, gender essentialism has also been used to subjugate trans people and to see them as not really the gender they are (Broussard and Warner 2019).

In this article, I turn to how super straights take up and use logics of the main-

stream gay rights movement. That is, this study examines how super straights take up the “born this way” logic—a logic that was used by a group to challenge inequality—but the super straights use the same logic to now justify and entrench inequality against trans people, while trying to mask their transphobia. While some super straights may be trolling, their usage of biological essentialism can reveal limits and problems of these gay rights strategies. Indeed, the fact that people of color and trans people have often been positioned outside of the mainstream gay movement and then for super straights to use gay rights logics to maintain white supremacy and discriminate against trans people may not be all that coincidental. What might seem like odd bedfellows—the super straights and gay rights discourses—might not actually be.

STUDYING THE SUPER STRAIGHTS

For this study, I analyzed numerous Reddit threads and subreddits. Reddit is an online community or “a community of communities” (Massanari 2017, 331) comprised of forums, discussion posts and threads, subreddits devoted to specific community posts and topics, and a social news aggregation website (Maxwell et al. 2020). As of September 2021, according to Statista—a market and consumer data company—Reddit is the 19th most visited site in the world and the 7th most visited site in the United States. A study by Pew Research found that YouTube and Reddit were the only two online social media platforms that saw statistically significant growth since 2019, with Reddit being the 10th most used online platform as reported by U.S. adults (Auxier and Anderson 2021). While increasingly everyday life is mediated by much of technology, studying online forums is important, especially since people may say and reveal information online that they would not in face-to-face settings. Moreover, online forums allow people who may not often interact with one another in everyday life offline to interact online with one another (Farber 2017).

I engage, then, in a discourse analysis of Reddit posts. Critical discourse analysis examines how ideologies shape talk and texts and inspects the impact of talk and texts (Rogers and Christian 2007). As meanings around social categories such as race are constantly shifting, people often engage in rhetorical strategies and cultural conventions to try to make sense of this shifting meaning; in turn, examining discourses can reveal the instability of these conventions and meanings (Hartigan Jr. 2010). Indeed, as this study will document, as meanings around gender and sexuality are shifting, super straights rely on strategies—biological essentialism, “born this way,” and personal preference discourses—to try to make sense of these shifting meanings and to try to restabilize the heterosexual dominant order. Therefore, a discourse analysis of online comments is important to document these discursive strategies, the ideologies shaping them, and their impact. Notably, while online comments might be performative (Preston, Halpin, and Maguire 2021) and who people say they are online might not be who they are offline, all identities are performative, and studying online forums can document one way that people manage, negotiate, and reformulate their identities and desires (Robinson and Vidal-Ortiz 2013; Ward 2008). The internet, as well, has become a tool for both cis and trans people to learn about trans-related issues and policies that they can apply to offline interactions (Tompkins 2014). In all these instances, examining Reddit is an apt place to engage in a discourse analysis to understand

meanings around gender, sexuality, identity, trans people, and desire today.

I examined Reddit posts from April 2021 to June 2021. The overall study was focused on examining online discourses about dating and having sex with trans people. I used search terms such as “transgender,” “dating transgender,” “sex transgender,” and “transamorous” to find posts. I also explored subreddits such as r/asktransgender, r/transpersonals, r/t4m, r/m4t, r/chasersrisseup, and r/transamorous. I quickly discovered discussions around super straights—a term I had not heard of until conducting this study. I then started searching for other terms such as “super straight,” “genital preference,” and “personal preference” based on the key terms I was seeing in the initial posts that I was examining.

I downloaded over 200 threads. Many threads were recent and from the past year, but some threads were also from over five years ago. Some threads had no comments. Some had around 20 comments. Some had hundreds of comments, with one thread having over 10,000 comments. I should note that I often clicked on threads related to the thread I was reading and explored Reddit in a way that a user would. Through this process, I found discussions about the super straight identity and “not transphobic” claims about one’s sexuality across a variety of subreddits, including on LGBTQI+ subreddits such as r/lgbt and r/transeducate, on the subreddit r/FeMRADebates that discusses feminism and men’s rights activism, and on numerous general subreddits such as r/NoStupidQuestions, r/Discussion, and r/AskReddit. The various types of subreddits can shape the audience for who the posters may be trying to perform for and convince that their logics and actions are not transphobic. Given, then, that these discourses were across a variety of subreddits, one can assume the audience is potentially a general audience. Moreover, I also do not anonymize the usernames as the posts are public and the usernames are another form of data and mean-making.

