

“I Took a Deep Breath and Came Out as GC”: Gender Critical Storytelling, Radicalization, and Discursive Practice on Ovarit and Mumsnet

PB Berge

is an Assistant Professor in the Media & Technology Studies Program and the Department of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Alberta. She directs the Discord Academic Research Community and has published work regarding extremist networks online, feminist media practices, and trans play.

✉ pb.berge@ualberta.ca

Madison Schmalzer

is a media scholar and digital humanist invested in bringing about more liberatory futures through technology and play.

Following the closure of the anti-trans subreddit r/GenderCritical, gender critical (GC) internet users have migrated to more obscure, invite-only spaces. A side-effect of this GC dispersal is that activity in online anti-trans spaces has become increasingly obfuscated and insular. In this project, we provide an overview of the current landscape of GC activity on social media as it exists in the post-r/GenderCritical era and analyze how GCs are radicalized in forums online. Using computationally-assisted discourse analysis, we examine how users on two anti-trans community forums—Ovarit and Mumsnet's Feminism: Sex and Gender board—condition members to interact with trans people and reshape their own identities. The study is presented in two parts. First, we expose how GCs discursively position themselves as victim-aggressors, framing GC ideology as a marginalized identity while deploying far-right language and rhetoric. Second, we demonstrate how GC forum users narrativize their own lives through anti-trans storytelling practices, appropriate the language of queer identities through “coming out” narratives, and encourage anti-trans abuse through dramatized “encounter” stories. Through these disciplined discursive practices, we argue, GC forum posters remediate anti-trans ideology as personal and epistemic, further entrenching them in organized transphobia and rendering them increasingly dependent on GC communities.

KEYWORDS gender critical; anti-trans radicalization; extremism; Ovarit; Mumsnet

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In June of 2020, the subreddit r/GenderCritical (r/GC)—one of the most active “gender critical” (GC) spaces on Reddit, with over 60,000 members—was banned alongside thousands of other hateful communities as Reddit contended with notoriety for platforming extremist groups (Milton 2020).^{1,2} Following the closure of r/GC (alongside other high-profile, transphobic subreddits including r/ActualWomen, r/GenderCriticalSociety, and r/truelesbians), GC Redditors migrated to more obscure spaces across the web, including invite-only, regional, and alternative platforms. Much like Parler, Patriots.win, and Truth Social used by the alt-right in the US, new online spaces were established by and for GC users: Spinster.xyz, private Discord servers, the short-lived Giggle app, subforums on UK parenting website Mumsnet, and Ovarit (an invite-only forum imitating Reddit’s architecture run by former r/GC moderators).

While we might celebrate the closure of openly hateful communities on major social platforms, a side-effect of the dispersal of GC internet users is that activity in anti-trans spaces has become increasingly obfuscated and insular. Much research on anti-trans internet subcommunities has focused on public and algorithmic social networks: YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Tumblr, Twitter/X, Twitch, and Facebook (Baker, Ging, and Andreasen 2024; Haimson et al. 2021; Lu and Jurgens 2022; Thach et al. 2024). Yet amid an international wave of political and physical violence against transgender people, it is imperative that we attend to how, despite increased insularity, GC-run social media still shapes public discourse and radicalizes users.

This study is a part of a multi-year investigation into anti-trans forums and is the first of two publications of our findings. Our analysis suggests that GC community forums are not isolated zones of anti-trans sentiment but culturally diffusive centers wherein users learn, practice, and proliferate anti-trans discursive habits. These forums represent more than a source of transphobic disinformation—they are sites where inflammatory content reinforces a conditioned GC identity through anti-trans mythmaking, autonarrative habitus, and in-group media literacy practices. Across two studies, we attend not only to *what* transphobic content these spaces circulate but seek to understand *how* GC subcommunities shape members’ media literacy and discursive practices as part of their radicalization. In a forthcoming publication, we explore how GC subcommunities rely on fandom and an information literacy model we call the “gender critical feminist book club” to condition participants to interpret

- 1 Content Notice: This article contains quotes, excerpts, and images that feature anti-trans extremist language, including use of transphobic slurs and disparaging descriptions of transgender people. Additionally, there are brief references to sexual assault, partner/child abuse, and self-harm.
- 2 We adopt “gender critical” (GC) rather than “trans-exclusionary radical feminist” (TERF) to emphasize GC ideology as an extremist, anti-trans position. Our use of “extremist” likewise highlights how GC subcultures radicalize individuals, shaping identity around anti-trans beliefs and encouraging harmful behaviors. While we recognize scholarly critiques that the term “extremism” is over-used and risks reinforcing neoliberal norms as apolitical and can obscure anti-trans violence within mainstream cultures, we use the term deliberately to challenge GC rhetoric of victimization and underscore the danger these groups pose to trans lives. For more on the contestation of “extremism” as a conceptual frame, see Thurlow (2024), el-Ojeili and Taylor (2020), and Tetrault (2022).

media, human bodies, and even their own lives through gender- and sex-essentialist ontologies (that is, to *read like a GC*).

In this study, however, we excavate what it means to *write like a GC* by analyzing how GC forum users rely on reactionary language and deploy storytelling practices in ways that calcify their anti-trans ideologies as personal and natural while rendering transgender people as anti-feminist, dangerous, and monstrous. To identify how GC groups perform political mythmaking and construct extremist identities, we undertook a computationally assisted discursive analysis of two popular GC forums: Ovarit and Mumsnet's "Feminism: Sex & Gender" board (abbreviated to "FSG"). Through comparative platform discourse analysis, we analyzed over 80k posts and comments scraped from Ovarit and over 60k posts and comments scraped from Mumsnet (Burgess and Matamoros-Fernández 2016; Lewis and Marwick 2017). Following extant scholarship on GC and anti-trans rhetoric (Billard 2023; Vincent, Erikainen, and Pearce 2020), post-truth mis/disinformation (Cloud 2018; Rieger et al. 2021; Sawyer 2018; Tripodi 2017), and research into far-right and extremist groups (Baker, Ging, and Andreasen 2024; Daniels 2018; Ging 2019; Rogers 2020), we explain how GC users discipline one another to interact with trans people and remediate anti-trans disinformation as epistemic (that is, personal and grounded in lived experience). Specifically, we examine 1) the semantic characteristics of GC discourse, which reveal GC poster's vacillating language of victim and oppressor and proximity to far-right rhetorical strategies, and 2) the emergent life writing genres that proliferate on GC forums—particularly "peak-ing," "coming out," and "encounter" narratives. Ultimately, we argue that through disciplined rhetorical framings and emergent social practices, GC forum users become further entrenched in organized transphobia and mobilized towards anti-trans political violence.

OVARIT AND MUMSNET IN CONTEXT

Ovarit and Mumsnet exist within a broader ecology of anti-trans communities online. GC forums exist alongside public platforms such as YouTube and TikTok, which scholars have found algorithmically network anti-trans content (Billard 2023; Bassi and La-Fleur 2022). There is crucial ongoing work in extremism studies regarding the rise of anti-trans influencers on algorithmic platforms, and their connections to anti-feminist, far-right, and male-supremacist/manosphere ecosystems (Abondio 2024; Baker, Ging, and Andreasen 2024; Czerwinsky 2024). Here, we attend to the rise of GC-specific alternative social platforms. For anti-trans Redditors displaced by the closure of r/GC, several anti-trans alternative platforms emerged, including Spinster.xyz, Giggle, Discord servers, and Ovarit. Spinster.xyz is a GC-specific iteration of Twitter/X and alt-right platform Gab, and Giggle, which claimed to be a "female-only" social application, attracted controversy at its launch for its use of racist and problematic "selfie verification" technology (Berge 2024). In the years following r/GC's closure, Spinster.xyz failed to capture a sizable audience and Giggle—which lost a landmark discrimination lawsuit in 2024—has largely been offline following its rocky launch and legal inculcation.³

3 *Tickle v Giggle for Girls Pty Ltd* (No 2) [2024] FCA 960 (Austl. Fed. Ct., August 23, 2024), <https://www.fca.gov.au/publications/decisions/tickle-v-giggle-for-girls-pty-ltd-no-2>.

