

Exclusive Environments:  
Transmisogyny in U.S. Environmentalism

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“I offer you this warning: the Nature you bedevil me with is a lie. Do not trust it to protect you from what I represent, for it is a fabrication that cloaks the groundlessness of the privilege you seek to maintain for yourself at my expense. You are as constructed as me; the same anarchic Womb has birthed us both. I call upon you to investigate your nature as I have been compelled to confront mine. I challenge you to risk abjection and flourish as well as have I. Heed my words, and you may well discover the seams and sutures in yourself.”

-Susan Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein  
Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage”

***Abstract:*** This senior thesis illuminates some ways in which trans women have been excluded both implicitly and explicitly from traditional environmentalism. The paper is largely based in rhetorical analysis, focusing on two discursive moments of exclusion: the rhetoric surrounding intersex fish, and the controversy around radical environmentalist group Deep Green Resistance's anti-trans policies. In addition, I situate these moments temporally, showing the ways in which the values of environmentalism today still reflect racist, ableist, and misogynistic insecurities of early environmentalism in the 1890s. Inspired by Sarah Jaquette Ray's analysis of ableism in environmentalism from her book, "The Ecological Other," I use her concept of "corporeal disgust" to explain how environmentalism is a corporeally based movement, and that it is through a politics of bodily disgust that trans women are labelled as "ecological others," farther from nature, or unnatural.

## Our Monsters, Ourselves

In 1994, an essay by Susan Stryker, prolific gender and sexuality theorist and U.S. professor, became “the first article to be published by a peer-reviewed academic journal by an openly transgender author.”<sup>1</sup> In her wildly influential piece, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage,” Stryker likens herself to “the monster.” She writes, “I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment.” As the “monster,” she positions herself in opposition to “naturalness,” even arguing that “the Nature you bedevil me with is a lie.”<sup>2</sup>

In the essay, Stryker emphasizes her experience as a *transsexual* woman, rather than a *transgender* or *trans* woman, to call attention to the role medical intervention played in shaping her identity.<sup>3</sup> Stryker argues that the motivations of the doctors who created sex reassignment or sex affirmation techniques are rooted in the “pursuit of immortality through the perfection of the body,” similar to the impulse of Mary Shelley’s Dr. Frankenstein. The motivations for developing these techniques are “aligned with a deeply conservative attempt to stabilize gendered identity in service of the naturalized heterosexual order.” In this way, Stryker argues that sex affirmation surgeries are *corrective*, developed to “contain and colonize the radical threat posed by a particular transgender strategy of resistance to the coerciveness of gender.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, rather than having to broaden definitions of gender to include a multitude of differing bodies, scientists and doctors seek to defuse this threat to the gender binary. They intervene by physically altering the body to fall more in accordance with binarist ideas of gender.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women*. New York: Routledge. 2000. 440.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (1994) 1(3): 237 and 240.

<sup>3</sup> The descriptions *trans* or *transgender* do not necessarily have the medical or physical connotations that *transsexual* does. Often, trans women just use the word *trans*, or *transgender*, to describe themselves, since ‘*transsexual*’ can be seen as invasive, as it possibly offers information about her body. National Center for Transgender Equality. *Transgender Terminology*. Updated January 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein.” 244.

<sup>5</sup> Binarist is an adjective that here means “supporting the construction of the gender binary.” The gender binary is the idea that gender exists in a binary (men and women) and that these are the only legitimate genders available and are appropriately assigned by genital appearance at birth.

Stryker argues that while these procedures and techniques are intended to “generate naturalness,” they actually place the subject “in an unassimilable, antagonistic, queer relationship to a Nature in which it must nevertheless exist.” While throughout the essay she takes on the subject position of “the monster,” or the unnatural creature, Stryker argues that *all* people (trans or not) are subject to a “gendering process that sustains the illusion of naturalness.” The assumed “naturalness” of pairing certain genders with certain bodies deserves interrogation. From the lack of, or mis-, representation of non-binary genders in popular culture and media, to the countless deaths of trans people (overwhelmingly trans women of color), the gender binary is more than inconvenient, it inflicts violence on those it does not describe. “Nature,” Stryker writes, “exerts such hegemonic oppression.”<sup>6</sup>

Even some scholars within environmentalism, a field whose goal is typically understood as to “defend Nature,” are beginning to question the concept of naturalness. Post-environmentalism, a relatively new branch of environmental thought, acknowledges the immense effect of human influence on the so-called “naturalness” of our planet. Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus, authors of the groundbreaking essay, “The Death of Environmentalism: Global Warming Politics in a Post-Environmental World,” challenge traditional environmentalism, calling for a movement that recognizes humanity’s progression into the Anthropocene, defined as “a new epoch of the earth, one in which humans dominate its landforms, biota, and atmosphere, one in which nature is no longer as natural as it once was (or seemed).”<sup>7</sup> One of the essay’s arguments is that the “environmental community’s belief that their power derives from defining themselves as defenders of ‘the environment’ has prevented us from winning major legislation on global warming at the national level.”<sup>8</sup> In addition to inhibiting the passage of legislation, the nature/culture (or environment/human) divide has kept environmentalism from acknowledging the ways in which nature is *created* through our cultural

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<sup>6</sup> Susan Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (1994) 1(3): 243-250.

<sup>7</sup> James Proctor, “Saving nature in the Anthropocene,” *Association of Environmental Studies and Sciences* (2013) 3:83-92.

<sup>8</sup> Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger, “The Death of Environmentalism,” The Breakthrough Institute (2004). [http://www.thebreakthrough.org/images/Death\\_of\\_Environmentalism.pdf](http://www.thebreakthrough.org/images/Death_of_Environmentalism.pdf).

and technological influence. The nature of today is not a pure, protected, mystical retreat from civilization, but an amalgamation of material, culture, power, and technology.

The story of Frankenstein is also used in an essay by Bruno Latour (French environmentalist and theorist), “Love Your Monsters,” to explain how we use Frankenstein’s monster to denote what we think is unnatural, or created. “When we fear genetically modified foods we call them ‘frankenfoods’ and ‘frankenfish,’” Latour writes. He argues that Dr. Frankenstein’s real sin was “not that he invented a creature through some combination of hubris and high technology, but rather that he *abandoned the creature to itself.*” Latour compares this to environmentalists who believe the answer to global climate issues is to “repent for their past hubris, to look for ways of diminishing the numbers of their fellow humans, and to swear to make their footprints invisible,” abandoning responsibility for the technologies that created the crisis. Latour argues that the reason many environmentalists’ stance as “protectors of Nature” has failed so often is because we are living in “a time when science, technology, and demography make clear that we can never separate ourselves from the nonhuman world—that we, our technologies, and nature can no more be disentangled than we can remember the distinction between Dr. Frankenstein and his monster.” Post-environmentalism calls for us to adopt a “compositionist” approach, “one that sees the process of human development as neither liberation from Nature nor as a fall from it, but rather as a process of becoming ever-more attached to, and intimate with, a panoply of nonhuman natures.”<sup>9</sup>

Some of the intimacy that Latour is referencing is apparent within his comparison of French and American national parks. In France, these parks are seen as rural ecosystems, whereas in the United States there is more intervention, “at always greater levels of detail, with ever more subtle care—to keep them ‘natural enough’ for Nature-intoxicated tourists to remain happy.”<sup>10</sup> The intervention required to maintain the *illusion* of naturalness is precisely the situation that Stryker is writing about. In order to preserve “naturalness,” greater levels of intervention are required, soon blurring the lines of what is natural and what is not. The logic itself is circular. What is unnatural? Why do we go through great lengths to protect Nature when

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<sup>9</sup> Bruno Latour, “Love Your Monsters,” *Love Your Monsters: Postenvironmentalism and the Anthropocene* (2011).