Similar to Taylor and Jackson’s (2018) study about masculinity on a Reddit forum about pornography abstinence, I began with close readings of the selected forums to become familiar with the patterns of how users talked and engaged with each other. From there, I analyzed all downloaded threads in MAXQDA. Following a grounded theory analytical approach, I coded the close readings of the selected forums following a line-by-line coding (Charmaz 2006) to get an analytical grasp on how people were discussing heterosexuality, trans people, and desire on the threads. I, then, moved to flexible coding (Deterding and Waters 2021), whereby I used the analytical insights from the initial coding to then code larger swaths of threads and posts. I generated over 100 codes (e.g., super straight, genital preference, eugenics, racial preference, biological sex). Notably, the analysis is not trying to reveal some “truth” about sexuality, but rather, to see how super straights construct their sense of their sexual identity discursively in relation to their non-desires of trans people (Taylor and Jackson 2018).

HETEROSEXUAL DISCURSIVE LOGICS OF BIOLOGICAL SEX, REPRODUCTION, AND EUGENICS

Although SS gets coined in early 2021, similar discourses and conversations had been occurring on Reddit for years, especially around if it is transphobic to not want to date or have sex with trans people. This section explores how these discourses relate to notions of biological sex, reproduction, and eugenics, and hence, how these discours-

es are linked to histories of white supremacy. This section also shows how discourses around biological sex are used to justify transphobia without wanting to be seen as transphobic.

A post by ggtab asks, “Why is it okay for transgender people to call other people transphobic if they don’t want to have sex with a transgender person? (not as rude as the [question] ? sounds, read the full post).” The poster went on to say, “[...] given the whole sex does not equal gender thing, this particular scenario confuses me to no end. I completely understand that in some cases, the reason may be down to transphobia, however I don’t see that this is always the case. Let me use a heterosexual cisgender woman and a heterosexual transgender man as an example.”

The poster, in their example, gave some definitions:

Heterosexuality: “sexual attraction to people of the opposite sex”

Transgender: “assigned gender does not correspond with birth sex”

Sex: “either of the two main categories into which humans and most other living things are divided on the basis of their reproductive functions”

I.e. sexuality is linked with biological sex, rather than gender identification.

As ggtab notes, *sexuality* should be about attraction to biological *sex*—not gender or gender identification.

Many straight posters on Reddit acknowledge that gender is a social construct and changeable. Indeed, another poster DorianMaximus writes, “Idk [I don’t know] why you are trying to deny science since gender and sex are two different things. You cannot change your chromosomes or your biological sex since they are permanent. [...] The issue is who people are attracted to, so it makes sense to focus on sex in this instance.” For these posters, gender is malleable, but sex is binary, immutable, and unchangeable.

The concept of sexual identity itself has often privileged a biological essentialism around both sexuality and sex, erasing how sex and sexual identities are also socially constructed (Fausto-Sterling 2000; Stearns 1995). For example, the concept of biological sex is rooted in white supremacy and imperialism, whereby white people constructed themselves as more civilized than people of color and people in the Global South through arguing that white people were more sexually dimorphic and that sexual dimorphism was a sign of modernity (Patil 2018; 2022; Henderson 2020). This biological essentialist discourse erases this colonial and racist history of the invention of sex. Notably, while some posters may not explicitly engage in white supremacy, the point is that their discursive strategies are rooted in white supremacist logics and concepts that now are utilized to try to justify not desiring trans people and to not be seen as transphobic.

This biological essentialist logic also allows posters such as ggtab and DorianMaximus to claim a type of progressiveness of seeing trans people for the gender they are. Simultaneously, though, these posters also construct trans people as different—as outside of heterosexual desires—by claiming that sex is not a social construct and different from gender. Biological essentialism becomes a frame, strategy, and logic that allows for transphobia without supposedly transphobes.

Moreover, ggtab also defines sex based on “reproductive functions.” This repro-

ductive logic clings to the historical notion that heterosexuality—or dominant sexuality—should be about procreation (Blank 2012; Katz 1995; Ward 2021). Other Reddit posters, though, push back against this reproduction logic as linked to heterosexuality. An example comes from mazotori, who is “a trans person who is usually T4T [trans for trans]” and who stated, “That’s... not how attraction works? Like are you gonna try and tell me as straight men can sense infertility issues?? Or are not attracted to women over 35??” This reproduction logic, then, ignores that there are cis men and cis women who cannot reproduce either; and yet, most people would still see them as men and women. Moreover, while patriarchal society may construct infertile cis women as less than, infertile straight cis women are still often seen as heterosexual. Nonetheless, in privileging reproductive functions, ggtab constructs sexuality—as attraction to sex and genitals—as ggtab concludes, “If we were to say that the heterosexuality of a person must include transgender people, regardless of the genitals and reproductive functions they possess, then surely that wipes out the whole concept of sexuality too?”