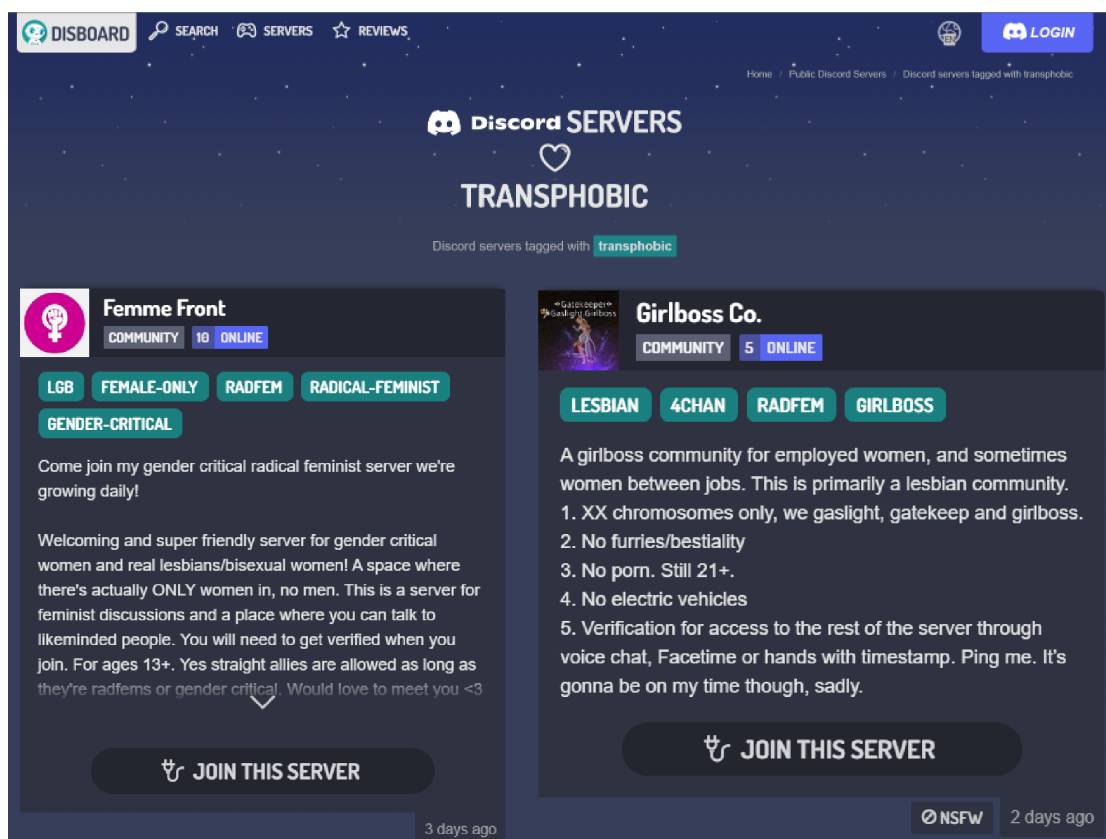


Figure 1. Public invitation listings for “radfem” and “transphobic” Discord servers advertised on bulletin site Disboard as of June 2024

Yet other GC-specific platforms persisted, and anti-trans activity in these spaces have been amplified by and contributed to recent legislative and political violence against trans people internationally (Alsott et al. 2024; DuBois 2023; McLean 2021; Thurlow 2024; Willem, Platero, and Tortajada 2022; Williams 2020). While not central to our study here, scholars have found that servers on social community application Discord are also common gathering sites for GC communities (Heslep and Berge 2021; Thach et al. 2024). This is borne out by our findings. Throughout our datasets we found that users on both Mumsnet and Ovarit circulated hundreds of links ($n_{\text{Ovarit}} = 221$; $n_{\text{FSG}} = 23$) to private, GC-specific Discord communities and social servers that, as one poster phrased it, “know what a woman is.” In one instance, users on Ovarit curated a list of two-dozen “Local and Regional Radfem Discord Servers” intended to help organize GC community members across countries. Prospective invitees were instructed to reach out to designated community managers for approval to access these private servers. With Ovarit announcing its imminent closure in 2025 (which we discuss at length in the conclusion), users began widely circulating private Discord server links. These servers were advertised as protected by strict voice and photo verification methods. This follows patterns in other extremist spaces on Discord; in their study of the platform, Heslep and Berge describe how hate groups often insulate their servers from moderation with additional verification methods, and they note that anti-trans groups

www.judgments.fedcourt.gov.au/judgments/Judgments/fca/single/2024/2024fca0960.

were prominent on Discord (Heslep and Berge 2021). We likewise found that Discord servers remain a popular venue for anti-trans users: as of June 2024, server bulletin site Disboard (which allows Discord users to publicize their servers) still advertises, indexes, and networks multiple public servers overtly tagged as “transphobic,” “rad-fem,” “LGB,” and “anti-LGBTQ” (Figure 1). Alongside Discord, links to anti-trans Tumblr posts, YouTube content from transphobic influencers, and GC resources hosted on Google Drive characterized the dataset, highlighting the inter-platform dynamics of these communities.

There remain an abundance of accounts, channels, personalities, and sites across social media and the web broadly dedicated to anti-trans activity, including many that don’t universally align themselves with GC groups (such as Kiwifarms and communities on 4chan), yet we have found forums to also be active and politically engaged spaces for organized transphobia. Invite-only and regional platforms, like these forums, are not algorithmically governed, but rather are sites where anti-trans users congregate and mobilize after being “peaked” (GC poster’s self-description for radicalization). This is to say, while anyone can be presented with anti-trans content on TikTok, YouTube, or Twitter/X, forum users on Ovarit and Mumsnet’s FSG board have deliberately embedded themselves in anti-trans communities. As we discuss below in our analysis of GC posters’ “peaking” stories, members often characterize themselves as having sought out anti-trans community spaces following their radicalization. In the post-r/GC era, anti-trans forums are insular but continue to shape anti-trans activity across the web. With this context laid out, let us now clarify how Mumsnet and Ovarit, respectively, fit into this ecosystem.

Mumsnet

Mumsnet is an internet forum established in 2000 dedicated to UK parents. Notably, Mumsnet has a longstanding reputation for being an overwhelmingly white, middle-class, and (at times) heteronormative space, yet a fixation on transgender people and opposition to trans rights has emerged over time (Baker 2022; Galpin, Gwenffrewi, and Stokoe 2023; Jensen 2013). Discussions on Mumsnet have historically centered around resources and advice for raising children, but they also took a feminist and political bent, tackling topics such as the division of household labor, the politics of pornography, and abortion rights. In the early 2010s, these were the topics that tended to dominate the “Feminism: Sex and gender discussions” (FSG) talk topic (a highly active subforum). Amid the UK government’s 2017 review of the 2004 Gender Recognition Act, the FSG boards shifted to almost exclusively discussing transgender rights amid public media coverage (McLean 2021). The FSG board became so toxic that site founder, Justine Roberts, put forth unique moderation policies in 2018 for discussing “gender identity and sex” in an attempt to “stand in solidarity with vulnerable or oppressed minorities” while also staying “committed to freedom of speech” (Roberts 2018). In effect, these moderation policies did little more than cut down on the use of overt transphobic slurs; the climate of the board remained mired in transphobia allowed under the pretense of protecting GC users’ “free speech.” Such handwashing policies are often used by platforms to mitigate accountability for users’ behavior and site content (Gillespie 2010, 2018). During this time, the FSG boards served as a site for political organizing where users circulated petitions, links to anti-trans organizations, and information for contacting representatives about repealing the GRA.

When r/GC closed, Mumsnet was poised to take on the influx of GC users as it had established a climate friendly to anti-trans forum users.⁴ The FSG boards overlap with the broader audiences of Mumsnet and British internet users generally, as it is a more public-facing site than other anti-trans networks. Instances of confrontation and context collapse, where posts by GC users are seen and engaged beyond the intended audience, are more common on FSG than other forums. Importantly, the dynamics of the FSG board are fundamentally different from, albeit entangled with, the culture of Mumsnet at large. Mumsnet hosts many subforums, and we will use the term “FSG” through the remainder of the paper to refer to the FSG boards specifically. This is done both for clarity and because, while Mumsnet is—as a platform—affiliated with anti-trans movements, our data is limited to the activity of the FSG boards. That said, it is important to remember that FSG remains entangled with Mumsnet generally and the politics of UK nationalism, colonialism, and British white supremacy (Evang 2022).

Ovarit

While FSG, over time, has become a cultural hub for GC users and dominated by anti-trans extremism, Ovarit emerged directly in response to the closure of r/GC and has maintained an emphasis on anti-trans community-building and mobilization since its founding. While FSG users are predominantly located in the UK, Ovarit users appeared to be primarily located in the US and demonstrated preoccupation with American events and issues. Much like other Reddit-clones created by far-right movements (including Voat and patriots.win), Ovarit imitates Reddit’s architecture by dividing posts across topical hierarchies sorted by most recent, “top,” and “hot.” From the site’s name (a pun on “ovaries”) to its subforums (called “circles,” e.g. include o/ItsAFetish and o/SaveWomensSports), Ovarit actively positions itself as an anti-trans rallying point online. One of Ovarit’s developers, M.K. Fain (also a co-founder of Spinster.xyz), admitted in her magazine *4W* that a clear “us vs. them narrative” is integral to the site’s design and a necessary evil that is “effective in building and mobilizing communities” (Fain 2020).

