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Born in the wrong body?



Mallory Moore · [Follow](#)

8 min read · Sep 25, 2020



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I'm trying to take a break from getting hammered on social media by people who can't or (much more likely) prefer not read what trans people have to say for ourselves. In the meantime I've been watching transphobes continue the cycle of re-affirming their radicalisation through repeating lies about "trans ideology" to each other while ignoring the efforts of politicised trans people, trans studies academics, etc to set the record straight.

TERFs are entirely correct that, just as if you ask the average woman about gender there's a decent chance you'll find some who will say things like "women are just more nurturing", if you ask random trans people you'll find some who will try to explain that they were "born in the wrong body". These are just so stories which smooth over the cracks of life under patriarchy, cracks which it is the job of both political agitators and theorists to uncover and pick at to find out how they break.

Many of them are now yelling at Sally Hines for saying that Trans Studies has always been critical of “Born in the Wrong Body” claims, and she has in turn pointed to her chapter where she dissects it in 2007.

I want to go further than that. Criticism of “wrong body” narratives has a long history outside of trans academia, wherever politically conscious trans people have discussed it. Unlike our critics we don't see the need to hunt down every trans person who subscribes to the idea to censure them—such a course of action seems like a bizarrely hostile way to treat our apolitical trans siblings who, we hope, may eventually benefit from the trans liberation movement, much more than they would from a lecture in political theory. I sincerely doubt that TERFs would typically approach apolitical cis women in such a hostile manner—such treatment is reserved for those of us who are trans and speak up for ourselves (labelled as trans activists whether we are or not), or academics associated with us.

The last time I ridiculed “born in the wrong body” narratives was August of this year, within the last month. I was citing Elena Rose's widely popular 2007 blog prose poem “The Seam of Skin and Scales” where she talks beautifully about fighting to stay inside of her body, the opening paragraph

I am not a woman trapped in a man's body. This body is no man's; it is mine, it is me, and there is no man in that equation. And I am not trapped in it. There are a million and one ways out of this body, and I have

clung to it, tooth and claw, despite an endless line of people and institutions who would rather I vacate the premises, and have sometimes been willing to make me bleed to convince me they're right.

This stuff *isn't confined to academia*.

Unfortunately Twitter search is broken for me before May 2020, but thanks to search engines, another instance I can find of my own open challenge to born in the wrong body narratives (and particularly their long history in tensions among the trans community between transgender liberation activists and apolitical “transsexuals”) is here, from October 2019.