In sexualized, intimate settings, biology-based criteria, especially a heightened focus on genitals, is often used to assess and discriminate against trans people, especially trans women (Schilt and Westbrook 2009; Westbrook and Schilt 2014). The obsession with genitals also has a long racist history of white people constructing themselves and their sexed bodies as the norm through pathologizing people of color’s bodies and people in the Global South’s bodies, including their sexed bodies and genitals as supposedly excessive and abnormal (Henderson 2020; McKittrick 2010; Snorton 2017; Patil 2022). This logic points to how genitals hold a primary function in how people understand race and sexuality, especially heterosexuality. Nevertheless, for ggtab, trans people trouble (or “wipe out”) these dominant understandings of sex and sexuality as tied to genitals. Posters on Reddit try to reassert and maintain heterosexuality and its link to sex and genitals by denying desires for trans people through reproductive and biological essentialist frames.

Other posters on Reddit push back against this biological essentialist logic and genitals discourse. In specific response to DorianMaximus’s post about chromosomes and biological sex, QuestionableParadigm replied, “I’m not denying science, however, if you reduce someone to literal chromosomes that you can’t see to someone who has the same appearance and genitals of gender they are—you are just transphobic. By that definition as well, you’d date a trans man because he was born female.” In reply, DorianMaximus uses the discourse of “sexual preferences” and states, “Why do you give a fuck if I am not attracted to women who are not of the biological female sex? That is literally no different than going around dictating the sexual preferences of other people too. [...] Also, I would only date biological females who identify as women. So I don’t see where the problem is.”

QuestionableParadigm shows how gender affirming surgery and the reality of trans men can both trouble the genital discourse asserted by some heterosexual Reddit posters. This poster also displays the illogic of tying attraction to chromosomes. Most people are not tested for chromosomes at birth. Therefore, sex assigned at birth has nothing to do with chromosomes. Sex is also more complicated than just chromosomes, as science has constructed sex through genitals, hormones, chromosomes, and other sex characteristics (Fausto-Sterling 2000).

DorianMaximus quickly dismisses the claim about trans men by stating a sexual

preference for just “biological females who identify as women.” “Sexual preference” relies on biological essentialist notions of sexual identity to dismiss any discriminatory claims without explanation. DorianMaximus and others may claim a progressiveness of seeing gender as a social construct—to not look transphobic—but in practice, when their logics around sex, sexuality, and trans people are further challenged, they use ideas around biological essentialism to justify their exclusionary practices and desires.

In fact, a “single trans guy,” whose username was deleted, wrote how these posters keep constantly changing the goalposts when their logics are undermined. The user wrote:

Transphobic: Constantly shifting the goalposts to explain why you're not attracted to trans people. e.g. “I'm not attracted to vaginas” / “Ok, what about these trans men with dicks?” / “I'm not attracted to high voices” / “What about these trans men with super deep voices?” / “I'm not attracted to people who were raised as girls” / “What about this guy who transitioned at 2?” / “I'm not attracted to XX chromosomes” / [...] At some point, there's no longer any basis for the blanket rejection (note: not individual rejection) other than transphobia.

But another user—Unshackledai—still gives reasonings for why they are not attracted to trans men. They post, “I'm not into trans men because they tend to have feminine features which I find unattractive. I don't think that's transphobic, you can't help what you're attracted to.” Posters on Reddit were downvoting this post, to which, Unshackledai then edited their post to add: “Not sure why I'm being downvoted. I just don't like ‘men’ that look like women. [...] I'm sorry I'm not into 11 year olds boys, ok?”

The “single trans guy” on Reddit noted that people were not rejecting trans individuals for specific reasons that should matter to dating, sex, and relationships (such as maybe not sharing similar interests and hobbies). Instead, for this single trans guy, once the heterosexual logics are completely undone, these discourses boil down to transphobia. And indeed, Unshackledai's post confirms this point. Unshackledai engages in biological essentialism that all trans men still “tend to have feminine features.” They also put men in quotes, suggesting that trans men are not real men. They also infantilize trans men by saying trans men look like boys. While Unshackledai states that one cannot help who they are attracted to—the preference logic of transphobic without transphobes—they still give many transphobic reasons to justify their desires.