While much of Ovarit is dedicated to anti-trans causes, the site also hosts a variety of subforums for general interests, including o/movies, o/books, and o/games. A former r/GC and current Ovarit moderator who goes by the handle Womenopausal claims in an interview that Ovarit’s goal is not to be “the new r/GenderCritical” but rather “to be the new Reddit... on a smaller scale, and with a very different culture naturally” (Fain 2020). Thus, administrators are not suggesting Ovarit has ambitions to grow to Reddit’s scope, but rather that Ovarit might eclipse Reddit’s role in users’ daily activity online. Womenopausal goes on to claim that Ovarit has two functions: 1) to become a hub for discussing and teaching about radical feminism and 2) “to provide a woman-centered space for discussion of everything that interests women.” Community members’ broader interests, then, become an onramp and site of retention within

4 This timeline is supported by the writings of Sarah Pedersen, particularly in her book *The Politicization of Mumsnet*. Pedersen’s work, however, uncritically celebrates Mumsnet’s rise as a “safe space for gender criticals” (Pedersen 2020: 158) and Pedersen herself has made proclamatory anti-trans statements in her work.

the closed ecosystem of Ovarit. As we discuss further in forthcoming work, this proximity to media and daily life is precisely what makes Ovarit such a dangerous vehicle for anti-trans extremism and disinformation.

Notably, as we were finalizing this manuscript, the site administrator announced that Ovarit would be shutting down on April 27th of 2025. We reflect on this announcement in the conclusion to this article, but it is notable that—at time of writing—Ovarit remains one of the most crucial platforms for organized transphobia and GC community building online.

PRIOR LITERATURE

Our study draws from the work of media scholars who have documented the unfurling of anti-trans disinformation and transphobia in online extremism. Fran Amery and Aurelien Mondon document how organized transphobia intersects with reactionary political movements online and relies on rhetorics of moral panics and populism to create “othering” narratives (Amery and Mondon 2025). TJ Billard’s (2023, 237) research clarifies the types and effects of various forms of disinformation circulated by GC communities, including *othering narratives*, *essentializing narratives*, and *authenticating narratives*, which all undermine trans identity and “reify the [cultural] hierarchies that privilege cisgender TERFs.” While our study explores specifically *how* GC posters condition one another and catalyze such disinformation, these categories of “identity propaganda” are deeply rooted in the data we present. Media researchers have explained how social media plays a role in promoting trans survival, resource-building, and community while simultaneously making trans people hypervisible and fostering conditions for anti-trans congregations to form. For example, Moya Bailey (2021) and Jackson, Bailey, and Foucault Welles (2020) have documented the ways that social media has created activist communities of resilience and vulnerabilities for trans people of color in the US as demonstrated by campaigns like #FreeCeCe and #GirlsLikeUs.

The rhetorical traditions of GC and TERF discourse have also been thoroughly discussed by scholars (Awkward-Rich 2017, 2022; Keegan 2020; Lewis and Seresin 2022; Libby 2022; Stone 1992; Stryker 2004). Cristan Williams (2020, 57) provides an overview of how GC sex-essentialist ideologies build upon the rhetorical and moral constructs of early anti-trans feminists and that “it is the need to defend an ontological woman rooted in sex-essentialism that morally animates TERF rhetoric and behaviors.” Other scholars have argued that the political alliance between conservative Christian nationalists and GC groups is not, as is often described, unlikely (Careaga-Pérez 2016; Graff, Kapur, and Walters 2019; Libby 2022). As C. Libby (2022, 438) notes, both groups rely on affective rhetoric that positions “cisgender women and evangelicals, not transgender people [as] sympathetic, endangered, and subject to injury.” Our findings reinforce this understanding: GC posters on both forums demonstrate savvy understanding of personal writing and emotional storytelling that obscure their politically violent contexts. Other research—particularly Gill-Peterson’s work on GC mothers in the UK—have centered on anti-trans political mobilization against trans youth (Gill-Peterson 2024).

While our instinct as researchers might be to contest GC forum members’ circulation of anti-trans disinformation, such corrections do little to deter the political

mobilization of the anti-trans mythmaking apparatuses at work in these spaces. Information scholars have documented this at length: our traditional understandings of “radicalization” problematically flatten user-media relationships and do not account for the role of affect and epistemology (Marwick, Clancy, and Furl 2022; Tripodi 2017). Marwick, Clancy, and Furl (2022), drawing on Marwick’s extensive research on QAnon conspiracy theorists (Marwick and Partin 2022), argue that extremists often demonstrate savvy yet conditioned media literacy strategies and that their beliefs are ultimately shaped by the “intertextual, interpretive practice[s]” learned in these communities. Thus, they argue, researchers must attend both to how extremist communities online are structured and how they shape participant epistemology. Dana Cloud (2018) similarly argues in *Reality Bites* that informational counternarratives to extremist practices are fundamentally insufficient when extremism has been internalized as part of one’s epistemic frame (that is, one’s core sense of self and the world). Cloud instead argues for the practice of “frame-checking”—a means of “evaluat[ing] the narrative and other meaning making that couches information in context” (Cloud 2018, 188). Cloud’s framework examines the ways that a community’s doxastic beliefs (a culturally constructed “common sense”) become remediated through social practices as epistemic (that is, personal and experiential). This understanding of extremism is crucial to the design of our study: we are ultimately interested in understanding how and where GC communities encourage members to internalize gender-essentialist doxa as personal belief. In this same vein, our study explores how the discourse and storytelling practices of GC extremists on Mumsnet and Ovarit couch anti-trans disinformation in personal narratives.

Despite the public criticisms of Ovarit and FSG for circulating anti-trans extremist content (Edie Miller famously noted that “Mumsnet is to British transphobia more like what 4Chan is to American fascism”), both FSG and Ovarit have received little academic attention in extremism scholarship. While these platforms are insular and niche, what GC forum users do in private has dire consequences for trans people and the project of trans liberation. We found that GC forums are politically mobilized, as indicated by regular links to petitions, events, and ballot measures appearing on FSG and Ovarit. However, while users on these sites encourage legislative interventions and other forms of anti-trans protesting, they are also likewise pedagogical, inculcating users to adopt specific discursive practices and epistemic frames. Our study is less concerned that extremist sites like Ovarit and FSG exist or even with what anti-trans disinformation and political activism that is circulated within them. Rather, we seek to excavate how these communities shape the media literacy practices and political identities of GC users. By attending to the ways that users post in GC forums, we analyze how social media platforms shape and reinforce extremist epistemology and argue that media and information literacy practices are at the heart of anti-trans mobilization.

METHODS

Data Collection

This study relied on a computationally-assisted discourse analysis of data collected from FSG and Ovarit using Python notebooks developed by one of the authors.

Data from each platform was collected and analyzed separately, using the means below.

Ovarit

Given Ovarit's overt focus on GC issues, we found it prudent to survey as much of the site as possible. To gain a representative sample of ongoing conversations, we scraped (up to) the top 25 threads from each of Ovarit's 20 publicly-listed circles (subforums), resulting in a total sample of 2,223 thread posts as well as 84,232 user comments. Notably, these were the 25 "Top" threads in each circle, meaning that the most-upvoted posts were collected. For each post, we collected the text, thread URL, vote score, post type (comment or thread post) and username of the poster. Data was collected in six consecutive batches across two days in November of 2023. The subforums included were: o/Activism, o/Announcements, o/Books, o/Canceled, o/FeministBooks, o/FeministEvents, o/FeministVideos, o/Games, o/GenderCritical, o/GoodNewsForWomen, o/Movies, o/Ovarit, o/Radfemmetry, o/SaveWomensSports, o/ItsAFetish, o/STEM, o/Television, o/TerfsASlur, o/WomensHistory, and o/WomensLiberation.

Mumsnet

Mumsnet posts within the FSG board are organized in a single feed. While Ovarit has forum subcategories (circles), FSG is a subforum itself, and does not have subcategories. Given that the discussion on FSG regularly involves trans- and gender-related subjects, it was likewise important to grab a wide sample. We scraped the most recent 3,767 threads and an accompanying 57,791 comments.⁵ In each case, the text, username, datetime, post type, and thread URL were collected. Data was collected in April of 2024.

Analysis

Following established practices in cross-platform social media analysis, data was computationally and manually analyzed using a mixed-methods, recursive process (Burgess and Matamoros-Fernández 2016; Makhortykh et al. 2022; Massanari 2017). The data was initially reviewed through two means: 1) close review of the most-active threads from each dataset and 2) examination of post text across each dataset using Python and digital humanist tools for the purposes of identifying patterns and outliers (see Appendix A for details). From this initial review, the authors developed several possible themes and patterns which were then computationally evaluated against the full dataset. Our procedure was recursive: as we evaluated patterns, our analysis generated new themes and further directed our review of specific threads and posts. For example, in our manual review of forum data, we noted two threads dedicated to "coming out" stories. We then used concordance tools to identify every other appearance and variation of "coming out" posts across each dataset, which we reviewed comparatively in context—thereby demonstrating the broader scope of this practice across the dataset. This procedure was repeated for each finding presented here.