<sup>10</sup> Bruno Latour, “Love Your Monsters.”



it resists this control? Both Latour and Stryker, both post-environmentalism and trans studies, are concerned with questions of naturalness, and how the things we deem “natural” are more often than not culturally or socially constructed. In both essays, Frankenstein’s monster is no character from a horror film. To Latour, our creations deserve love and care, the same affection we would show our own children. Stryker reminds us of the Latin root of the word “monster,” *monstrum*, which means “‘divine portent,’ itself formed on the root of the verb *monere*, ‘to warn.’” Throughout history, Stryker writes, monsters served a role similar to angels, messengers sent to say, “Pay attention; something of profound importance is happening.”<sup>11</sup>

Though there are seventeen years between the publication dates of Stryker and Latour’s essays, I have brought them into conversation just now to make a point about what types of dialogues could benefit environmentalism as scholars try to theorize about our future. Latour’s essay persuades environmentalists to take ownership for technology and to dismantle the “emancipation narrative” that has tricked humans into thinking we may someday *overcome* nature. However, his focus is on landscapes, pieces of Nature, and technologies. He doesn’t seem to realize, or want to talk about, the way in which these ideas of naturalness have affected people, as in Stryker’s case, at the level of their very body. How important it is, then, for a voice like Stryker’s to come into conversation with Latour’s to remind environmentalists that when we talk about the effects of naturalization, we’re not just talking about how we *think* of parks, or forests, or water, or air, but also how it affects *people*.

There are many ways in which scholars and activists within trans studies and environmentalism could communicate, especially about the construction of un/naturalness and its implications. However, trans people have been excluded from conversations about environmentalism. Environmentalists’ construction of the Natural as pure, whole, and separate from culture contributes to transphobia, and more specifically, transmisogyny (misogyny that uniquely targets trans women). This paper will explore the ways in which environmentalists create and contribute to transmisogyny, excluding trans women from the conceptualization and theorizing of environmentalism, as well as from activism around ecological issues. I argue that environmentalism in the United States erases and excludes trans women by portraying them as

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<sup>11</sup> Susan Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein.” Both quotes are from page 240.

ecological others, unnatural, and alienated from nature through both a politics of corporeal disgust, and by portraying gender as either naturalized or entirely a cultural artifact.

To analyze how environmental rhetoric can be used to exclude trans women, I am focusing on recent research and news articles about intersex fish in U.S. streams and rivers. While the research papers themselves present the information as objectively and cautiously as possible, popular science and mainstream news articles have completely changed the language regarding these fish, often using transmisogynistic and binarist language and frameworks. This section will examine how humans impose our own social and cultural expectations onto animals in regards to their sexes and genders, and then use these inaccurate “scientific” observations to justify oppressive or exclusionary social expectations and policies.

Second, I will be focusing on Deep Green Resistance, a specific activist community that excludes trans women, to show how their environmentalist and ecofeminist values are used to *justify* that exclusion. This trans-exclusive radical feminist organization argues “gender is not natural,” equating trans women’s genders with “culture,” distancing them from Nature and consequently environmentalism as well.

## **Methodology**

My methodology for this thesis is discursive analysis, drawing heavily on the fields of feminism (specifically trans feminism), disability studies, queer theory, environmental justice, post-environmentalism, and history. I am defining discourse rather broadly in this paper, meaning that I am analyzing a diverse array of materials. Books, articles from academic journals, and theoretical essays all make their way into my analysis, as do pop science articles, Youtube videos, blog posts, and even the comment sections under online articles.

I am including this variety of material for two primary reasons. The first is that the majority of the leading thought around trans feminism and transmisogyny is produced by trans women on blogs, Youtube channels, and websites, and not necessarily through academia. The second reason is my own personal choice to push back against the academic industrial complex by not limiting my analysis to only work published by academics. In order to create knowledge that leads to justice, I am choosing to distance myself in part from the supposed need for

validation from academic institutions, which limits important knowledge only to those who can afford higher education. For knowledge to be liberatory it must be accessible, and must draw from the real experiences of those closest to the topic at hand. Too often researchers write about a marginalized group using language that is completely inaccessible to the very people they are writing about. By drawing on real-life experiences, I hope to humanize my topic, never letting readers forget that they are reading about real people.

My thesis is situated in the United States and at the convergence of many discourses. I aim to explore the borderlands between them, where understandings are created, dismantled, and pieced back together. Rather than thinking of these points as intersections, I argue that these discourses shape each other and are inextricable, that no discourse is created without the knowledge produced in another. I am interested in locating a theory of gender in environmentalism that is inclusive, accountable, and finds strength in deviation, ambiguity, and porousness.

## **The Dream of a Common Language**

In the interest of accessibility, I'm going to devote the next section to defining some of the key terms and concepts I will be using throughout this paper. The interdisciplinarity of both Environmental Studies and Gender Studies, while contributing to thorough and unique analyses, also means that many people may be entering this conversation from a background that may not include theory on post-environmentalism, gender, trans studies, or queer theory. To help bridge this gap, I will attempt to make clear the vocabulary used in this paper.

I will be using the words **male** and **female** in two different ways throughout my paper. When I am talking about non-human animals and organisms, I will be using the biological and ecological definitions for these terms, where male means “producing small gametes” and female means “producing large gametes.”<sup>12</sup> No other characteristics (chromosomes, anatomy, coloring) will be taken into consideration.

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<sup>12</sup> Joan Roughgarden, “Sex and Diversity, Sex Versus Gender, and Sexed Bodies,” *The Transgender Studies Reader* 2. New York: Routledge. 2013. 148.

For humans, I am using a more complicated concept of male/female. I will *not* be referring to trans women or trans feminine people as “male” or “male-bodied.” I will *not* be referring to trans men or trans masculine people as “female” or “female-bodied.” When I am talking about someone who is trans, I may use the terms “male-assigned” or “female-assigned.” For example, a trans woman does not have a “male” body, she has a female body, regardless of what her body looks like or her medical history, but it is still accurate to say she was “male-assigned” at birth.<sup>13</sup> I will be sure to acknowledge how I am using these words later on in my paper, and I will address the tension this creates when striving for dialogue between the hard and social sciences.