Notably, while many of these biological essentialist logics are shaped by histories of white supremacy but not explicitly racist, some users did use explicit eugenic logics to justify not desiring trans people. As Fit_Historian states, “But a preference for cis women among straight men mainly exists because of their innate sexual orientation based on biological sex (to subconsciously find a healthy mate to procreate with).” Eugenics is the racist and ableist science and ideology of “improving” the white race by bearing “healthy” and “fit” offspring (Hobson and Margulies 2018). Fit_Historian links this eugenic logic of finding a “healthy mate” to procreation, biological sex, and sexuality as all being natural and inherent. Even more explicitly, on a thread titled “Is it truly transphobic to not want to date Transgenders?,” Reddit user Vadoff writes:

Sexual attraction is usually a narrow band for most people. We avoid people who look too much like us (because they could be family/closely related genes), who look too different from us (may be another species),

those that are of the same gender (can't reproduce), those that are too young (can't reproduce), too old (can't reproduce or high chance of offspring being unhealthy/dying), or those that aren't physically fit (signs of being unhealthy/weak genes/lower life span). It's not just absence of attraction either, usually we feel repulsion at the thought of having sex with any of the above in order to make sure we stay away. It's purely biological.

For Vadoff, it is “purely biological” to be ageist, ableist, and homophobic—at least in one's sexual desires—as sexual attraction and its supposed natural link to reproduction has people avoiding others who are too young, old, of the same gender, and not physically fit. It should be noted that eugenics privilege reproductive choices for middle-class white people. The same logic has been used against poor people, especially poor women of color, to take away their reproductive choices, including forcefully sterilizing them (Nelson 2003). This link, then, of sexuality—and particularly heterosexuality—to bioessentialist eugenic logics continues this long ableist, heterosexist, and racist history to now be used against trans people. It also allows people to claim to not be transphobic as it is supposedly purely biological to desire a young non-disabled cis person of the opposite gender. Biological essentialism, including its link to eugenics, becomes a discursive strategy of justifying transphobia without wanting to be seen as transphobic.

THE SUPER STRAIGHT STRATEGIES OF BORN THIS WAY AND OTHER GAY RIGHTS DISCOURSES

This notion of biological sex also delves into the gay rights logic of “born this way”—that sexuality identity is also natural, inherent, and unchanging. Posters on Reddit use biological essentialist ideas of sexual identity to also claim to not be transphobic. As Reddit poster babno stated, “How can an orientation be transphobic? People are born that way, they can't help it.” And indeed, many Reddit posters took up this logic to argue that their sexuality—of not desiring trans people—is biological, and hence, not discriminatory and not something to be ashamed of. Poster DeltaMx11 stated:

No, because I shouldn't be shamed for my sexuality. I have as much of a right to be not attracted to a transgender person as a gay man has a right not to be attracted to a woman or a lesbian has the right not to be attracted to a man. I have no personal problem with transgender people, but I can't force myself to be attracted to a biological man with a female brain.

Other users similarly expressed that there should not be stigma or shame in not desiring trans people. As doorknoob posted, “I'm not sexually attracted to transgender people. There shouldn't be stigma for being heterosexual.” Trunk-Monkey also said, “Still, it [calling straight people who don't desire trans people as transphobic] strikes me as a rather dishonest way to shame straight men for their sexual preferences.” Dontwanttogooglet hat posts, “Fight the good fight! Down with superphobes!” CherryKnockout even asks, “If a transgendered couple refuses to date cisgendered people, would you call that cisphobic?” Poster drteeth69r also writes, “Why is it, if I, a cis male, don't want to date a MTF [male-to-female] I'm transphobic, but is it ok for the MTF not

want to date women? Would that make them cis phobic?” Poster drteeth69r went on, “Not trolling or joking. Serious question from a cis male who has no interaction from transgenders, as none live in my area.”

Notions of biological sex merge with notions of biological sexuality. DeltaMx11 links their sexuality to notions of biological sexed brains. This notion of “female brain” is rooted in phrenology and eugenic sciences that tried to justify the difference of women and Black people in comparison to white men (Bessant 2008). That is, this notion of a female brain was used by eugenicists to try to justify gender inequality (Bessant 2008). For DeltaMx11, this logic is used to both justify their non-desire for trans people and to establish this non-desire as an inherent, biological sexuality.