5 FSG threads were scraped according to recency because Mumsnet's boards have neither an upvoting system, nor a way to sort posts by activity or popularity.

In our findings, we present qualitative analyses of user posts that demonstrate how these discursive practices are deployed by GC users alongside quantitative data (which we note by token count in each dataset: n_{Ovarit} and n_{FSG} , respectively) that contextualizes the prevalence of each pattern. Where token counts are presented, these represent the number of appearances in post/comment text across each dataset. Other metadata, including URLs, poster usernames, and votes, are not included in token counts, but were consulted by the authors for context. Token counts only include direct appearances and conjugations, unless additional variations are noted. We have chosen this approach because it allows us to illustrate narrative practices while still providing a longitudinal view of trends in anti-trans discourse. User data presented from the dataset is generally anonymized (except for site founders and administrators publicly affiliated with these platforms) to reduce searchability.

In the following two sections we describe key findings from our review of the dataset. Firstly, we extend the work of previous scholars by demonstrating how the discourse of GC forum posters shares a telling proximity to the language of far-right movements. We then turn to three genres of anti-trans storytelling GC “peaking” stories, “coming out” narratives, and the transphobic “encounter” narrative (dramatic retellings of mundane run-ins with trans people). Through attention to the specific language and storytelling practices of users, we demonstrate how GC community members discursively create isolated communities and escalate extremist positionality through autonarrative habitus.

GC DISCURSIVE PROXIMITY TO FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM

Over the last five years, crucial research has emerged linking the political mobilization of GC, anti-trans, and anti-gender groups with far-right and neofascist movements (Balci et al 2023). As Tudor (2021, 243) writes, “transphobic feminists not only copy the language of the far right but are also part of far-right discourse.” Our findings here echo this previous scholarship, rearticulating a persistent overlap in the discursive practices of GC posters and other far-right groups. Overall, we found that GC rhetoric was characterized by four key similarities with far-right rhetoric: an emphasis on 1) self-victimization, 2) “wokeism,” 3) “cancel culture,” and 4) a denigration of sex-workers.

Constructing Victim Ideologies

Much like alt-right and ultraconservative groups in the US, users on Ovarit and FSG framed themselves as experiencing righteous backlash from a monolithic “queercult” ($n_{\text{Ovarit}} = 303$, $n_{\text{FSG}} = 274$) and its allies. Posters also repeatedly described themselves as being silenced and rejected by “mainstream” culture, friends, family, and colleagues. Feminist scholars have previously noted this shared rhetorical strategy, arguing that “trans-exclusionary feminisms deploy the rhetorical flashpoints of victimization and endangerment as part of an ongoing effort to forge and consolidate a new vision of cis womanhood” (Bassi and LaFleur 2022, 325; see also Lewis and Seresin 2022; Vincent, Erikainen, and Pearce 2020). This construction of womanhood, according to Tudor (2021, 241), “uses the same vocabulary and logics as right-wing anti-gender argumentation” and reinforces racialized hierarchies and white plasticity. Evang notes

that anti-trans discourse in Europe often centers the vulnerability of white women and children:

the malleability that white, civilized subjects are imbued with can back-fire; it is what makes white women and children particularly susceptible to being perverted and exploited by “gender ideologues” and “racialized others.” (Evang 2022, 381)

Accordingly, both datasets were inflected with colonial and nationalist framings of political events.

Ovarit and FSG users performed “transvestigations” of athletes and celebrities from outside Europe and North America. More generally, discussion of gender diverse people of color from outside the US and UK was levied to reinforce the local oppression of GC posters themselves. For example, one user on FSG shared an *Independent* article titled “How climate change is hitting vulnerable Indonesian sex workers” with the caption “Is this the most woke headline ever?” In the 80 responses to this thread, users not only accused the journalist of “farm[ing] oppression points” and “TRA [Trans Rights Activist] propaganda,” but suggested that the article was, itself, a harm to white UK women, as the article performed a racist exclusion of white people and that such a “specific” focus meant that “women’s sports, changing rooms, toilets, free speech, being utterly ignored by politicians as if women are invisible” [FSG]. As one user noted: “The key takeaways are that there are too many white people in the countryside... (with the unspoken assumption here that the subject would prefer that there were more people like her there)” [FSG]. This reframing of oppression is not incidental but reflects the ways that the GC users discursively assert their position as victims by courting a “longer genealogy of racialized plasticity” (Evang 2022, 378). This vacillating position of victim-aggressor is foundational to the rhetoric found in GC forums and is—as we demonstrate through the remainder of this article—further evidenced by their storytelling practices.

Opposing Wokeism

The discourse carried strong animosity towards political progressives and liberals exemplified by the widespread invocation of “wokeness.” “Woke” has long history in American Black communities stretching back to the 1920s, however the term entered the broader public’s vernacular in 2014 after the police murder of Micheal Brown in Ferguson, Missouri (Romano 2020). The term has been used to signal an opposition to and vigilance against anti-Black violence, in particular police brutality, but has morphed into a catchall term used by conservative reactionaries to denigrate left leaning political commitments generally. Variations of “woke” (especially “people” and “agenda”), “wokeists,” “wokies,” “wokesters,” and “Wokerati” appeared hundreds of times across both sites ($n_{\text{Ovarit}} = 942$; $n_{\text{FSG}} = 516$). “Woke,” and its variations, were used—as they are in other reactionary subcultures—as oppositional labels targeting neoliberal political institutions and progressive individuals (Asen 2024). The flexibility of the term was crucial to its use: “woke” was generally used as a way of lumping trans people, their allies, and progressives into a homogenous political target—often framing them as ignorant, selfish, or misogynist/anti-feminist:

soothing the hurty feelings of some self-obsessed woke twats is given more priority than burglary, assaults, murders, rapes etc. [FSG]

You did NOT deserve this. You are NOT a transphobic liar. And don't let the woke misogynists convince you otherwise. [Ovarit]

More often, “woke” was simply used as a shorthand for the political antipode to GC ideology. For example, one FSG poster politically grouped their children under the labels of “gender critical” and “woke” based on their support of trans rights:

My 3 eldest dc [dear children] are gender critical, they are 33, 31 and 25.

My younger 2 are full on woke at 20 and 15. [FSG]

On Ovarit specifically, GC posters also used the term woke to distinguish between the “libfems” (progressive individuals warped by trans ideology) and “radfems” (another term for GCs).

Lamenting Cancel Culture

In the same way that far-right groups describe themselves as maligned and slandered by the “mainstream media,” GC users likewise lamented being “silenced” and “canceled”—a term widely associated with the deplatforming of far-right figures (Boehme and Scott 2020; Isom, Tonique, and Boehme 2021; Munn 2019)—by mainstream media outlets and women’s/queer communities. This echoes previous arguments by Lavery (2019, 127) that GC feminists often rely on “the framing of trans lives as case studies in an ongoing conversation about free speech.” In our data, GC posters demonstrated a discursive preoccupation with the threat of being “canceled,” appearing hundreds of times across both data sets: “cancel culture” ($n_{\text{Ovarit}} = 544$; $n_{\text{FSG}} = 746$), “silencing” ($n_{\text{Ovarit}} = 342$; $n_{\text{FSG}} = 401$), and “censorship” ($n_{\text{Ovarit}} = 324$; $n_{\text{FSG}} = 244$). In Ovarit’s case, one of its most popular circles, o/Canceled, is set up to “catalog the attempts... to silence those who speak out against the TRA/gendercult” (Figure 2). This preoccupation with cancel culture reflected GC posters’ investment in positioning themselves as a countercultural movement, and their antagonism was often directed at press outlets, namely “mainstream media,” “mainstream news,” and “mainstream feminist” publications ($n_{\text{Ovarit}} = 357$; $n_{\text{FSG}} = 235$).