Perhaps two of the most important definitions to understand from the very beginning of this paper are for the words **cis** and **trans**. If it was not apparent by now, a **trans** person is someone whose gender differs from the one they were assigned at birth. A **cis** person is someone who does *not* identify as a different gender than the one they have been assigned. The word **cis** was popularized by trans people who wanted an alternative way to refer to non-trans people, rather than using words like “natural,” “biological,” “normal,” “genetic,” or “real.” The reason why the word **cis** is “preferable to all the others is that it treats ‘cis’ and ‘trans’ as linguistic equivalents, rather than treating one as more normal or natural or otherwise standard and the other abnormal, artificial or exceptional.”<sup>14</sup>

I want to make clear that I will not be using **trans\*** with the asterisk. The intention of the asterisk was to make the word “trans” even more encompassing for people that did not identify as “men” or “women,” but rather genderqueer, genderfuck, two spirit, pangender, agender, bigender, etc. While the asterisk was well-intentioned, its use has unfortunately turned into a shorthand for communities with priorities focused on trans men and trans masculine people. The asterisk has been added in situations to the word **transmisogyny** (trans\*misogyny) which conflates the experiences of trans women with those of trans men, erasing the very real and

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<sup>13</sup> Mey Rude, “It’s Trans Day of Visibility,” Autostraddle.com. March 2014. <http://www.autostraddle.com/its-trans-day-of-visibility-heres-15-ways-to-let-trans-people-know-you-see-them-and-care-231510>.

<sup>14</sup> Emi Koyama, “Cis is real—even if it is carelessly articulated,” *eminism.org*. September 2013. <http://eminism.org/blog/entry/399>.

specific oppression that trans women face.<sup>15</sup> The word “trans” by itself was created to function as an umbrella term, and in the context of my paper, when used by itself, or in front of “people,” should be read as all-encompassing of gender identities.

**Transmisogyny** is perhaps best described as the confluence of misogyny and transphobia, including “negative attitudes, expressed through cultural hate, individual and state violence, and discrimination” that are specifically targeted toward trans women and trans feminine people.<sup>16</sup> Some ways in which this phenomenon manifests are described in Julia Serano’s essay, “Transmisogyny Primer.” She writes that “the majority of violence committed against gender-variant individuals targets individuals on the trans female/feminine spectrum.” In the media, “jokes and demeaning depictions of gender-variant people primarily focus on trans female/feminine spectrum people,” and these individuals are also “routinely sexualized.”<sup>17</sup> Regarding the relationship between transphobia and transmisogyny, some trans women are beginning to argue that transphobia (as the more generalized system of oppression) is actually rooted in transmisogyny. In other words, any negativity or violence that trans men or trans masculine people experience is a collateral effect of transmisogyny.<sup>18</sup> In this paper, I will be discussing transmisogyny, and not transphobia.

## My Position

I want to state from the beginning that I am writing from the position of a cisgender woman. Throughout this process I have struggled with how to approach my topic in a way that does not silence or speak for trans women. By illuminating the ways in which environmentalism in the United States has been exclusionary, I hope this paper begins to persuade other cis environmentalists to make room in their communities and conversations for trans women to speak about their experiences and ideas. There will be people who say that cis women should

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<sup>15</sup> Iphis, [http://theroguefeminist.tumblr.com/search/trans\\*](http://theroguefeminist.tumblr.com/search/trans*)

<sup>16</sup> Laura Kacere, “Transmisogyny: What Is It?” (2014), <http://everydayfeminism.com/2014/01/transmisogyny/>.

<sup>17</sup> Julia Serano, “Transmisogyny primer” (2012), <http://www.juliaserano.com/av/TransmisogynyPrimer-Serano.pdf> For a more comprehensive exploration of transmisogyny, please read Julia Serano’s book, “Whipping Girl”.

<sup>18</sup> STFU, Transmisogynistic Trans Folks! (2014) <http://stfutransmisogynisttransfolks.tumblr.com/post/45162205749/transmisogyny-as-the-foundation-for-transphobia>.

never write about transmisogyny. I am not trying to change their minds. There are others who say, and have been saying for a long time now, that trans women alone cannot carry the burden of calling out transmisogyny, and that liberation needs to be a dynamic process. I hope for this thesis to be a movement into coalition with them.

## Intersex Fish

Pollution holds a privileged place in the consciousness of environmentalists. Books and articles about pollution, like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, are heralded as the early catalysts of the U.S. environmental movement of the 1960s, whose paradigm still dominates most of environmentalism's concerns and goals today. *Silent Spring* serves as a good example of the narrative and framework that current environmentalism continues to rely on: "unnatural" or "created" threats (such as chemical pollutants) infiltrate our otherwise discrete, whole, and fit bodies, both human and ecological. According to this paradigm, contamination is the most pressing threat to the integrity and health of individuals, systems, and by extension, the planet.<sup>19</sup>

Pollution fear is corporeally based, finding much of its grounding in anxieties about the supposed discreteness of the body. As I argue later in this section, trans women are also perceived as threats to the body's discreteness. The idea that the body may not necessarily be innately whole, contained, or without need for medical or chemical intervention threatens the idea that discreteness of the body is necessary or even possible. In addition, given U.S. environmentalism's rooted investment in preserving and purifying masculinity, on which I will elaborate later, trans women's femininity amplifies their status as a perceived threat to both masculinity and nature itself.

*Corporeal disgust* "distinguishes between good ecological subjects and impure, dirty, unnatural 'ecological others'" through the deployment of "disgust against various communities [seen] as threats to nature...through discourses of the body," a concept articulated by Sarah Jaquette Ray in her book *The Ecological Other*.<sup>20</sup> In the following case, transmisogyny and pollution fear combine to create a corporeal disgust aimed at both trans women and intersex fish. Through this politics of disgust, trans women are portrayed as ecological others whose identities are imagined onto the bodies of male fish with a type of intersex characteristic called testicular oocytes.

Beginning in 2002, researchers from the United States Geological Survey started investigating unusually large fish kills and accounts of skin lesions on smallmouth bass in the

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<sup>19</sup> Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962.

<sup>20</sup> Sarah Jaquette Ray, *The Ecological Other*. Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 2013. 1-2.

South Branch of the Potomac River in Virginia. Upon closer examination of the samples brought back to the lab, they discovered that many male smallmouth bass had microscopic female germ cells (oocytes) developing in their testes. In 2005, more smallmouth bass were collected from sites in the Shenandoah River in Virginia after similar fish kills and skin lesions were noted. Again, a high prevalence of testicular oocytes (also known as ovotestis) was measured.<sup>21</sup>

Testicular oocytes (TO), when found in gonochoristic fish (fish that typically have only one distinct sex), are often used as an indicator of the presence of endocrine disruptors or estrogenic compounds in the water.<sup>22</sup> The report by USGS admits that “a low level of gonadal intersex may be a natural phenomenon in some gonochoristic fishes,” though there are only two other studies that have evaluated smallmouth bass reproductive health.<sup>23</sup> These two studies both observed TO in smallmouth bass, but because the sites they were collected from were either urban areas or downstream from pulp and paper mills, it has not been determined what the norm is for smallmouth bass collected from areas with no pollution. Whether smallmouth bass are, in fact, gonochoristic is still unknown.<sup>24</sup>

The USGS study concludes that pollution may be to blame for the presence of TO in smallmouth bass, and lists potential sources of contamination including “agricultural runoff, municipal and industrial wastewater, and treated and untreated domestic wastewater.”<sup>25</sup> The estrogens “found in these effluents include estrone, 17 $\beta$ -estradiol, and the synthetic estrogen 17 $\alpha$ -ethinylestradiol used in birth control and hormone replacement medications.”<sup>26</sup> While

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<sup>21</sup> Blazer, et al. “Intersex fish: Endocrine disruption in smallmouth bass,” U.S. Geological Survey. 2009. 242-253.