Moreover, in adopting anti-shame, anti-stigma, and “born this way” discourses, straight posters on Reddit use mainstream gay rights discourses and tactics to argue that they are naturally not interested in dating or having sex with trans people. The notion, however, of Gay Pride was an attempt to transform homosexuality from being a perversion into a positive social identity (Halperin and Traub 2009). It was an attempt to combat the isolation, stigma, and internalized homophobia that many gay people experience growing up in a heteronormative society. In a heteronormative society, there is no actual shame for being straight, as straight people do not face isolation and stigma for their heterosexual desires. That is, this discursive move around shame and stigma misses how stigma is about possessing a marginalized position or identity (Goffman 1963), erasing the power dynamics of sex and sexuality under heteronormativity.

This concept of “cisphobic” or “superphobic” also misses power dynamics—that to not date a cis person does not lead to structural discrimination and violence against cis people. It also misses how many trans people may not want to date cis people because of how cis people discriminate against them and treat them poorly (zamantakis 2020). While some posters may be genuine and are seeking to learn from trans people on Reddit—as they do not think they live by any trans people—other users seem to be more strategically using gay rights discourses as a way to troll and to try to be transphobic without being seen as transphobes.

Moreover, the coining of super straight itself is seen as an important corrective now that heterosexuality (according to the super straights) includes desiring trans people and that certain straight people claim to be discriminated against—by being called transphobic for not desiring trans people. As barbodelli states:

Look at any such conversation here. There is bound to be a couple of people claiming that..... “If you are initially attracted to the person but then lose interest because you find out that they are trans. You are transphobic”. So basically they are calling the majority of heterosexual men transphobic. I don’t know how common this view is in the real world. But it is definitely widespread here. Which is why the Super Straight movement is no surprise at all to me. If being straight is not enough to only be interested in members of the opposite biological sex. Then I guess call me super straight.

Similarly, randomasshole874 posted:

How? “Straight” now has changed to include women with or that had a penis and secondary male characteristics. I am a straight man, who

likes vagina. Anything penis or man related is completely unattractive to me (including born and still women). But the word “straight” doesn’t describe me anymore as it was recently redefined.

For the super straights, heterosexuality has moved beyond desire for biological sex. The social maintenance of heterosexuality, though, often requires policing trans people and genitals, especially within intimate settings (Schilt and Westbrook 2009). For certain straight people to maintain heterosexuality and to reinvest in heteronormativity, they developed a new concept. This concept of super straight reasserts notions of bioessentialism, especially gender essentialism, as the heart of sex, sexuality, and sexual identity (Stearns 1995). That is, some super straights work to reassert genitals and dominant notions of biological sex as essential to heterosexuality—or what makes it *super*.

Super straights simultaneously argue that their sexuality is inherent and hence cannot be transphobic, but also that straight people who do not desire trans people are different from straight people who do desire trans people. Reddit poster FaZe_Pickle01 even stated, “The movement seems transphobic. Although it is simply an attraction, the way they call it ‘superstraight’ doesn’t sit right with me cause it’s as though they’re straighter than other people who date trans people which makes it sound like they’re saying trans people aren’t their desired gender.” In making straight desires not for trans people as its own identity, super straights maintain structures that further discrimination against trans people, including the notion that trans people are not really the gender they are. Indeed, as the opening quote of this article stated from KyleRoyce who coined the term, “But that’s not a real woman to me, I want a real woman.” Born this way discourses and constructing super straight identities become other strategies to engage in transphobic discourses and actions without trying to be seen as transphobic.

But as many trans posters point out, including trans poster maybri, these discourses and posts are a dog whistle—speaking in coded language to a targeted audience to often convey hostility toward a marginalized group (Haney López 2014). As maybri writes, “In the past few days I’ve seen people repeatedly claim that some cisgender people are being pressured into dating transgender people against their will, specifically by being shamed and called transphobic. Often the people making this claim say they support trans people in general and attribute this problem to a problematic ‘vocal minority’.” Poster maybri goes on, “I don’t think there is such a vocal minority. I don’t think this happens at all. I believe the phenomenon has been completely fabricated as part of a recent far-right troll campaign to fuel animosity towards trans people.” In this regard, super straight discourse is not only used to be transphobic without transphobes, but as a dog whistle, it actually fuels further prejudice against trans people.