Antipathy Towards Sex-Workers

Much like manosphere and incel groups that denigrate sex workers and exhibit a puritanical concern with sexual deviance (Devries, Bessant, and Watts 2021; Monea 2022; Phipps 2021), GC users’ rhetoric consistently disparaged, targeted, and demonstrated enmity towards sex workers, who were referred to as “prostitutes” ($n_{\text{Ovarit}} = 509$; $n_{\text{FSG}} = 371$) and accused of proliferating the “porn addicted” and “pornsick” ($n_{\text{Ovarit}} = 1,350$; $n_{\text{FSG}} = 482$) conditions under which gender ideology allegedly proliferates. Denigration of sex workers is an established component of GC ideology. As Phipps writes, the grouping of trans people and sex workers as political targets stems from the way GC groups police gender according to white, bourgeois imaginaries of womanhood (Phipps 2020). Both sex workers and trans people are denied personhood because of their deviant relationships with sex, gender, and labor. Importantly, these deviant acts are rhetorically positioned as impinging on “women’s safety,” something that was foundational to discussions on FSG and Ovarit. Accordingly, we found that the rhetorical blurring of trans identities, kink, sex work, and pornography under a catchall of “sexual deviancy” underscores GC discourse. One Ovarit poster directly summed up these preoccupations

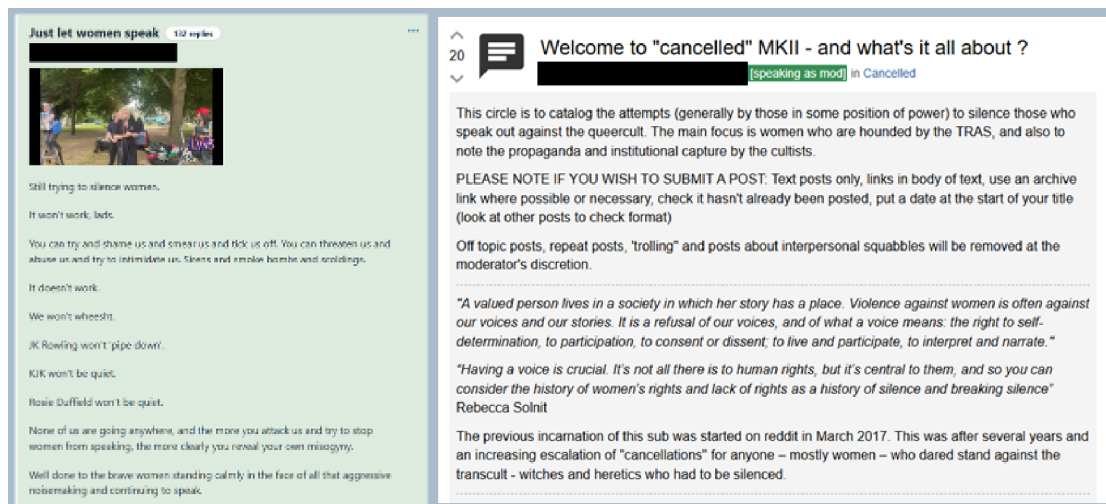


Figure 2. Example posts from FSG (left) and Ovarit (right) referencing “cancel culture” and alleged silencing of GC voices

by listing the most major problems they had with the “American left,” which included support for “prostitution, surrogacy and porn, along with gender ideology.” Posters regularly moved between these labels and would link discussions of trans identity with pornography or sexual perversion:

A lot of the male ones [trans women] are pornsick and obsessed with looking like a cute uwu anime girl. [Ovarit]

In my experience, any man who labels himself as a male feminist tends to be a misogynistic tosser. I’ve known a few like that and they all had extensive porn habits and actually didn’t cope that well when they had female bosses telling them what to do. They then turned into TRAS, predictably. [FSG]

While I think it’s important to put aside bias over sex or race and choice of partner, obvious signs of abnormal sexuality should not be ignored. There’s good reason why many people view inappropriately dressed men with suspicion and it’s not bigotry. [Ovarit]

By linking trans identities to a broad label of sexual deviancy, GCs seek to invalidate trans individuals and sex workers vulnerability and recenter a white, cisgender femininity. Connections with other anti-sex and anti-sex-worker spaces, is both discursive and infrastructural: Ovarit dedicates an entire circle, o/AntiKink, that hosts anti-sex and anti-pornography discussions. In this way, these forums and platforms are positioned to recruit and network members invested in anti-sex politics.

A Fraught Alignment

These overlaps are ultimately unsurprising: previous scholarship has suggested complex political entanglements between GC groups online and alt-right groups (Lewis and Seresin 2022; Tudor 2021; Vincent, Erikainen, and Pearce 2020). We wish to both echo and further clarify this understanding through our findings: GC groups indeed

signaled coalitional proximity to far-right groups and emulated their specific discursive practices. GC posters were, however, overtly conflicted about their proximity to far-right movements. On the one hand, some users openly advocated for allyship with far-right groups or suggested coalitional mobilization. For example, one user noted that it was important that GC users post and spread their message within conservative spaces:

GC feminists have been crafting the catchphrases for a while... It's time to go into conservative forums and share this with conservatives.

[Ovarit]

Beyond infiltration and dissemination of information within far-right spaces, discussions of how GC communities might interface with far-right communities online were not uncommon. We found users on both FSG and Ovarit describe how they would be voting in coalitional alignment with far-right movements in regard to anti-trans legislation. A FSG poster, for instance, described the Labour party's belief that "TAWW [Trans Women Are Women]" as reason enough "to hold [their] nose and vote Conservative."

Yet other users on both Ovarit and FSG expressed frustration about or denied their political proximity to far-right movements. GC communities noted their hostility to "MRAs" (men's right activists), incels, and "femcels," even as they regularly adopted the anti-sex, anti-porn, and anti-sex-worker rhetoric commonly used in those communities. Notably, this influence is reciprocal: as Baker et al. contend, organized transphobia has, since 2020, vastly reshaped the algorithmic landscape of the manosphere in turn (Ging 2019). This vacillating position is integral to GC rhetoric on these forums: GC posters distance themselves from far-right movements by emphasizing their feminist commitments even as they imitate the specific language of and actively work alongside other anti-trans groups. Users on both forums identified themselves as being "politically homeless." This political homelessness, as they articulated, was due to the "silencing" and "erasure" they faced from mainstream media alongside their discomfort with the misogynistic and ultraconservative language of the far-right.

As organized transphobia scholars note, there have been longstanding collusions between feminist and fascist groups, and GC movements are only the most recent (and well-organized) of these ventures (Evang 2022; Gill-Peterson 2021; Lewis and Seresin 2022). What was of interest to us as researchers, however, was how GC posters maintained their anti-trans doxastic agenda amid their vacillating political discourse. We theorize that the rhetorical entrenchment of GC posters is mediated by specific, autonarrative practices: modes of personal storytelling which—to use Cloud's model—remediate doxastic political belief into epistemological truth. Through this remediation, posters are disciplined to frame their participation in organized transphobia not as ideological, but as the personal and social realization of a persecuted, endemic GC identity. By excavating these specific practices, we demonstrate how the political ideologies of anti-trans hate groups are mobilized through personal mythmaking on these forums.

GC AUTONARRATIVE PRACTICES

Recasting “GC” as an Endemic, Personal Identity

There is one further connection between the rhetoric of GC users and far-right groups that warrants particular attention: the use of in-group language to describe one’s personal narrative of radicalization. Specifically, GC forums regularly centered discussions of “peaking,” a term used to describe a dramatic, egg-crack moment in which a poster “discovered” the fraudulence of gender ideology and “realized” they were GC. This language is analogous to other group narratives of radicalization, particularly the infamous alt-right motif of “redpilling.”⁶ Information scholars have documented the alt-right’s description of redpilling as “a decisive moment of conversion, a single event that radically transforms the subject forever” (Munn 2019). While scholars of disinformation and hate movements have noted that this is a fictive depiction—internet users are, in fact, radicalized more slowly through several phases that take place following sustained interaction with extremist media and communities (Lewis and Marwick 2017; Marwick, Clancy, and Furl 2022; Rieger et al. 2021)—such narratives of peaking remain central to GC users’ own descriptions of their political identities. As we discuss in this section, in-group stories of peaking and subsequently “coming out” as GC, further reify fantasies that mainstream culture is silencing, canceling, or confusing vulnerable GC users and confusing would-be GC community members who simply haven’t peaked yet.

We examined how GC posters were performing this rhetorical positioning across both platforms. GC users regularly described their GC beliefs as an endemic identity, rooted in a doxastic framing of womanhood. This emphasis on the endemicity of GC ideology was made apparent in the way that GC users addressed other members through nominalized terms. On Ovarit specifically, GC users relied on a variety of emergent terms to hail other members. “Radfem” ($n_{\text{Ovarit}} = 412$) was used frequently on Ovarit to refer to other members and to signal anti-trans association. (i.e. “this video is a love letter to all my radfem sisters” [Ovarit], “as a radfem I barely dare to open my mouth” [Ovarit]). “Ryn” and “gyns” ($n_{\text{Ovarit}} = 51$) were used to refer to other GC users (i.e. “Love you gyns”, “Thank you GYNS!!”, and “You gyns inspire me daily”).