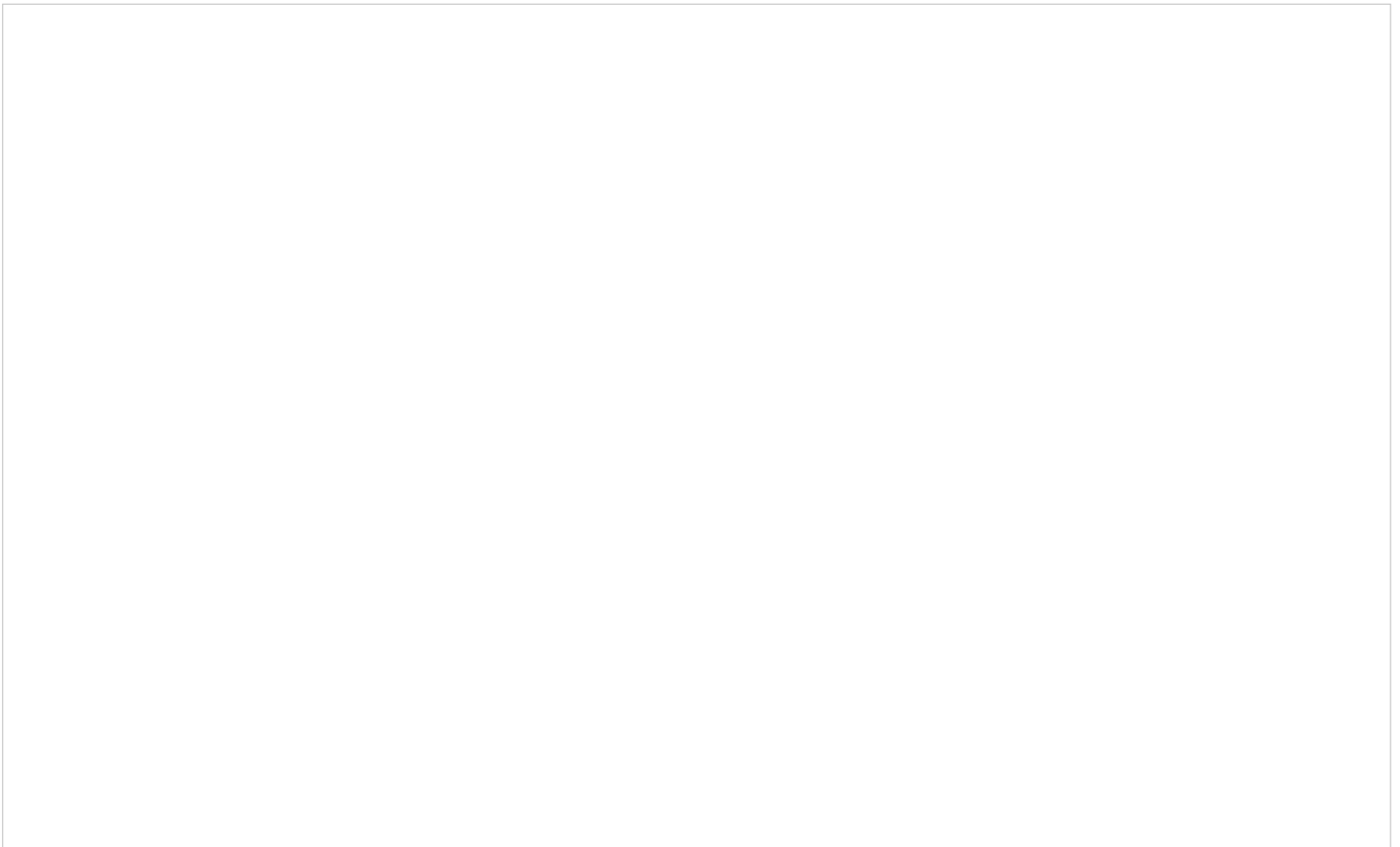
“It’s fundamentally weird that GCs/TERFs are getting in on the act, saying Transsexuality is valid while Transgender is bullshit— [Transgender Liberation] is the side of the movement that calls out against [essentialist] views of sex and gender, and “born in the wrong body” narratives that GCs and TERFs profess to hate so much”

Looking at activist and academic comrades who I’ve worked with over the years turns up similar open negativity towards born in the wrong body stuff (that you don’t need to go read academic material to find). Here’s Ruth Pearce live tweeting a conference in 2015 where a speaker was speaking out against “Trapped In the Wrong Body” narratives:

“Trapped in the wrong body thing—that’s just bollocks [...] it’s not very empowering”—yep

| *#onscenity2015'*

And again with another conference live tweet (showing how commonplace these are in trans healthcare and sociology as well as theory).