GENITAL PREFERENCE AS THE NEW TRANSPHOBIA

The logic of “just a preference” was predominant on many of the Reddit threads about super straights and about not desiring trans people. Many users compared this cis preference or genital preference as having a racial preference when it comes to dating and sex. User bigjdman stated, “No tf [the fuck]? It’s a preference. Just like how it’s not racist to not want to date a certain race, not homophobic to be straight.” Poster ggtab

also wrote, “[...] if you are in a situation where you meet someone, start dating them, they tell you they are trans and then you find out that they have the genitals of the biological sex that you are not attracted to, then that isn’t transphobic, that’s simply just your preference.” Another example includes:

Or at least it’s not more prejudiced than for any other trait. It’s just the same as someone not liking brown hair even though they find the other person attractive otherwise, and would date them if that person dyed their hair blond. Besides, when dating, prejudice doesn’t matter. That’s one area where no one has the right to complain about it. Whether it’s racial prejudice, trans prejudice (not the same as transphobia) etc. you can be disappointed but if you’re upset about it you’re being entitled.
-assolf_shitler

Super straights rely on the personal preference discourse to justify their non-desire for trans people. They explicitly make the comparison to having a racial preference, which for them is “not racist” or with dating “prejudice doesn’t matter.” But as Robinson (2015) has shown, notions of having a “personal preference” around race works to erase the racist cultural assumptions often shaping these desires. This discourse also leads to the devaluing of people of color, excluding them from dating and intimate contact, and maintains whiteness as the most desirable race (Robinson 2015; Han 2021). Personal preference around race, then, is another discursive strategy to engage in what is perceived as more respectful language—language that is not explicit racism—but that maintains racial inequality (Robinson 2015; Forbes and Stacey 2022). In these instances, personal preference becomes another frame of transphobia without transphobes.

Moreover, user *assolf_shitler*—which notably is a play on curse words for Adolf Hitler—compares trans prejudice to hair color prejudice. This framing erases the larger structural causes shaping desires and ignores how these dating prejudices can have larger impacts on people outside of just dating such as the discrimination trans people face in the workplace or in the public sphere (Westbrook and Schilt 2014). In replying to *assolf_shitler*, *LibraryLass* stated, “Except that, generally, no one is murdering their partner for not being a natural blonde. No one is trying to legislate what bathrooms brunettes can use. No one considers brunettes to categorically be sexual deviants.” *LibraryLass* deconstructs the personal preference discourse to show how these desires link to larger structural and political battles.

One poster, though, wanted to be able to cleanse trans people from their viewing practices on dating apps, showing how these “personal preference” beliefs also shape actions. *Full_Conversation823* said, “There should be an option to select and deselect transgender people from your dating app preferences.” Like using filter systems to cleanse Black and Asian people, HIV positive people, and fat people from dating sites and apps (Robinson 2015, 2016, 2018), this cleansing practice is another type of way to uphold not only white, HIV negative, and fit people as the most desirable but also to uphold the gender binary and cis people as the most desirable as well. Moreover, in not even having to see trans people when browsing dating and hookup apps, some super straights can reinforce their idea that only cis people are desirable. That is, if super straights have to see trans people, they might actually find certain trans people to be desirable. In turn, their notions of desire might expand.

Intriguingly, there were Reddit posters against the super straights but who also

bought into the “genital preference” discourse. These users pointed out that trans people are not a monolith and have various genitals. They argued, though, that while it is okay to have a genital preference, it becomes discriminatory when someone blanketly applies this preference to all trans people. As heydemonsitsmeyaboo—someone who “transitioned while dating a very religious guy” and whose “gender fluctuates from feeling very masculine to very non-binary”—wrote, “If you have a legitimate genital preference for sex, that’s fine. If you go out of your way to not date trans people, even post op [post-operative], then that is transphobic. Anyone who calls themselves Super Straight is transphobic (and it’s a neo nazi idea to begin with).” User frozen_hell66 even wrote, “It isn’t transphobic to be attracted to cis people. I wouldn’t make a word for it like he did, but there’s nothing wrong with having a genital preference.” Moreover, peridot_rae13—“just a trans girl trying to make it through life”—elaborates:

Genital preferences are fine. That’s why if you wouldn’t date a specific trans person because they don’t have the genitals you prefer, that isn’t transphobic. But assuming all trans people have genitals they were born with and that’s why you don’t date them, not only is that transphobic, but it’s just wrong to assume that. And if a transgender person claimed to only want to date people with their agab [assigned gender at birth], then they too would be transphobic. Trans people can be transphobic too; just look at all the transmen snobs. Generally speaking, it’s only transphobic if you make a blanket statement that you don’t date ANY trans people, or even worse, you only date “real” men or “real” women. This whole “super” crap is 100% transphobic because it’s a blanket statement against dating trans people, not to mention it originated in Neo-Nazi circles and SS [the Schutzstaffel]... come on.