This said, “GC” ($n_{\text{Ovarit}} = 776$; $n_{\text{FSG}} = 2,377$) was by far the most common term used by both Ovarit and FSG users self-referentially and to address other members. While posters did use “GC” in the context of “GC views” ($n_{\text{Ovarit}} = 16$; $n_{\text{FSG}} = 140$), “GC women” ($n_{\text{Ovarit}} = 60$; $n_{\text{FSG}} = 156$), or “GC feminism” ($n_{\text{Ovarit}} = 24$; $n_{\text{FSG}} = 92$), “GC” was often used as a nominalized term and as a standalone identity marker:

there are a few people GCs/RFs [radfems] need to be aware of. [Ovarit]

I’m fed up with the Twitterverse GCs. [Ovarit]

- 6 It’s worth noting that the term “redpilling,” used by alt-right groups is likewise co-opted from queer communities, as the term draws from *The Matrix*, which has been widely lauded as a landmark work in trans cinema in which the red pill and blue pill represent an analogy for HRT and awareness of the malleability of gender. For further context, see Keegan (2018) and Munn (2023).

I'm GC but not very bothered about the pronouns issue. [FSG]

100% Labour - and I'm GC. Our country shouldn't be in this state. [FSG]

Across both datasets, users relied on "GC" not only as a descriptor for their views or a subject for discussion, but as an identity marker in itself. Within these groups, "GC" is seen as something that one *is*. GC users maintained a clear group-identity, which they established as innate to the "gyns." That is, within the framing of GC rhetoric, people can *be* GC, but people are misled by "TRAs," short for "Trans Rights Activists," and "gender ideology." As we illustrate below, this idea that one "is" and "becomes" GC is a key discursive practice that enabled posters to craft personal narratives in which their radicalization is framed as a personal discovery, realization, or "coming out."

The suggested endemicity of GC extremism is especially important, and becomes starker, given the way that transness is framed as an ideology separated from identity. Across the dataset, GC posters rhetorically distanced transness from lived experience, casting it as an ideology maintained by "TRAs." This is an established practice in reactionary feminist movements that has been noted by scholars that serves to erase the personhood of trans people by framing them as a monolithic, ideological group (Bassi and LaFleur 2022; Billard 2023; Williams 2020). While it is unsurprising that our datasets were riddled with unconscionable descriptions of trans people, we wish to highlight some of the most pervasive patterns in how transgender people were framed in GC discourse:

1. On both forums, discussions of "TRAs" ($n_{\text{Ovarit}} = 2,076$; $n_{\text{FSG}} = 1,464$) were nearly ubiquitous (i.e. "I find the TRA movement narcissistic and childish- but also dangerous." [FSG], "the aggressive male TRA movement which is stomping all over Twitter telling people to suck their lady cock." [FSG]).
2. "Trans ideology" ($n_{\text{Ovarit}} = 175$; $n_{\text{FSG}} = 303$) and "gender ideology" ($n_{\text{Ovarit}} = 337$; $n_{\text{FSG}} = 1,002$), as well as some additional variations, were commonly used to describe trans subject-positions (i.e. "the obvious clash between trans ideology and women's rights" [FSG], "trans ideology is just another arm of the patriarchy" [Ovarit]).
3. "Trans-identified female" and "trans-identified male" ($n_{\text{Ovarit}} = 138$; $n_{\text{FSG}} = 152$), often abbreviated as "TIF" and "TIM" on Ovarit ($n_{\text{Ovarit}} = 1,438$), were widely used as pejorative labels for trans people. While TIF/TIM acronyms are technically banned on Mumsnet,⁷ variations of "trans-identified" were still present on FSG.

Ultimately, these practices were unsurprising features of the discourse. Reactionary feminist movements often seek to invert the political landscape by framing themselves as a politically vulnerable group using the language of an "ontological womanhood," while simultaneously suggesting that trans rights are an ideological concern (Williams 2020). Yet, as we explore in the following sections, it is the autonarrative

7 "TIF" and "TIM" were banned across Mumsnet by founder Justine Roberts along with the terms "cis" and "TERF" as "many feminists are affronted by" the terms (Roberts 2018). These changes were aimed at encouraging "civil debate," exemplifying the apolitical posturing that gives lip service to free speech and open debate while allowing Mumsnet leadership to abdicate responsibility for their culpability in fostering transphobia.

practices that these discursive features enable that make GC rhetoric so personally motivated. GC posters form mythological framings of their “peaking” that reinforce their extremism as part of their political and gendered identities. At the same time, the denigration of “TIFs” and “TIMs” is wielded to render transgender people as folkloric subjects through memetic “encounter” narratives. These narrative practices build upon these reactionary discursive elements to entrench users in GC extremism by re-mediating community belief as deeply personal life stories.

“COMING OUT” NARRATIVES

The reframing of “GC” as a personal identity was underscored by our discovery that GC posters, seeking to invert the political landscape and center a narrative of self-victimization, co-opted the language of queer communities in their personal narratives. Posters regularly described their experience “coming out” as GC. In these instances, “coming out” meant disclosing their anti-trans beliefs or proximity to extremist platforms or communities. Such stories are epistemic and affective, demonstrating C. Libby’s (2022, 427) argument that “transphobia is not merely a conceptual error but also a form of affective resonance.” We documented dozens of threads across both Ovarit and FSG where GCs posters reflected on their coming out stories through narrative retellings or sought feedback on their plans to come out.

For example, one FSG user wrote that they “just ‘came out’ (as GC) to two friends” and inquired of other users whether they were similarly “out’ to their friends.” This post garnered many responses sharing methods for avoiding “rant[ing],” “shoe-horn[ing],” or “feel[ing] tinfoil-hat” when coming out to friends and coworkers as GC. In this case, the queer language of coming out was deployed to reinforce GC political alignment as an endemic, marginalized identity that risked public censure if revealed. In another example, from Ovarit’s o/Canceled subforum, several users participated in a discussion of workplace policies and navigating the risk of getting fired for violating discrimination clauses. One user took this as an opportunity to share their coming out story:

I took a deep breath and came out as GC to my boss a couple weeks ago to warn her that I am planning to refuse to comply with any such paperwork, trainings, forced use of pronouns, etc. She is not GC, I’d classify her as a libfem, but she understood and is supportive of me for now. I love my company and my boss and hope it doesn’t come to this, but I’ve thought a lot about this, and I work for a large, visible tech company, and I am prepared to fight this and get fired over it if it comes to that.
[Ovarit]

This brief anecdote is indicative of several rhetorical elements that saturate coming out posts on Ovarit and FSG. The author positions themselves as oppressed by the dystopian conformity policies of their company; despite being the one setting out to violate anti-discrimination clauses, they situate themselves as the subject of discrimination. They signal their feminist resistance to policies (“I am planning to refuse to comply”) and position themselves as speaking truth to power, risking censure and even unemployment, while noting that they are “prepared to fight this and get fired over it.” Perhaps most crucially, the post relies on a narrative richness (“I took a deep breath

and...”) that roots it in the personal, embodied, and emotional experience of the speaker. For the author and users of this forum, this is not someone mobilizing anti-trans political agendas in their workplace: this is someone risking retribution for standing by their feminist identity.

Across dozens of threads, users demonstrated how telling one’s coming out story was an important aspect of their identity as a GC. This language often moved in-step with discussions of being canceled or silenced (discussed previously). For example, an FSG user described how they “came out” to their son and husband regarding their belief that “TW [trans women] are men.” The poster mentioned that their son “gave a strong lecture” and their husband “has gone silent.” They attributed their ability to come out, despite the hostile reaction from their family, to the “bravery of MNers [Mumsnetters] in standing up to this IRL.” Another FSG user wrote: “I’m a senior HCP [Health Care Professional] and have been carefully emphasising the need to record sex medical accurately [sic] for months now, and have received... knowing looks and quietly supportive nods in return. So I’m not out out, but I am sure that people are aware of my views.” An Ovarit poster described how they “Got tipsy and ended up outing my GC views to a friend.” In a follow-up post, they discussed how their friend ended contact with them following this event and shared their emotional turmoil at the loss. These deeply personal—and at times, heart-wrenching—vignettes followed a pattern of storytelling that celebrated acceptance from family and/or coworkers or solicited sympathy for facing retribution and alienation. Other users reinforced this sentiment by lamenting that they were still “closeted” or discussing their fear of reproach if they were to come out (Figure 3).

While the irony of anti-trans extremists relying on the language of “coming out” is apparent, it’s important to note that this is a reactionary discursive tactic that reinforces the GC position as inherently vulnerable, personal, marginalized, and subject to cultural censure and violence. Even as GC extremists amass political power, celebrate legislative restrictions on trans healthcare, and erode the safety of trans people, they still describe themselves as the oppressed. What is unique to GC movements is the specific linguistic mimicry that at once borrows from far-right self-victimization rhetoric regarding cancel culture, wokeism, and silencing while simultaneously using the very language of the marginalized communities they oppress.