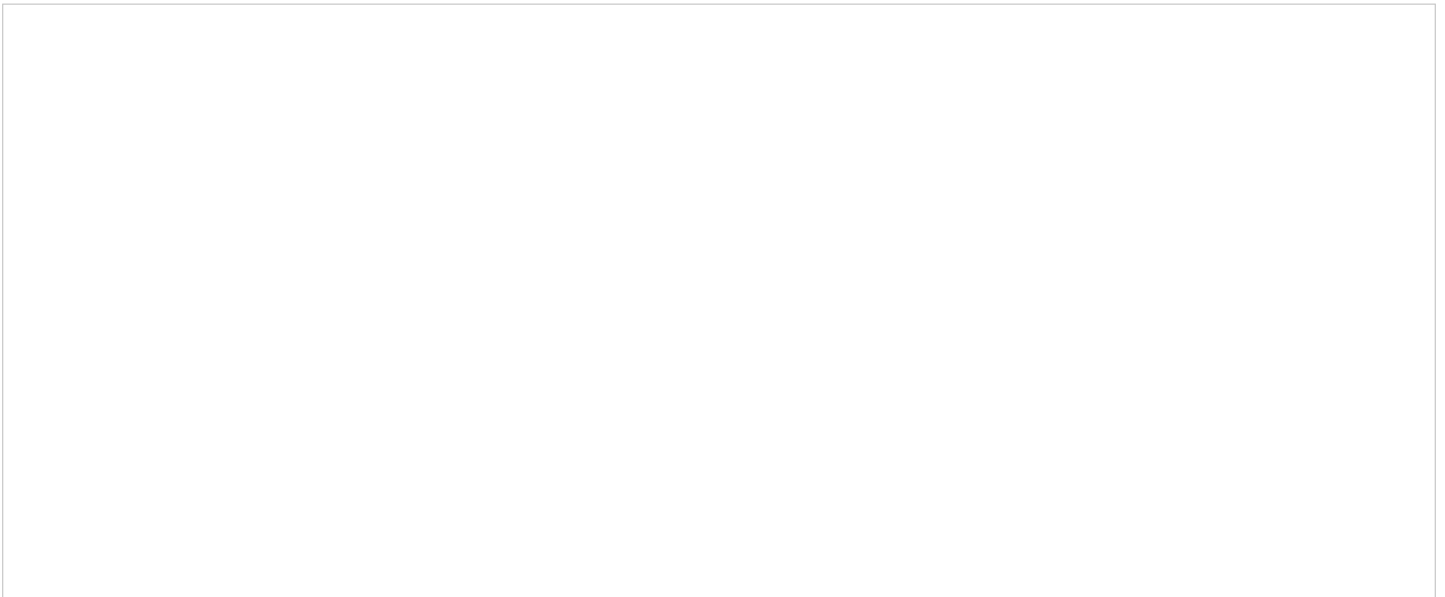


| *'Bons critiquing "wrong body" narrative and languages of dysphoria and incongruence. These limit notions of trans possibility, particularly for most vulnerable, e.g. disabled, people of colour, migrants, sex workers.*