<sup>22</sup> Some examples are mentioned in the paper: “male spottail shiners *Notropis hudsonius* collected at sites in the St. Lawrence River with sewage contamination (Aravindakshan et al. 2004), sharptooth catfish *Clarias gariepinus* inhabiting a reservoir in South Africa with estrogenic water pollution (Barnhoorn et al. 2004), white suckers *Castostomus commersonii* from waste-water effluent-dominated Colorado streams (Woodling et al. 2006)...” Please see the paper for more examples.

<sup>23</sup> Blazer, et al. “Intersex fish...” 248.

<sup>24</sup> Blazer, et al. “Intersex fish...” 247-251.

<sup>25</sup> Douglas B. Chambers and Thomas J. Leiker, “A Reconnaissance for Emerging Contaminants in the South Branch Potomac River, Capacon River, and Williams River Basins, West Virginia, April-October 2004,” *U.S. Geological Survey Open-File Report*. 2006.

<sup>26</sup> C. Desbrow, E. J. Routledge, G. C. Brighty, J. P. Sumpter, and M. Waldock. “Identification of estrogenic chemicals in STW effluents. Chemical fractionation and in vitro biological screening,” *Environmental Science and Technology* (1998) 32:1549–1558.



testicular oocytes were speculated to have “potential effects on reproductive capacity,” any health problems regarding an individual’s mortality were linked to the skin lesions that made fish more susceptible to infectious and neoplastic diseases. In other words, the lesions and kills themselves had nothing to do with the presence of testicular oocytes in individual fish, and the only proposed consequence of TO, which was not measured or tested, was potential reproductive difficulties.<sup>27</sup>

However, as soon as reports like the one above began to circulate outside of the scientific community, the story took on a very different vocabulary. “Operation Sex Change.”<sup>28</sup> “‘Gender-bender’ threat to marine life.”<sup>29</sup> “Something in the Water Is Feminizing Male Fish. Are We Next?”<sup>30</sup> Popular science publications jumped at the story, quickly summarizing the results and providing their own interpretations of the significance of the presence of TO. The articles dial into people’s worst fears about pollution: that something sinister is lurking in one of our most precious resources, one necessary for life, and holds the ability to make our bodies and identities unrecognizable. In addition to perpetuating pollution fear, the articles sensationalize sexual variation by using transmisogynistic language and stereotypes to aggravate insecurities about masculinity and the supposed fixity of human gender and sex.

### ***The Rainbow of Sex***

Many of the articles about the intersex smallmouth bass use words such as “odd,” “strange,” and “bizarre” to portray the fish as exceptional and unnatural. “Something strange is happening to the fish in America’s rivers, lakes, and ponds,” writes Dean Reynolds for CBS News, in an article titled “Chemicals in Water Alter Gender of Fish.”<sup>31</sup> However, when contextualized within the sex diversity that exists among other animals and organisms, this make-up is not so odd. Even Reynolds himself references that “catfish and sturgeon have the

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<sup>27</sup> Blazer, et al. “Intersex fish...” 242-253.

<sup>28</sup> Cynthia Mills, “Operation Sex Change,” *Conservation*, July 16, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Helen Briggs, “‘Gender-bender’ threat to marine life,” *BBC News*, July 17, 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Eric Hagerman, “Something in the Water Is Feminizing Male Fish. Are We Next?” *Popular Science*, November 30, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Dean Reynolds, “Chemicals in Water Alter Gender of Fish,” *CBS News*, November 25, 2009.

same odd make-up.”<sup>32</sup> “The most common body form among plants and in perhaps half of the animal kingdom is for an individual to be both male and female at the same, or at different times during its life,” writes Joan Roughgarden, an evolutionary biologist at Stanford University whose work on sex and gender variation in animals is informed in part by her own experience as a trans woman.<sup>33</sup>

Particularly interesting in Roughgarden’s book on biodiversity, *Evolution’s Rainbow*, is her description of the Great Barrier Reef’s goby fish. In this species, all juveniles mature into females. A few females end up changing into males while retaining the ability to change back into females at any point. Of particular relevance to the case of the smallmouth bass is that all goby fish males “contain early-stage oocytes—cells that develop into eggs—in their gonads.”<sup>34</sup> For this species, testicular oocytes are not abnormal, and occur as a part of the natural sexing of their bodies. Could the smallmouth bass be similar in this way? Are the skin lesions and kills that are caused by chemicals not related to the presence of testicular oocytes? If reliable data about TO presence in smallmouth bass taken from “pristine” areas is not yet reliable, perhaps there is more room for interpretation about the significance (or insignificance) of testicular oocytes.

For this paper, I am not as concerned with the cause of testicular oocytes in smallmouth bass as I am about why the majority of articles assume their presence is an abnormality. I argue that this assumption is based in transmisogyny and through its combination with pollution fear, constructs gender, femininity, and unnaturalness as contaminants that infiltrate supposedly discrete bodies on multiple levels. The articles draw not just on scientific data, but heterosexist and cissexist<sup>35</sup> cultural beliefs as well.

In every article, sex and gender are treated as interchangeable. This essentialist equation of sex and gender allows the authors to make false comparisons between trans women and intersex fish. For example, in an article in *Health & Science*, Darryl Fears writes, “ten years have gone by since one of the weirdest discoveries in the Chesapeake Bay region... male smallmouth

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<sup>32</sup> Dean Reynolds, “Chemicals in Water.”

<sup>33</sup> Joan Roughgarden, “Sex and Diversity...” 147-155.

<sup>34</sup> Joan Roughgarden, “Sex and Diversity...” 153.

<sup>35</sup> Cissexism is defined as the belief that transgender people’s genders are less authentic than, or inferior to, cisgender people’s genders.

bass with lady parts, eggs in places where they absolutely should not be.”<sup>36</sup> In addition to his misconceptions about the frequency of sex diversity in organisms, Fears also attempts to naturalize cisness by referring to eggs as “lady parts,” equating the female gametes of fish with a human gender.