ANTI-TRANS MYTHMAKING AND ENCOUNTER NARRATIVES

Much like “coming out” narratives, an emergent genre central to the posting practices on both platforms was the “encounter” story: a dramatic telling of one’s encounter with a transgender person, “TRA,” or reaction bait (often referred to as “peak trans” content). Time and again, unremarkable run-ins with a trans person at a grocery check-out, in a bathroom, or at a social event were described in imposing narration as an encounter with “one of them.” As one Ovarit poster demonstrated:

There’s a TIM at the natural foods grocery where I buy a few things...
I said to him, after he rang me up, “Thanks. And I’d just like to tell you that I think it’s great that men can express themselves however they like, now!” Then I walked out with my groceries... I’m sure he went home fuming and cursing the clueless old lady. [Ovarit]

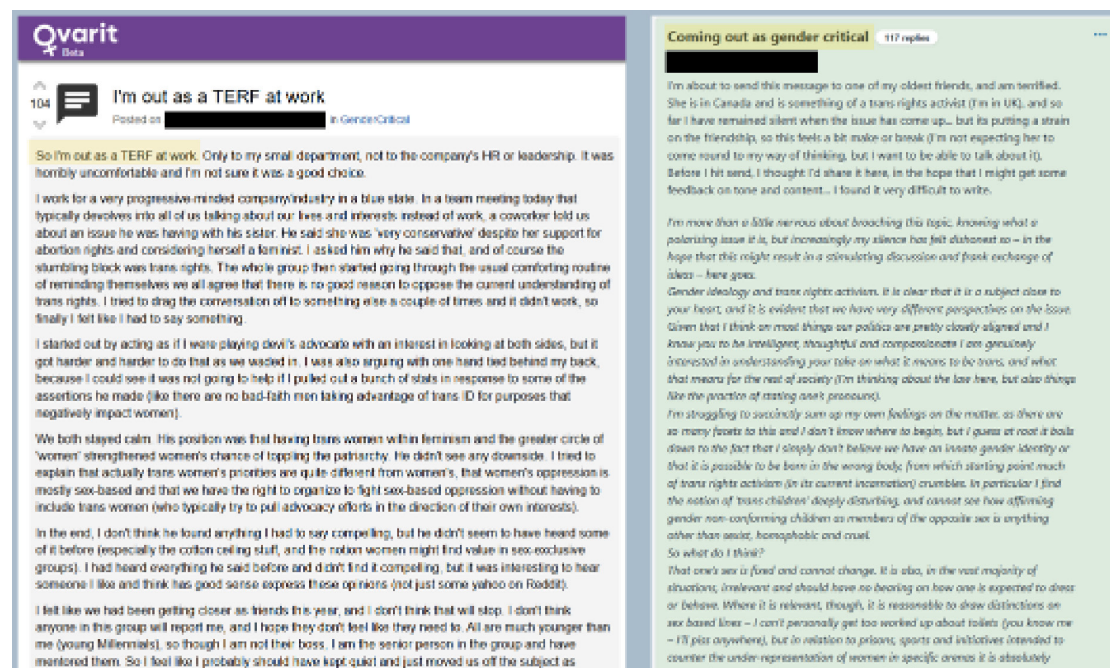


Figure 3. “Coming out” posts from Ovarit (left) and FSG (right; anonymized; highlight emphasis added)

In another such grocery store encounter, described on Ovarit, the poster details how they spotted a “TIM” working at the checkout and quickly disrobed down to their “Adult Human Female” T-shirt as they reached the front of the line. While both posts emphasize the author’s transphobic harassment as a kind of heroism (the top-rated comment to the above quoted author was “Um. I love you.”), these posts likewise portray trans people as either confused and ridiculous, or monstrous and worthy of fear or disgust. Take the following example (Figure 4), which describes the author’s run-in with an (ostensibly) transgender person in the women’s restroom of a movie theater.

“First TIM encounter...” is illustrative of the autonarrative habitus that saturates Ovarit and FSG and is worth unpacking in detail. Readers are given significant background on the author and their life to make their perspective familiar, solicit empathy, and connect with other forum members (they are a homebody, they’re pregnant, and they’re going to see *Dune*). They describe this mundane run-in as an “encounter” (as one might have with an animal) that is almost predetermined (“...it finally happened.”) and violently interrupts an otherwise ordinary, pleasant day. The post underscores the author’s shock, disgust, and vulnerability (“I should just book it out of there...”, “I stood frozen”) in a moment where time seems to stand still (at 6:40pm). The description of the (ostensibly) trans person reduces them to their wardrobe and stubble and presumes the author’s certainty of the subject’s sex and gender (“That is 100% a man...” and “this enormous man”). The telling is interwoven with rhetorical flourishes and rhythmic uses of short sentences to punctuate the drama of the situation (“That’s a man.”, and “It just wasn’t right.”). Importantly, the drama is not rooted in anything that unfolds within the washroom—the poster does not interact with the other person at all. Rather, it is the moment of the encounter that is sensationalized: a possibly transgender body is itself framed as the cause of trauma. The narrative concludes with the poster

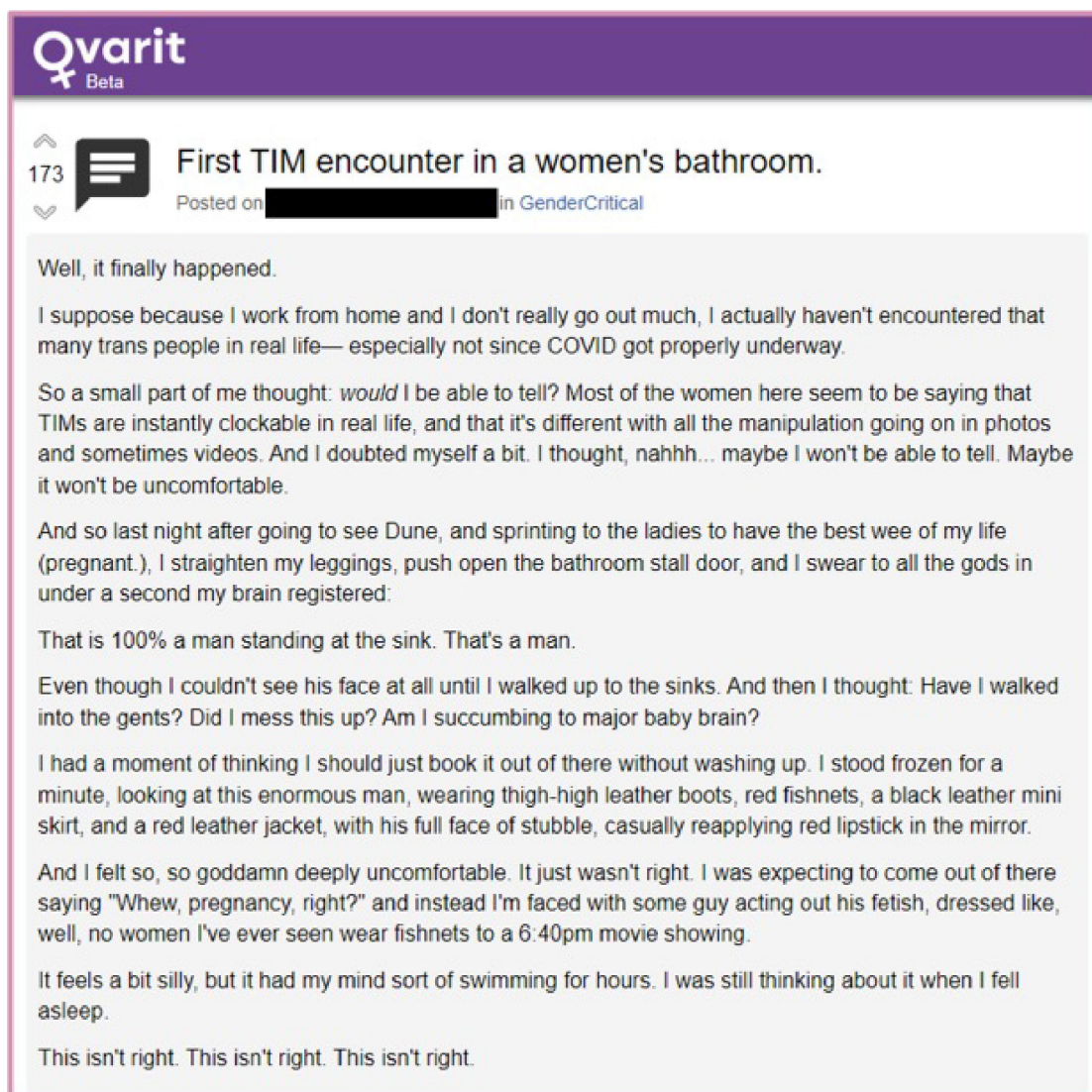


Figure 4. Ovarit post featuring a transphobic description of a stranger in a movie theatre restroom (anonymized)

struck numb, perpetually stuck in the bathroom as the shock of this moment lingers on (“I was still thinking about it when I fell asleep”), echoing rhetorically through the conclusion: “This isn’t right. This isn’t right. This isn’t right.”