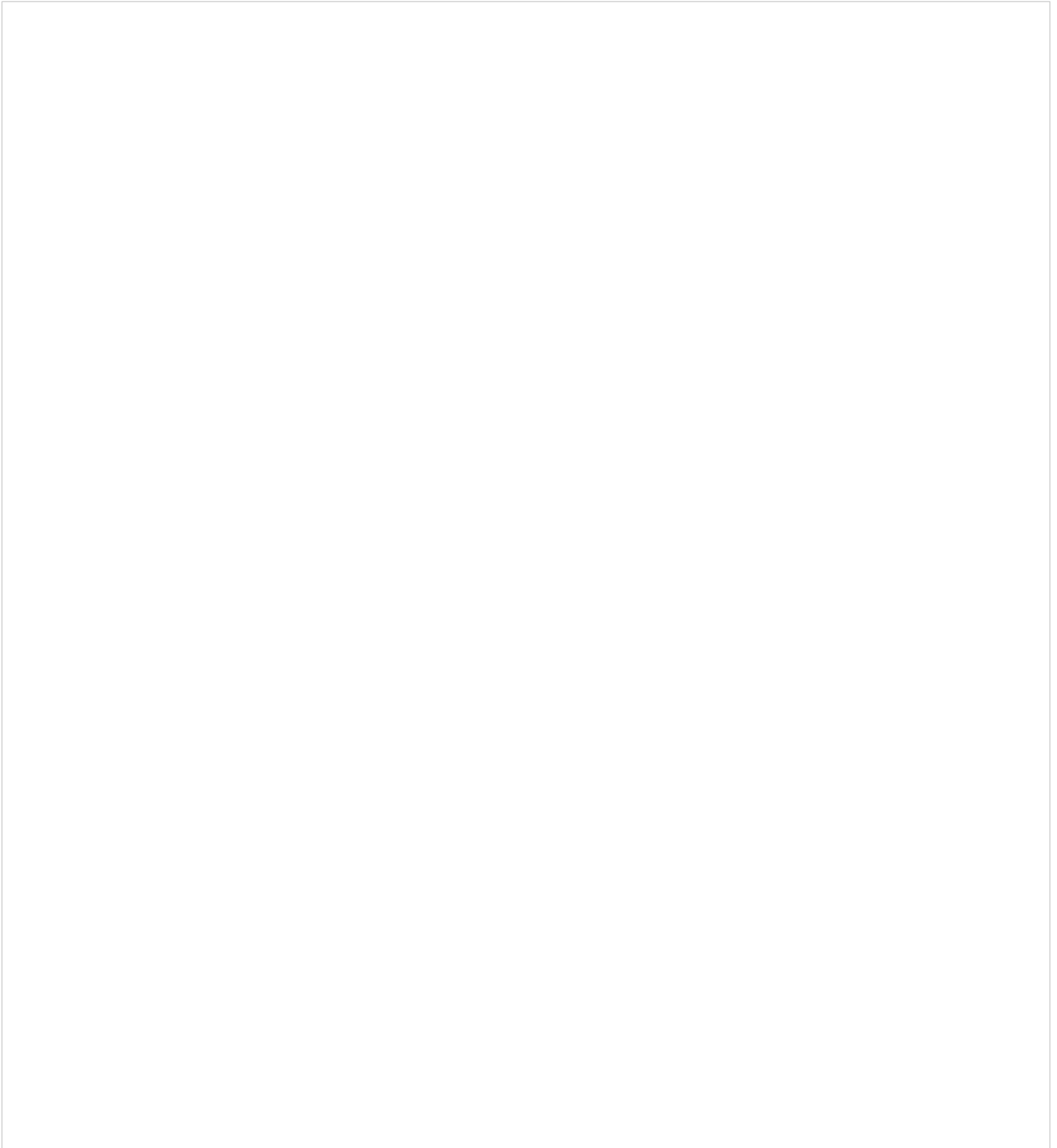
| *#EPATH2019'*

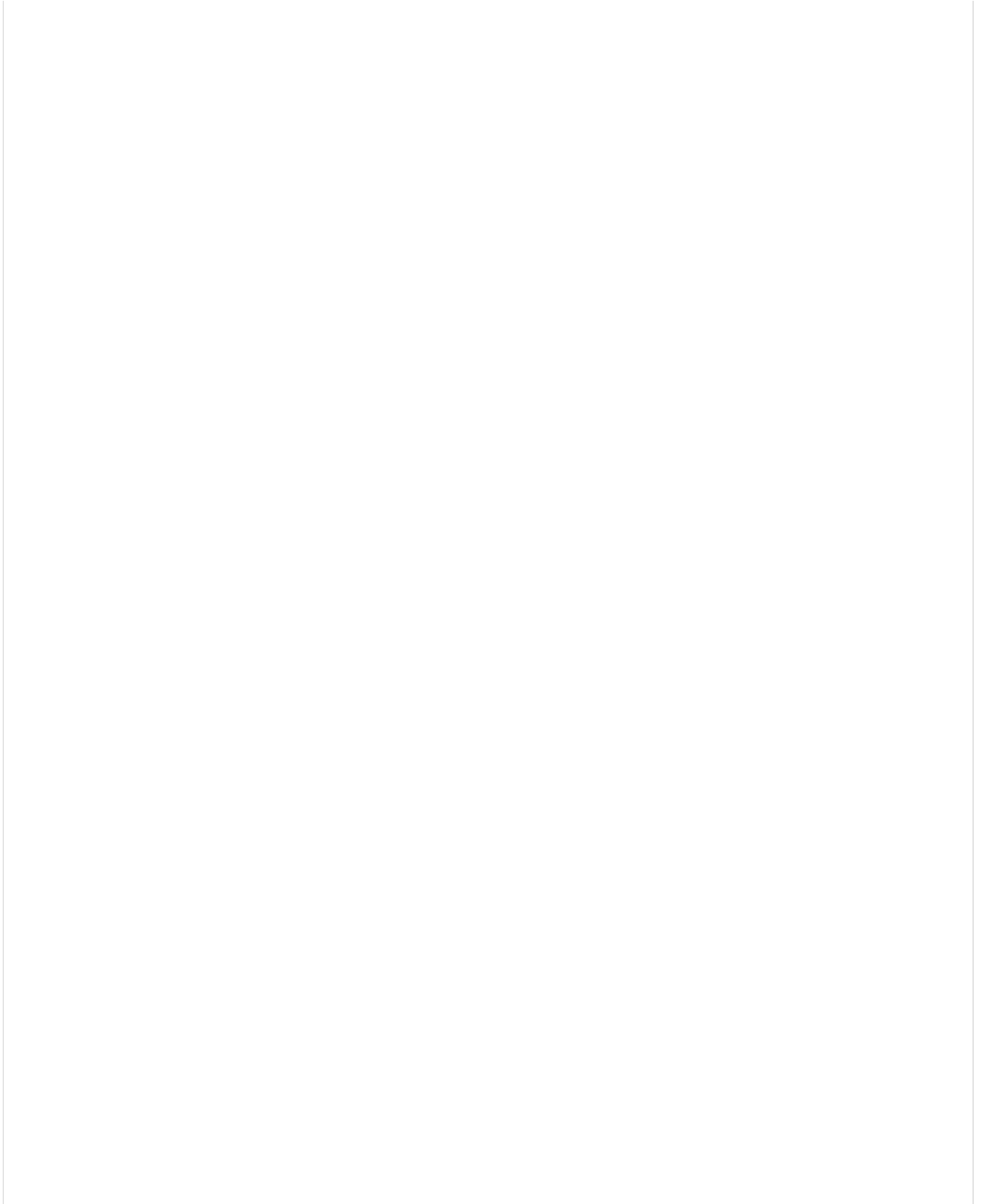
In fact searching Twitter for wrong body narratives within the last few years (as far as 2016), I seem to almost