Beyond the general gender essentialism that is present in each article, some of the articles rely on transmisogynistic stereotypes to describe and generate anxiety around the fish. One particularly offensive article, written by Cynthia Mills for *Conservation*, an independent journal published out of the University of Washington, describes two researchers, John Teem and Juan Gutierrez, who are attempting to induce an intersex characteristic in fish populations as a way to control invasive fish species without the use of chemicals. The fish would appear female but remain genetically male, meaning that when they mated with other fish, they would end up “skewing an entire population until it consists entirely of males—effectively wiping it out.”<sup>37</sup> “It’s the kind of bizarre idea that brings to mind the old Kinks hit ‘Lola’—or even a bit of twisted science fiction,” Mills writes.<sup>38</sup> For those unfamiliar with the song, “Lola” tells the story of a man who meets a woman “down in old Soho” who he falls in love with. The lyrics, “well I’m not the world’s most masculine man, But I know what I am and I’m glad I’m a man, And so is Lola,” suggest a double meaning: that Lola is glad the singer is a man while also being a “man” herself. The song is intended to be humorous, as the listener is in on the fact that Lola is not a cis woman, and makes a joke out of Lola’s gender, suggesting that trans women’s genders are illusions, shoddy costumes, or punch lines. Mills uses this reference, as well as other words used to delegitimize or pathologize trans women, to make the situation of the fish seem “edgy,” “bizarre,” or even “twisted.”

The researchers trying to enact a population collapse with the help of these fish use the term “intersex,” but throughout the entire paper Mills insists on referring to the fish as “transvestite fish,” a word that is considered a slur by many trans women today. When explaining the researchers’ project, she writes that they “believe that if they can dupe normal fish into

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<sup>36</sup> Darryl Fears, “Bay’s intersex fish mystery remains unsolved,” *Health & Science*, March 17, 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Cynthia Mills, “Operation Sex Change.”

<sup>38</sup> Cynthia Mills, “Operation Sex Change.”

mating with these gender-bent fish, they can kick off a chromosomal cascade” which will wipe out the species.<sup>39</sup> Here Mills draws on extremely harmful stereotypes that portray trans women as deceivers, as though living as their gender is somehow inauthentic. Stereotypes like these contribute to considerable violence and incarceration among trans women, especially trans women of color.<sup>40</sup> Mills ends her article on an especially vicious note. “Teem’s idea also assumes,” she writes, that “wild fish won’t resist being seduced by transvestites... In other words, these transvestite fish might look good from a distance, but up close you might be able to see the stubble.”<sup>41</sup> Overall, the articles use cis people’s fears of trans women to amplify pollution fear with regards to the significance and implications of intersex fish.

Fears’ article in particular reveals the common insecurities that many cis people have about the fixity of the sex and gender binaries.<sup>42</sup> Mixing, blurriness, and ambiguity of sex and gender are perceived to be “bad,” “threatening,” or “unnatural.” The anxiety around the possible porousness of supposedly discrete categories relates back to pollution fear. In the case of intersex fish, the pollution is not limited to estrogenic compounds; gender variance and femininity become pollutants as well.

### ***Situating Within a History of Cultural Projection***

The heteronormative and cissexist beliefs framing this story are unfortunately unsurprising. Despite the reputation of science as “objective,” there is a long history of scientists imposing human cultural values and social structures onto animals. “Most often we project human worlds onto the supposedly blank slate of animality,” writes Jack Halberstam in their book *The Queer Art of Failure*, “and then we create the animals we need in order to locate our own human behaviors in ‘nature.’”<sup>43</sup> This projection is circular in its effect, since our imposition onto animal behavior is used by us, in turn, as justification for our own behaviors.

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<sup>39</sup> Cynthia Mills, “Operation Sex Change.”

<sup>40</sup> Julia Serano, “Transmisogyny primer.”

<sup>41</sup> Cynthia Mills, “Operation Sex Change.”

<sup>42</sup> Darryl Fears, “Bay’s intersex fish mystery remains unsolved.”

<sup>43</sup> Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. 32.

One example of how humans affix our own social values, however sloppily, onto the behaviors of animals is the film *March of the Penguins* by Luc Jacquet. While the movie focuses on the penguins' arduous trek to their breeding grounds, along with the threat that global climate change poses to their icy habitat, the film "ultimately trains its attention on only a fraction of the story of penguin communities because its gaze remains so obstinately trained upon the comforting spectacle of 'the couple,' 'the family unit,' 'love,' 'loss,' heterosexual reproduction, and the emotional architecture that supposedly wields all these moving parts together." The Christian Right glommed on to the movie, promoting it as "a moving text about monogamy, sacrifice, and child rearing," even though, as Halberstam points out, "penguins are monogamous for only one year" and "they promptly abandon all responsibility for their offspring once the small penguins have survived the first few months of arctic life."<sup>44</sup> Joan Roughgarden explains that "most biologists observe 'nature' through a narrow and biased lens of socionormativity and therefore misinterpret all kinds of biodiversity," folding it into "rigid and unimaginative hetero-familial schemes of reproductive zeal and the survival of the fittest."<sup>45</sup>

One example of this misunderstanding was detailed in a 2010 article in *The New York Times*, titled "Can Animals Be Gay?" Jon Mooallem, the writer of the article, visited Kaena point in Oahu, Hawaii, home to the Laysan albatross, to talk to the researchers studying female-female nesting pairs. Albatross couples take turns incubating a single egg, while the other searches for food. Lindsay C. Young, a researcher who used the colony as the focus of her doctoral dissertation while at the University of Hawaii, found that about a third of all nesting pairs at Kaena Point were both females, rather than the assumed male-female pairings. Since male and female albatross look nearly identical, the different pairings weren't easily recognizable. While the confirmation of female-female pairings was in some way surprising, there is evidence that their existence is not a recent phenomenon.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*. 39.

<sup>45</sup> Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*. 39.

Joan Roughgarden, *Evolution's Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and People*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>46</sup> Jon Mooallem, "The Love That Dare Not Squawk Its Name: Can Animals Be Gay," *New York Times*, 31 March 2010.

Researchers in the 1960s assumed that a small number of female birds must have been able to lay more than one egg. In 1968, Harvey Fisher, a leader in albatross science at the time, “reported on seven years of daily observations made at 3,440 different nests on the Midway atoll in the middle of the Pacific.” He concluded that the extra egg was caused by “an inexperienced female accidentally [laying] her egg in the wrong nest.” However, 40 years after the publication by Fisher, Brenda Zaun, a biologist who works with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, “realized that certain nests there seemed to wind up with two eggs in them year after year,” meaning that the supernormal clutches probably weren’t solely the result of accidents made by younger females.<sup>47</sup> After taking blood samples of the nesting birds, Zaun and Young discovered the female-female pairings.

What is perhaps even more interesting than the discovery of the female-female pairings is the political response to the publication of their research. Before their research was published, First Lady Laura Bush visited the island and “praised Laysan albatross couples for making lifelong commitments to one another,” politicizing the species’ supposedly heterosexual monogamy.<sup>48</sup> After the discovery of female-female pairings were announced, Young found herself “in the middle of a national debate about whether homosexuality among animals proved the rightness and naturalness of gay and lesbian proclivities among humans.”<sup>49</sup> “A Denver-based publication for gay parents welcomed any and all new readers from ‘the extensive lesbian albatross parent community,’” writes Mooallem, while a “conservative Oklahoma senator Tom Coburn highlighted Young’s paper on his Web site, under the heading ‘Your Tax Dollars at Work,’ even though her study of female-female pairs was not actually federally financed.”<sup>50</sup>

While physical sex is different from gender, and both are different from sexual orientation, the common factor between the penguins, albatrosses, and intersex smallmouth bass is the presumption that these animals would exhibit behavior, bodies, and characteristics that reflect the hegemonic human ideals that are constructed culturally. “There is still an overall

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<sup>47</sup> Jon Mooallem, “The Love That Dare Not...”