The dramatic presentation obscures the ideological mobilization that permeates this telling. This is a pre-conditioned encounter: the poster claims this is the first time they have come across a trans person in public and yet demonstrates great familiarity with both the GC community (as an already an active Ovarit member) and with the emergent genre of the “encounter” post. By sharing this retelling, this user marks another moment in their “peaking.” Their imitation of this form also stands as an invitation to other users to follow suit with their own stories; indeed, in the replies to this post, several users speculate on the times they encountered “TIMs” or fret about what might happen when they “finally” do. Rhetorically, the author invites this—their self-deprecating flourishes solicit support and participation from other community members (“It feels a bit silly...”, “*would* I be able to tell?”, “Am I succumbing to major baby brain?”).

“First TIM encounter...” illustrates the ways that GC narrative genres remediate doxa and episteme: GC ideological misgivings about the dangers of trans ideology are rendered into a chilling and intensely personal anecdote after nothing more than a shared moment in the bathroom. This transphobic mythmaking is crucial to the practices of GC communities online: they reinscribe themselves as down-and-out victims stuck in the closet while portraying (ostensibly) transgender strangers as auto-fictive threats. More importantly, these practices are self-replicating, memetic, and crucial to fostering extremism: users (whether consciously or simply through exposure and imitation) learn the emergent genre of the encounter story and shape their own lived experiences to fit its form. What was an ideological belief becomes, through such mythmaking, deeply personal, affective, and community-driven. Such encounter narratives do not even require public run-ins; users described peaking in response to email signatures, having to share online “fandom spaces with TIFs,” or even reading through forum posts on these very platforms. Beyond exaggeration (if not utter fabrication), these stories are performative and pedagogical: trans people—as folkloric subjects—are culturally ossified through archetypal retellings. In this way, GC users are conditioned to narratively position trans people “in the wild” as monstrous and, in turn, retell such encounters to generate cultural capital through performance.

CONCLUSION

In March of 2025, site owner *girl_undone* announced Ovarit’s imminent closure on April 27, 2025, citing the immense labor and financial costs involved in maintaining the site. In the thousands of comments under the post announcing the shuttering, users lamented the loss of GC community, thanked administrators for their years of hard work, reminisced about their time on the forums, encouraged one another to “keep up the good fight” against TRAs, and circulated invitations to alternative spaces to organize online. These included invite-only Discord servers, personal blogs on Tumblr and Substack, niche radfem forum sites appearing on saidit.net, cekni.to, and clovenhooves.org, as well as intermittent (and contentious) suggestions to adopt overtly far-right forums like Kiwifarms. Users also discussed where to find fandom spaces outside of Ovarit, circulating “GC/radfem-friendly” fandom Discord servers and fan forums as viable alternatives. This suggests that users experienced Ovarit in much the way that site admins imagined: a place to discuss GC concerns while engaging users’ broader media interests.

In the same way that the closure of r/GC inaugurated new anti-trans communities across the web, the closure of Ovarit heralds another dispersal of GC users to further isolated platforms. We are at once relieved that one of the most pernicious sites of organized transphobia online is shuttering, yet we are also wary. These insulated spaces—particularly Discord communities—are uniquely difficult to study and monitor from without (Berryman et al. 2024; Heslep and Berge 2024). Likewise, as GC users enter openly conservative spaces like saidit.net and Kiwifarms, we might also be wary of the further amplification of anti-trans rhetoric in these spaces.

It is increasingly urgent to understand the ways that forum users become acculturated into anti-trans communities and how in-group discursive practices serve to entrench users in extremist ideology. Confirming previous scholarship, our findings

suggest a complex, accelerated entanglement between GC communities and neofascist, reactionary groups that is underscored by shared discursive practices—namely a fixation on “wokeism” and “cancel culture,” an antagonism towards “mainstream” media and sex workers, and a rhetorical inversion of victim and aggressor (Bassi and LaFleur 2022; Billard 2023; Evang 2022; Vincent, Erikainen, and Pearce 2020). Yet the most dangerous and complex alignment between anti-trans communities and other extremist groups lie in the autonarrative remediation of political ideology as personal episteme—a conditioned mode of “writing like a GC” that reinforces their perceived identity as a political victim and social outcast, and thereby their dependence on organized anti-trans movements. Across Ovarit and FSG, we encountered story after story of posters who—as they became further entrenched in GC community practices—found themselves alienated from their families, friends, and coworkers. These heartwrenching narratives intentionally confuse the axes of oppression. The tragedy of GC members’ vacillation as victim-aggressor is that GCs claim that they are the ones being oppressed even as they publicly dramatize, with pride, their harassment of strangers and coworkers and the emotional abuse of children and partners.

It’s important to note that the narrative practices we have documented here rely on a personal mythmaking that pervades the entirety of one’s epistemic frame. Receiving an email with pronouns in the signature becomes woven into one’s peak-ing story [Ovarit]. A parent alienating their trans child becomes—through autonarrative thread-posting—a tragic story in which the transphobic parent is persecuted for “coming out” as GC [FSG]. This remediation is not merely rhetorical—it is the primary instrument of radicalization. GC coming out narratives, for example, reinforced an evangelical orientation towards anti-trans ideology: such threads prompted other forum members to consider their own coming out story and confront the reasons they have not (yet) “come out.” Members who emulated this genre were celebrated for their willingness to “fight,” “[stand] up to this IRL,” or “get fired” even when it meant alienating those around them. Those who did experience alienation for their hateful behaviors were encouraged to turn back to the forums for consolation, further entrenching them in extremist communities with their fellow “gyns” who recognized their struggle. It’s particularly telling that messages posted in coming out threads often ended with a message restating a bittersweet thankfulness for the forum:

I know, same ol’ story. Thanks for the platform. It’s the only one I truly have. [Ovarit]

Thank goodness for this board. [FSG]

I guess going forward I’ll stick with my one friend who shares my views and just not mention it to any others/anyone else... it’s times like these where I really question myself, but at the same time I know all of you and many other people feel the same way I do. I think I’m in good company. It’s just rough to lose a friend. [Ovarit]

We raise this final point to emphasize that the autonarrative practices of GC forums drive members towards increased isolation and dependency on GC communities. As we have shown, the autonarrative habitus of GC forums are memetic and quickly picked up by newcomers. Posters who alleged having never encountered a transgender

person before were already predisposed to the genre of the “encounter” story, as we’ve shown with “First TIM encounter.”

Ultimately, our study presents a horizontal analysis of GC rhetoric on Ovarit and FSG to demonstrate how these discursive dynamics and storytelling practices—that is, writing like a GC—catalyze anti-trans extremism and make it personal. Our analysis has focused on several crucial elements of GC posting practices. To this end, we wish to review our most crucial findings.

First, in the post-r/GenderCritical era, GC communities online are more insular. Invite- or member-only spaces such as Ovarit, Mumsnet, and Discord seek to network GC users and capture their everyday lives and interests online.

Second, GC discourse maintains a linguistic similarity to other far-right and reactionary political movements. GC forum members are discursively preoccupied with “wokeness” and “being silenced” and rely on the redpill analogue of “peaking.” GC allyship with the right is contentious within GC communities, yet their discursive proximity reveals ideological similarities even as GC users distance themselves given their self-proclaimed feminist commitments.

Third, GC posters create and share narratives of their own radicalization (or “peaking”) to sanitize their extremism as personal and epistemic. GC posters demonstrated savvy, well-refined storytelling practices that framed their radicalization as affective and individual, further ensconcing their political identity through stories of self-enlightenment.

Fourth, GC posters characterize “GC” as an endemic, marginalized identity. GC forum members adopt the language of queer communities to fallaciously suggest that “GC” is something one *is*, rather than an ideology one adopts, as they position themselves as politically vulnerable.

Fifth, GC posters learn and adopt memetic, anti-trans mythmaking practices. GC forums discipline users towards memetic storytelling structures; users recite stock formats such as “peaking narratives” and “trans encounters,” dramatizing users’ lived experiences within anti-trans and gender-essentialist frameworks.

Finally, GC media literacy practices encourage isolationist evangelism of anti-trans political ideology. GC posters regularly described struggles with friends, coworkers, and families in response to their radicalization. Even at the cost of professional and personal relationships, members are encouraged to “stand up” and “get fired” for their GC beliefs, exacerbating their dependence on extremist communities.

In the face of such platform subcultures, we must understand that contending with the specific details—that is, the informational elements—of anti-trans disinformation is insufficient when GC extremists have been conditioned to internalize anti-trans ideologies through autonarrative habitus. Instead, it is imperative we understand how the lens through which anti-trans community members process and participate in these forums has been, from the get-go, shaped by sex- and gender-essentialist, racist, and nationalist doxa. To these ends, we must combat anti-trans disinformation not only through empirical study and corrective logics, but also through affective and epistemic approaches that directly engage the rhetorical disciplining of anti-trans communities.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The authors are willing to provide the data used to conduct this study to other researchers upon reasonable request.

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