exclusively find GC/RF personalities spreading claims that these narratives are pushed by trans people:

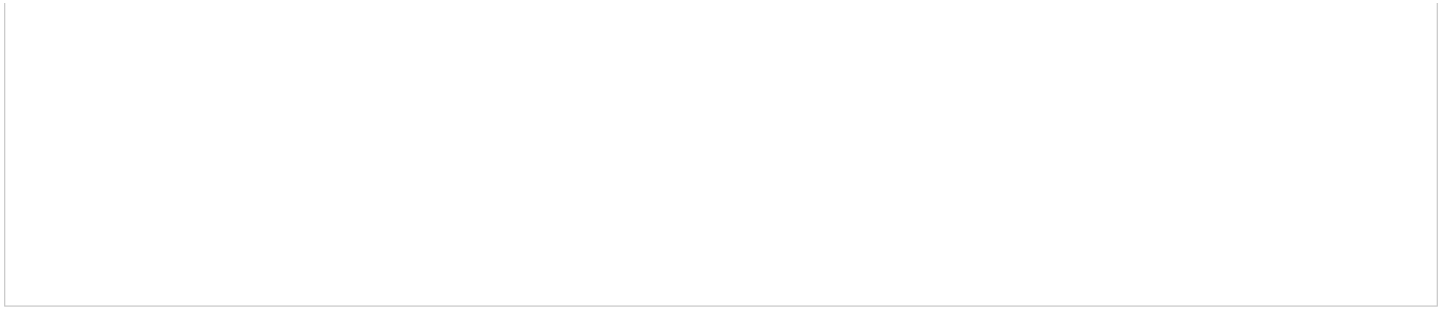













This fixation with the “wrongness” of trans bodies isn’t limited of course to the transphobes of the present day. In 2012 it was part of headlines in the Daily Mail chasing Lucy Meadows from her transition as a school teacher to her suicide.



Meanwhile popular transfeminist accounts are clear on the topic:



I increased my activity levels in Twitter in part after seeing a pattern of GC and TERF accounts radicalising a growing following through telling them lies about what trans people and particularly trans activists think about sex and gender. Despite repeatedly attempting to get in touch with GC people to try and correct the numerous lies about us, the only thing gained by that approach was proving, with reasonably high confidence, that GC people *want* the lies and really don't care too much about the facts, much less demonstrating any concern for the open discussion that they make claims in favour of.