<sup>48</sup> Jon Mooallem, “The Love That Dare Not...”

<sup>49</sup> Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*. 39.

<sup>50</sup> Jon Mooallem, “The Love That Dare Not...”

presumption of heterosexuality,” says biologist Bruce Bagemihl. “Individuals, populations or species,” Bagemihl writes, “are considered to be entirely heterosexual until proven otherwise.”<sup>51</sup> In the case of the smallmouth bass there exists the cissexist presumption that animals will be gonochoristic until proven otherwise. As biologist Joan Roughgarden noted, gonochorism is not even the most common state of being for most organisms, so the assumption is not informed by the frequency of intersex characteristics in other animals, but rather from human cissexism and transmisogyny.<sup>52</sup>

### ***The New Crisis of Masculinity***

Throughout the articles, a common question is posed, whether implicitly or explicitly: What effects will this pollution have on humans? The concern is valid. No one should have to experience non-consensual alteration of one’s body, and by being aware of what chemicals may exist around us, we increase our abilities to protect our health. However, the conversation happening around this question harkens back to environmentalism’s beginnings, in the 1890s during the Progressive Era. Social reform efforts were being “led by individuals such as Theodore Roosevelt and Charles Davenport... who sought to engineer an ideal society, socially harmonious and free of social deviants and groups thought to threaten America’s image of itself, which linked moral purity to whiteness, cleanliness, and reform politics,” writes Sarah Jaquette Ray.<sup>53</sup> Cleanliness, the removal and exclusion of contaminants, became the overarching goal of these reforms, operating on physical, social, national, and corporeal levels. Immigrants, people of color, disabled people, and women were perceived to threaten the health of the “nation as body,” justifying rampant racism, anti-immigration sentiment, ableism, and misogyny through exclusionary policies and eugenics.<sup>54</sup> Amidst a perceived “crisis of masculinity,” “wilderness became a ‘purification machine’ that produced ideal Anglo-American men.”<sup>55</sup> White, class-

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<sup>51</sup> Jon Mooallem, “The Love That Dare Not...”

<sup>52</sup> Joan Roughgarden, “Sex and Diversity...” 147-155.

<sup>53</sup> Sarah Jaquette Ray, *The Ecological Other*. 13.

<sup>54</sup> Sarah Jaquette Ray, *The Ecological Other*.

<sup>55</sup> Sarah Jaquette Ray, *The Ecological Other*. 9.

privileged men could escape their “feminizing” urban environments and retreat to a “pure nature” that was increasingly sectioned off and emptied of Native Americans by the conservation movement.<sup>56</sup> I argue that the rhetoric surrounding intersex fish creates a *new* “crisis of masculinity,” one in which nature itself is seen as feminizing.

As mentioned above, femininity and gender variance are portrayed as types of pollutants within the rhetorical framing of these articles. Estrogenic compounds are the most frequently discussed potential cause for testicular oocytes in the articles, but in addition to estrogen as a pollutant, femininity and transness are portrayed as *social* pollutants, or characteristics or identities that threaten the discreteness and fitness of cis men. The perceived threat that intersex fish pose to human masculinity is in part based in a common fear that masculinity, while representing strength and toughness, is somehow fragile enough that “even the slightest brush with the feminine destroys it.”<sup>57</sup> Environmentalism, again, shows an over-investment in preserving and purifying masculinity.

In this section, I have demonstrated the ways in which our language and assumptions surrounding non-human animals can enforce transmisogyny. In this next section, I will be focusing on an example of more explicit exclusion of trans women that occurs within activist communities.

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<sup>56</sup> Sarah Jaquette Ray, *The Ecological Other*.

<sup>57</sup> Gwen Sharp, “Policing Masculinity in Slim Jim’s ‘Spice Loss’ Ads”



## Exclusionary Activism

Deep Green Resistance describes itself as an organization of radical environmentalists dissatisfied with the ineffectiveness of mainstream environmentalism. Founded by Derrick Jensen, Lierre Keith, and Aric McBay, the organization mobilizes around issues of global warming, rapid species extinction, and the over-consumption of fossil fuels.<sup>58</sup> Deep Green Resistance states that “the only honest solution is to stop industrial civilization from burning fossil fuels,” asserting that “this culture needs to be destroyed before it consumes all life on this planet.”<sup>59</sup>

The goal of Deep Green Resistance (DGR) is to “deprive the rich of their ability to steal from the poor and the powerful of their ability to destroy the planet,” and while they admit this is “a vast undertaking” they believe that the collapse of industrial civilization is possible through the implementation of their plan by the same name. The plan involves a complex network of belowground and aboveground organizing that is committed to “fighting back” against exploitation and injustice in every facet of civilization, not only issues of ecological significance. While the organization’s radicalism may be intimidating or off-putting to some, at first glance they at least appear to be operating under noble motives. In fact, one of their stated principles is that DGR “works to end abuse at the personal, organizational, and cultural levels,” attempts to “eradicate domination and subordination” from their personal interactions, and seeks “to promote solidarity between oppressed peoples.”<sup>60</sup> In the context of this paper about exclusion, one may be wondering how an organization that seems so invested in abolishing injustice could possibly relate to the topic at hand.

Despite DGR’s claim that they work to promote solidarity, the group has recently generated a great deal of controversy in radical environmental communities. Perhaps

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<sup>58</sup> Jensen is an American author, self-described “indigenist,” and critic of mainstream environmentalism radical. (<http://www.derrickjensen.org>) Keith is a trans-exclusive radical feminist, environmentalist and food activist. (<http://www.lierrekeith.com>) McBay is the primary contributor to Deep Green Resistance’s strategy for collapsing civilization, but left the organization in early 2012. (<http://www.aricmcbay.org>.)

<sup>59</sup> Deep Green Resistance, “Why Deep Green Resistance?” <http://deepgreenresistance.org/en/who-we-are/about-deep-green-resistance>.

<sup>60</sup> Deep Green Resistance, “Guiding Principles of Deep Green Resistance.” <http://deepgreenresistance.org/en/who-we-are/guiding-principles-of-deep-green-resistance>.

surprisingly, it is not because the organization sees “civilization as the institution that is destroying life on Earth” and in response has created a strategy for catalyzing the collapse of global civilization through what they call *Decisive Ecological Warfare*. It is also not due to their highly militant underground resistance network that plans to engage in direct action against banks, coal-fired power plants, and other exploitative institutions.<sup>61</sup> The reason why the organization has been recently banned from numerous conferences, speaking events, tabling opportunities, and radical websites has had to do with their policy on gender, specifically their refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the genders of trans people.