In these instances, certain Reddit users challenge the super straight logic to argue that super straights are transphobic if they construct trans people as a monolith, especially around the genitals they have. However, these users still buy into the genital preference discourse. This discourse objectifies and reduces trans people to their genitalia (Schilt and Westbrook 2009; Westbrook and Schilt 2014). The discourse also upholds the personal preference logic, eclipsing larger structural forces shaping desires (Robinson 2015). The notion of genital preference also reinscribes genitals as being a defining feature of sex, gender, and sexuality. This re-inscription can maintain a type of genital gender essentialism as part of sexual desire and identity (Stearns 1995). In these regards, those who are trying to challenge the super straights but who still also buy into larger personal preference discourses still uphold certain ideologies that harm trans people.

Other challenges come, though, from a transgender subreddit r/transgender-circlejerk. This subreddit is a parody, whereby trans people mock transgender-related topics. As a parody, trans man poster sammcollum writes, “No one should assume anyone wants to have sex with transgenders. It’s sick they always try to push their beliefs onto us. I only like BIOLOGICAL FEMALES!!!! That’s not transphobic! It’s called a preference people!!!” In utilizing the infamous Am I the Asshole? (AITA) type posts on Reddit, another poster That’sALotOfOranges made the mock post: “AITA for not wanting to have sex with a transgender?” They went on to write, “I’m a straight man. I fully support the LGBTs [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender] and think gay marriage

should be legal and all that. But it's not my thing. I am only into biological females." ThatsALotOfOranges went on to pretend to be this straight man at the bar. They continued, "I was at bar with some friends when I saw what looked like a woman from behind. But when she (yes, I'm using her preferred pronouns instead of her biological pronouns. As stated, I'm an ally to the LGBT) turned around and I saw her face, noticed she was actually a transwoman." Going on, ThatsALotOfOranges wrote, "I didn't want anyone to think I'm gay. So I politely explain to this dude (gender neutral term) that I'm straight, that I only am attracted to females, and that her penis disgusted me." The poster goes on to say the trans woman was rude and concludes, "How is it transphobic to not want to have sex with someone? I had even told him I support the transgenders! Why do that transgenders think they're entitled to sex with me?"

Parody is a reflexive strategy that both imitates and makes fun of social practices while destabilizing reality (Pullen and Rhodes 2013). Parody can be a form of queer resistance that deconstructs discourses through subverting them through textual strategies including exaggeration (Dhaenens and Van Bauwel 2012). On the subreddit r/transgencirclejerk, parody becomes a form of trans resistance and play. This parody mocks and subverts dominant transphobic discourses, including discourses and logics used by super straights. Famously, Butler (1990; 1993) turns to drag to examine how parody can denaturalize the gender binary. Parody becomes a type of performance that can undo gender and an important part of a gender politics (Pullen and Rhodes 2013). On r/transgencirclejerk, trans posters parody and exaggerate super straight discourses—making fun of how super straights claim to not be transphobic while engaging in transphobic discourses. This parody becomes a different way of exposing the illogic of the super straights while also working to undo dominant discourses around heterosexuality and non-desires for trans people. The subreddit r/transgencirclejerk exposes the illogic of transphobia without transphobes by revealing how they are actually just transphobic.

TRANSPHOBIA WITHOUT TRANSPHOBES

In this time of both rising trans visibility and anti-trans laws, this article turned to Reddit and super straights in order to examine discourses about heterosexuality and how people engaged in discursive strategies to claim to not be transphobic while still engaging in transphobia. As gay people gained more rights in U.S society, heterosexuality shifted, whereby heterosexuality, especially heterosexual masculinity, could often not rely on explicit homophobia to shore up itself (Dean 2013). Now with more visibility of trans people, some heterosexual people are finding new ways to shore up heterosexuality without relying on explicit transphobia. That is, in this moment of changing ideas around gender and sexuality, some people are using bioessentialist frames of biological sex, "born this way" ideologies of sexual identity, and personal preference discourses to both assert and construct their heterosexuality as superior and naturally occurring and to try to legitimate their non-desire of and exclusion toward trans people without wanting to be seen as explicitly transphobic. Interestingly, people are partly using diverging discourses around gender and sexuality—that gender is socially constructed but sexuality (and sex) is inherent and natural—to try to engage in a type of progressiveness of supposedly accepting trans people and the malleability of gender

while still engaging in discriminatory practices toward and beliefs about trans folks.