I'm starting to regret my own and others common response of saying "read

a book” to people who will never bother with it, especially when it comes to this topic. Large amounts of resistance to “wrong body” narratives comes from work well outside the academy. I’m not a trans studies academic myself, and unlike most people accused of it, I actually do have a history as a trans activist beyond arguments on Twitter (which are not activism, in my opinion). Anyone who has spent any amount of time around trans liberation activists will be familiar with this part of our shared political philosophy. This doesn’t belong to the academy or to books, and you see it on social media to an extent (where relevant—typically activists reserve such efforts for struggles with power structures that enforce such narratives rather than random yelling at strangers) more often than not when trans people discuss “Born in the Wrong Body”.

If you’re GC or the variety of Radfem that sets out to oppose trans rights or trans liberation, and you’ve gotten this far, I’ll thank you for your time so far by saying please stop getting your awareness of trans politics half digested from other anti trans sources. At the very least do yourselves a favour, listen to what we say directly, disagree with things we actually believe rather than what your friends claim about us.

Final bit

I’ll be adding some classic quotes from transfeminist activists in case this is of interest when I get time.

A pretty obvious starting point for people new to trans political writing is this from Emi Koyama’s “Transfeminist Manifesto”:

Trans people have often been described as those whose physical sex does not match the gender of their mind or soul. This explanation might make sense intuitively, but it is nonetheless problematic for transfeminism. To say that one has a female mind or soul would mean there are male and female minds that are different from each other in some identifiable way, which in turn may be used to justify discrimination against women. Essentializing our gender identity can be just as dangerous as resorting to biological essentialism.

There's also [this exchange between the late Davina Anne Gabriel and author of "The Posttranssexual Manifesto" Sandy Stone in a transfeminist journal in 1995](#), with Stone very clearly citing the roots of her beliefs on the topic from her time in the radical feminist movement.

Davina: Do you agree that the "wrong body" metaphor is something that has been imposed upon transsexuals by the medical profession?

Sandy: Yes, but I also think that it originates in society at large. I think that, for all intents and purposes, the only way we can speak about feeling that we are "other" in the sense of being transgendered has been to talk about it in terms of being in the wrong body. In other words, we simply haven't had the depth of description to be able to think about it in any other terms because our society has made those terms invisible.

Davina: You say that the lexicality of the phrase "wrong body" suggests "the

phallogentric, binary character of gender differentiation.” I understand why that term suggests binarism, but I’m not sure that I agree that it is necessarily phallogentric. So could you explain to me why this phrase is necessarily phallogentric?

***Sandy:** Certainly. It comes from first and second wave feminism, which had a fairly simplistic idea of what phallogentrism was and how it worked; namely that any binary opposition must by nature be phallogentric. That worked very well for a long time, and it allowed a lot of powerful, useful and transformative feminist discourses to arise and gave us good tools with which to examine the ways we use and respond to description of ourselves and others.*

Here’s the renowned Janet Mock on the wrong body narrative:



“Trapped in the wrong body” is a convenient, lazy explanation but it fails to describe #trans people & our bodies every time.

@purpleleather it makes our lives and struggles more palatable to the cis masses, but it is lazy media “reporting.”

Roz Kaveney taking a poke at it back in 2010:

Old-school language such as 'trapped in the wrong body' was always sentimental twaddle, but spoke to how life felt.

Kate Bornstein in her 1994 book Gender Outlaws

The reality of being a transgendered individual goes way beyond just being born in the wrong body... Rather, it reflects a deeper dissatisfaction with the bipolar gender system, the culturally constructed imperative to be either man or woman.