Deep Green Resistance identifies the organization as aligned with radical feminism. However, a better description would be trans-exclusive radical feminism. In the past three years, numerous accounts of DGR’s discrimination against trans people, specifically trans women, have been made public by trans and cis women within the organization. The organization has deliberately used the wrong pronouns for trans women, denied trans women access to women’s spaces and gender appropriate housing, delegitimized and erased trans women’s struggles for safety, and spread false information about the tenets of trans-inclusive feminism.<sup>62</sup>

### ***Accounts of Exclusion and Responses***

One account of this exclusion comes from a former member of DGR (who remained anonymous) who wrote to the website [decolonizingyoga.com](http://decolonizingyoga.com) to share that she had been denied “access to the DGR forum women’s board and gender appropriate housing at the DGR conference.” Eventually, she writes, another member of DGR (a cis woman) told her that “in wanting access to women’s spaces [she] was implementing [her] male violation imperative.” Also around this time, key organizational leaders Saba Malik, Lierre Keith, and Derrick Jensen “all sent emails to [her] chapter and one other chapter that supported trans folks with the usual

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<sup>61</sup> Deep Green Resistance, “Decisive Ecological Warfare.” <http://deepgreenresistance.org/en/deep-green-resistance-strategy/decisive-ecological-warfare-dgr>.

<sup>62</sup> GenderTrender, “Trans vs. Feminism: Video footage of Queer/Trans activists at the ‘Law and Disorder’ conference following last weekend’s Portland attack.” May 2013. <http://gendertrender.wordpress.com/2013/05/16/trans-vs-feminism-video-footage-of-queertrans-activists-at-the-law-and-disorder-conference-following-last-weekends-portland-attack>.

rad fem attacks.” The former member also wrote that “gradually my group and the other chapters were presented with a choice: put up with trans phobia or hit the road.”<sup>63</sup>

Another example of the organization’s exclusivity occurred at the recent Law & Disorder Conference in Portland, Oregon in May 2013, an altercation broke out between two trans women who were attending the conference and two cis women who were tabling for DGR. As the women from DGR flatly denied the identities and struggles of the trans women, one of the women (not from DGR) took out a black marker and began to deface the copies of DGR’s books that were sitting on the table. A woman from DGR held out her hand in the way of the marker, and the marker grazed her hand as it was in mid-stroke. The incident was reported to the organizers of the Conference, and was described by DGR as a vicious assault. Included in this report was also the account of a queer activist throwing a burrito at the head of someone else from DGR, after the DGR member had continued to be aggressive and delegitimizing toward the activist. When the time came for the organizers to make a statement on “safer spaces,” they sided with the trans women. “Ideally DGR’s transphobia should have been a concern to organizers, and if there was better internal communication, we would not have allowed them to table,” one organizer wrote in an official statement on the Law & Disorder Conference Facebook page. “Regardless, we will go our separate ways with DGR,” he continues, “and not involve them in any future events due to their transphobic attitudes being contradictory to a safer space policy.”<sup>64</sup> DGR’s account of the Conference was, of course, very different, and they misgendered the trans women in order to spin the story as “male violence” against women. DGR described themselves as “the recipients of bullying, threats, and silencing,” refusing to consider how they themselves silence, exclude, and bully trans women in their movement.<sup>65</sup>

Some chapters of DGR have indeed “hit the road.” Portland’s former DGR chapter defected after the trans-exclusive policy was announced and now call themselves “Resistance

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<sup>63</sup> Be Scofield, “How Derrick Jensen’s Deep Green Resistance Supports Transphobia.” May 2013. <http://www.decolonizingyoga.com/how-derrick-jensens-deep-green-resistance-supports-transphobia>

<sup>64</sup> Trashy, “DGR Meets Resistance at the Law and Disorder Conference.” May 2013. <http://earthfirstjournal.org/newswire/2013/05/13/dgr-meets-resistance-at-the-law-and-disorder-conference>.

<sup>65</sup> Cathy Brennan, “Statement from Deep Green Resistance on Trans/Queer Attacks on Women,” [organizingforwomensliberation.wordpress.com](http://organizingforwomensliberation.wordpress.com). May 2013. <http://organizingforwomensliberation.wordpress.com/2013/05/16/statement-from-deep-green-resistance-on-transqueer-attacks-on-women-plus-video/>

Portland.” In an open letter published by *Earth First! Newswire*, Resistance Portland states that they “renounce trans\*phobic statements made by Derrick Jensen, Lierre Keith, and other members of DGR” and “are in solidarity with the many biocentric and anti-civilization people of any gender who are against all forms of oppression and will not accept bigotry in any form.”<sup>66</sup> DGR’s centralized organizational structure has enabled a type of authoritarian control, in which a small board is given complete discretion over policies and goals. Resistance Portland’s letter elaborates that the decision-making structure of DGR “lies exclusively in the hands of the three-person advisory board: Jensen, Keith, and Saba Malik, and a half-dozen hand-picked staff members. [*sic*]” These staff members are newer members, who are often young and live with Keith in Crescent City, so the influence that Keith has over them is likely very high. While Resistance Portland clarifies that they are not against leadership or delegating authority within movements, they “are against unclear centralized decision-making structures and against a climate where questioning authority is discouraged.” Many members of DGR joined the organization because of their anti-civilization analysis, not their stance on gender, but have not been given platforms on which to provide a voice of dissent to Keith and Jensen’s view because such platforms do not exist within the organization.<sup>67</sup>

### ***What is Gender Anyway? DGR Doesn’t Know***

DGR’s anti-trans policies and actions are rooted in the organization’s trans-exclusive radical feminism; transmisogyny is built into DGR’s structure and values. In a 40-minute long video on DGR’s Youtube channel, Rachel Ivy, a 23-year-old liberal arts graduate, presents DGR’s official policy on gender in slideshow form. Ivy begins the presentation by clarifying that she is “not presenting this topic for debate, not in the slightest... this represents DGR’s policy.” From the very beginning, DGR emphasizes that they do not allow for productive conversations around gender. Furthermore, Ivy describes their trans-exclusive policy as “the core of DGR.”

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<sup>66</sup> Throughout this section the people quoted will use the words “trans\*phobia” and “transphobia” to describe the hate and oppression of trans people, specifically with regards to how DGR treats trans people. However, I argue that this is actually transmisogyny, as every example of anti-trans sentiment is framed by DGR to be about trans women, and the altercation at the Conference occurred between cis and trans women. Calling DGR’s views “transphobic” erases the specific, violent prejudice that happens against trans women.