Importantly, these discursive strategies are similar to the naturalization frame that is central to how people engage in racist actions and logics while reinforcing the myth of nonracialism (Bonilla-Silva 2010). For example, people may think segregation—both neighborhood segregation and only having intraracial friendships and partners—is naturally occurring or almost biologically driven ignoring how policies and practices and socialization processes shape why neighborhoods are segregated and why people form friendships with people of similar racial backgrounds (Bonilla-Silva 2010). Similarly, biological essentialism, “born this way” and personal preferences—all work to construct sexuality, identity, and desire as naturally occurring, erasing larger historical and current practices and processes that shape sexuality, identity, desire, and transphobia today.

More specifically, one strategy used to engage in transphobia without wanting to be seen as transphobic is bioessentialist frames of biological sex, reproduction, and eugenics. Notably, the notion of biological sex was born out of evolutionary science, whereby white scientists constructed white people as the most evolved for having the most sexual dimorphism (Henderson 2020; Patil 2022). Black people—including the long racist history of associating Black women with masculinity as part of denying their humanity (Collins 2005; Spillers 1987)—were seen and constructed as having low sexual dimorphism, and hence, seen as not being as evolved or as civilized (Henderson 2020; Patil 2022). Even today, this notion of biological sex has been used to deny African women such as Caster Semenya from competing in Olympic sports (Adjepong 2020). These discourses around biological sex work to maintain the sex binary and its link to sexual dimorphism and middle-class whiteness. These discourses and the white middle-class constructions of biological sex and sexual dimorphism also exclude people of color, especially trans people of color, from being desired and recognized as human (Gill-Peterson 2018). This current bioessentialist strategy, then, of denying trans people, especially trans people of color, their full humanity through relying on notions of biological sex—while still claiming to not be transphobic—comes from this larger white supremacist history.

People also rely on bioessentialist notions of sexuality and being “born this way” to engage in another discursive strategy of excluding trans people while claiming to not be transphobic. Notably, the concept of sexual identity is also tied to this white supremacist eugenic history, whereby sexual identity, and especially heterosexuality, gets invented to discipline people to reproduce—and mainly, to get middle-class white people to reproduce to further the white race (Ferguson 2005; Foucault 1976; Somerville 2000). Indeed, “born this way” and biological essentialist discourses and ideologies have often been used by people in power to actually justify and legitimate inequality and to further eugenic visions of society (Schilt 2015; Bessant 2008). And some posters on Reddit adopt this logic to argue that their heterosexual or super straight identity is inherent, and hence cannot be discriminatory toward trans people. Intriguingly and insidiously, super straights adopt a strategy used to expose inequality—gay rights uses of “born this way”—to now reassert heterosexuality as superior and to entrench inequalities against trans people, while claiming to not be transphobic.

Furthermore, people also use the contemporary dating and hookup discourse of “personal preference” to also engage in exclusionary actions toward trans people while

claiming to not be transphobic. As scholars have shown though, especially in relation to personal preference discourses around race, personal preference might be perceived as more respectful language but this discourse still maintains inequality (Robinson 2015; Forbes and Stacey 2022). Importantly, desire, “personal preference,” and partner selection are not really about the individual, as notions of desirability shape people’s life chances whereby lacking desirability can translate into negating and ignoring people and denying them resources (Han 2021). Personal preference discourse, especially the over-focus on discussing trans people’s genitals and having a genital preference, can also impact trans people outside of just dating such as the discrimination they face in the workplace, in bathrooms, and in the public sphere (Schilt and Westbrook 2009; Westbrook and Schilt 2014). While people utilize personal preference and genital preference discourses to claim that one’s exclusive desires for cis people are inherent and hence cannot be transphobic, these discourses and ideologies can have larger trans antagonistic consequences in the public and political realms.

While overt transphobia is on constant display in this historical moment of rising anti-trans laws and anti-trans backlash, understanding more covert—and at times progressive and liberal—ways that transphobia operates is also crucial in addressing trans antagonism and working toward trans liberation. Indeed, the logics and discourses examined on Reddit such as biological essentialist discourses of sex often operate in other settings, including some feminist spaces, to exclude trans people. As these logics of transphobia without transphobes might be harder to challenge compared to more overt transphobia, it is imperative to name and expose these ideologies and logics, including their historical links to white supremacy, in order to resist them. We can learn from trans people pushing back against these discourses and logics through reason, parody, and play to continue the work of ending violence and discrimination and building a world of gender liberation.

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