Transgender

Wrong Body

Feminism

Liberation



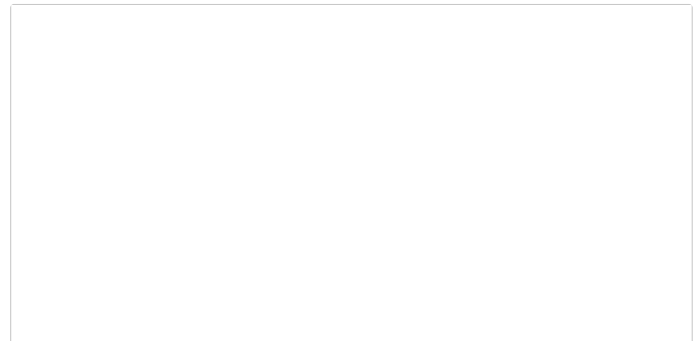
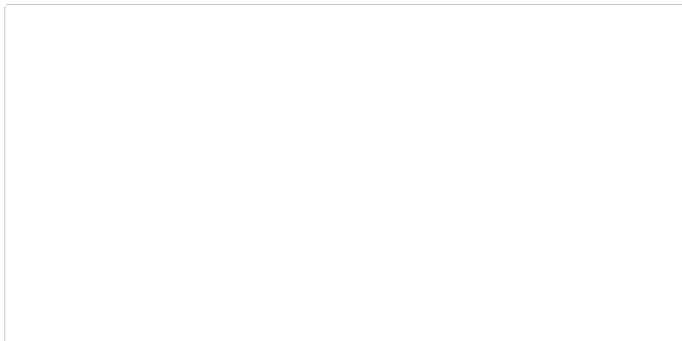
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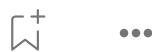
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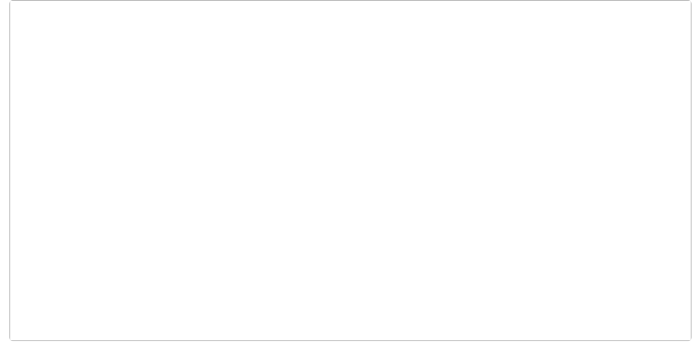
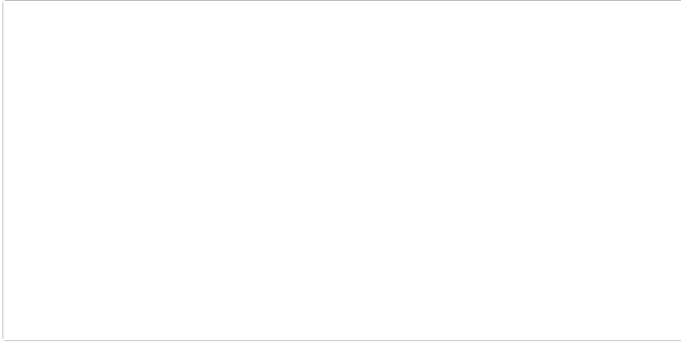
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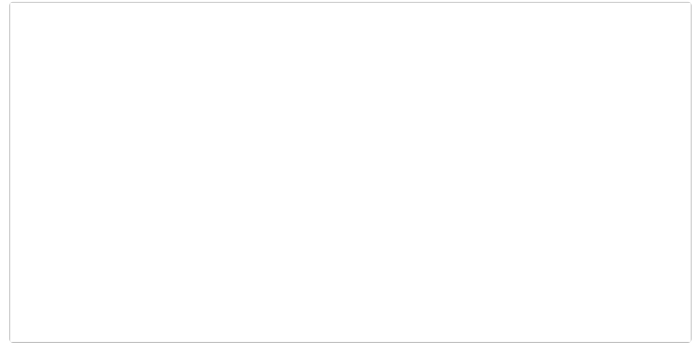
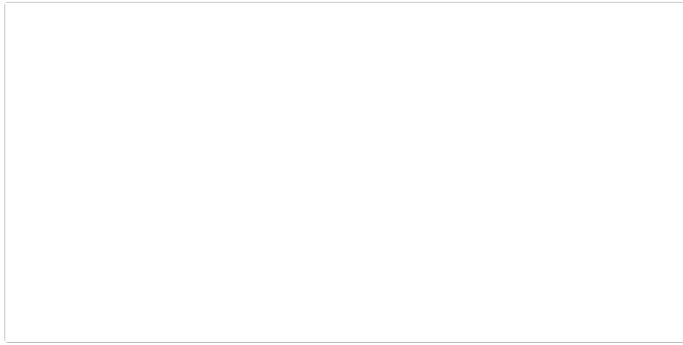
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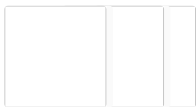
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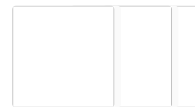
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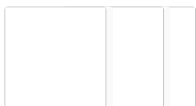
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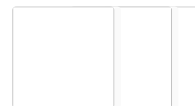
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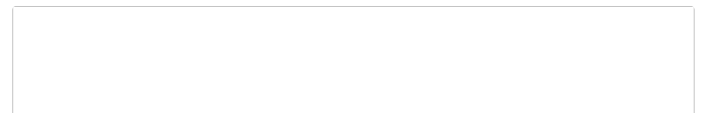
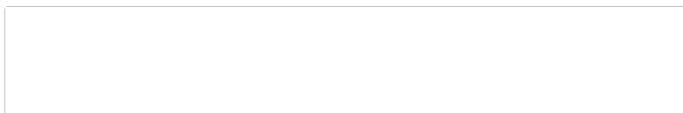
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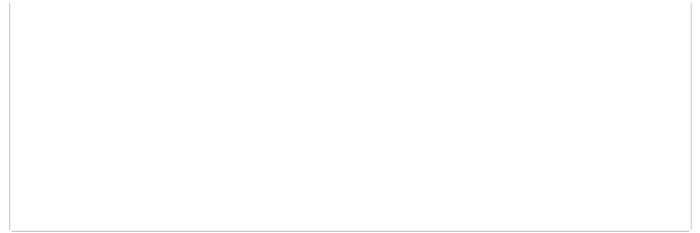
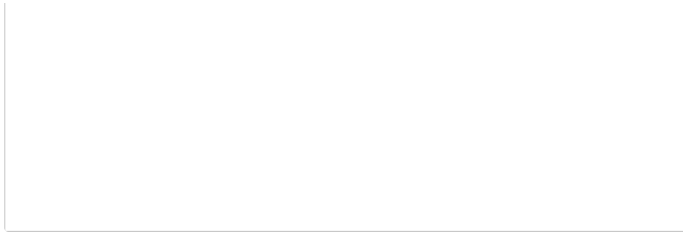
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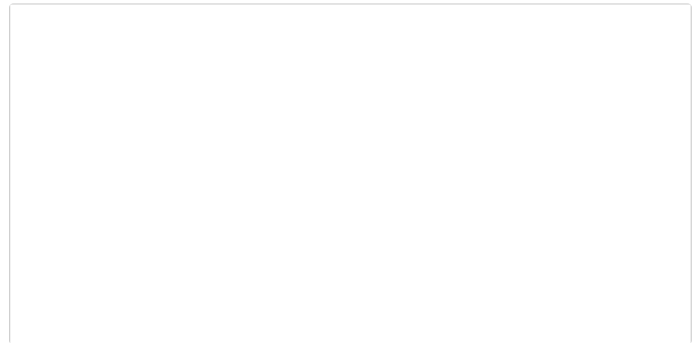
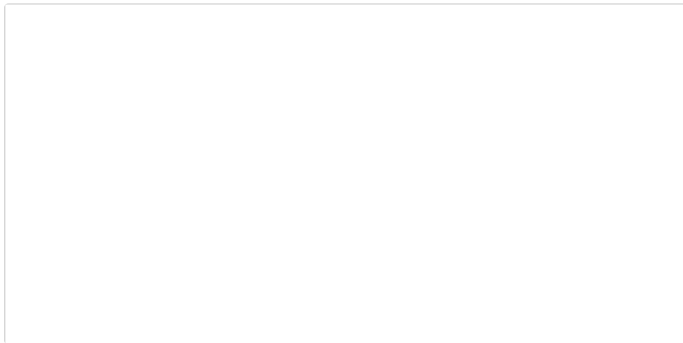
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