<sup>67</sup> Tessa, Lumen, and Justin (former members of DGR Portland), “Deep Green Resignation and Reclamation.” May 2013. <http://earthfirstjournal.org/newswire/2013/05/16/deep-green-reclamation/>

“This is the reason why I joined DGR,” she states, “[and] this is the reason why the women I look up to are in DGR, and if it changed, we would all leave.” DGR is one of the only radical environmentalist organizations that also identifies as a feminist organization of some kind, attracting many feminists who were both aware, and unaware, of the transmisogynistic beliefs of the movement’s leaders. However, many women have left the organization for precisely the same reason Ivy is defending.<sup>68</sup>

It is important to understand that DGR’s framework for understanding gender falls apart easily under the slightest pressure. There are four main contradictions or false claims in DGR’s definition of gender that makes their trans-exclusivity completely illogical. The first is that their definition of gender conflates gender identity, gender role, and gender expression. The second is that they define femininity as “ritualized displays of submission to males,” thus naturalizing masculinity by portraying femininity as constructed and inherently subordinate.<sup>69</sup> The third is that DGR makes no distinction between difference and hierarchy, and assert that difference itself is what creates the hierarchy. Finally, they portray the genders of trans people as voluntary and political. In this section, I will deconstruct each of their claims to illuminate the contradictory nature of their argument.

DGR defines gender as “a hierarchical system which maintains the subordination of females as a class to males as a class through force.” Additionally, they argue that “gender is not natural or voluntary, since no person is naturally subordinate to another.” The solution to this oppressive gender system? “Overthrow male power and thus the entire gender system,” asserts Ivy, reading the statement for DGR.<sup>70</sup> In addition to seeing gender as a class system, DGR’s notion of gender is also a conflation of gender identity, gender expression, and gender role. DGR, like arguably all feminists, questions assigned gender roles, and for good reason. The basis of feminism is founded on this rejection of compulsory roles assigned by gender, and the

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<sup>68</sup> Rachel Ivy, “The End of Gender: Revolution, Not Reform,” YouTube video, 39:17, posted by “DeepGreenResistance,” May 10, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ot8cBm0YmXo>

<sup>69</sup> Rachel Ivy, “The End of Gender: Revolution, Not Reform.”

<sup>70</sup> Rachel Ivy, “The End of Gender: Revolution, Not Reform.”

devaluation of typically feminine tasks or roles.<sup>71</sup> Gender identity, however, is different from gender role. Gender identity is simply the gender that someone identifies as.<sup>72</sup> So a woman can still identify as a woman while choosing not to fulfill her expected gender role. There are women who choose not to have children, women who work in the construction industry, and women whose husbands cook them dinner, but this does not mean they do not identify as women. DGR compounds upon the conflation of gender role and identity by adding gender expression to the mix. Gender expression is the way in which we express our gender identities.<sup>73</sup> A woman may wear her hair long or short, may wear tight-fitting skirts or baggy jeans, and may play with mixes of feminine and masculine characteristics, all as valid ways to express her gender identity. But while gender identity, expression, and role are often connected in U.S. society, they are also extremely different things, and one can change while others stay the same. For example, the gender *roles* and *expressions* available for women have changed drastically since the Victorian era, but mainstream conceptions of gender are still based around the *identities* of “men” and “women.”<sup>74</sup>

DGR argues that gender identity and gender expression are loci of hierarchical power dynamics, going so far as to define femininity itself as “ritualized displays of submission to males.”<sup>75</sup> While it is true that women are often defined as deviations, or in opposition to men (though not as equals), DGR’s definition of femininity reinforces, rather than challenges, the positioning of women and femininity as lesser. Femininity is not inherently submissive—submission has been labelled as a feminine trait because society devalues both submission and femininity. And this is capable of being changed socially, indeed, it is being changed all the time by powerful, feminine women such as Beyonce Knowles, Janet Mock, Hillary Clinton, etc. What

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<sup>71</sup> This is not to say that these roles are bad or oppressive by themselves. Some women find incredible joy in motherhood or caretaking. Others have no interest in politics. Others enjoy sewing and other stereotypically female activities. The problem is when we fail to appreciate these roles, when we make them seem somehow less important than traditionally masculine roles, and also when we force people into these roles based on gender.

<sup>72</sup> Planned Parenthood, “What Is Gender? What Is Gender Identity?” <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/sexual-orientation-gender/gender-gender-identity-26530.htm>.

<sup>73</sup> Human Rights Campaign, “Gender Expression.” <http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-terminology-and-definitions>.

<sup>74</sup> Gender Spectrum, “Understanding Gender.” <https://www.genderspectrum.org/understanding-gender>.

<sup>75</sup> Rachel Ivy, “The End of Gender: Revolution, Not Reform.”

DGR does by equating femininity, women, and submission is strip women of agency. By arguing that femininity is inherently less valuable or natural than masculinity, this argument reinforces patriarchal notions of masculinity's innate superiority.

In a patriarchal society such as the United States, gender identity, expression, and roles of men and women are not simply *different*; women and femininity are marked as *lesser*, while masculinity and men are rewarded with social privileges, thus creating a hierarchy. However, DGR does not make a distinction between difference and hierarchy, as they believe difference itself is what creates the hierarchy. "Without gender there cannot be oppression," states Ivy in the video, but difference exists all around us.<sup>76</sup> The problem is not that difference exists, or that the identities of "men" and "women" exist. The problem is when we think these are the only legitimate genders that people can have. The problem is when people are forced into those identities based on nothing more than the appearance of one's genitals. The problem is when one category has far more power, respect, and privilege in society than others.

The last major flaw of DGR's reasoning around gender is their claim that trans people's genders are solely political statements. There are many trans people who come to an understanding about their genders long before being exposed to trans, queer, or feminist theory, and many trans people will *never* be exposed to those discourses.<sup>77</sup> To say that gender identity is absolutely not linked to biological predispositions, which is what DGR argues, discounts the deep, inexplicable feelings that most trans people have, often early in life as children.<sup>78</sup> In the video, Ivy refers to trans people as "gender outlaws," referencing the title of trans advocate Kate Bornstein's groundbreaking memoir, but while Bornstein was attempting to describe what it feels like to have an identity outside the mainstream conception of gender, Ivy interprets this to mean that all trans people's genders are simply political statements, or a way to "escape" gender.<sup>79</sup> "When I was a liberal this was really attractive," Ivy says, "because it left it all up to me. If I

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<sup>76</sup> Rachel Ivy, "The End of Gender: Revolution, Not Reform."

<sup>77</sup> TransWhat? "Misconceptions Debunked." <http://transwhat.org/debunked>.

<sup>78</sup> Julia Serano, *Excluded*, Berkeley: Seal Press, 2013. 113.

<sup>79</sup> Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*, New York: Routledge, 1994.

wanted to escape gender, I could do it.”<sup>80</sup> Not only does Ivy misinterpret the reason *why* trans people transition by seeing it as a voluntary and political act, but she also is completely off-base on the idea that somehow trans people “escape gender.”

In reality, trans people are faced with gender *constantly* in their daily lives, and are forced to think about it much more often than cisgender people just in order to live comfortably and survive. Trans people are often not allowed to express their genders in the way they would like because they receive inordinate amounts of pressure to present in a way that is masculine or feminine enough to avoid discrimination and violence or to gain access to medical care. This attempt to present in a way that will minimize the threat of being misgendered or attacked is often misinterpreted as trans people “dressing as or presenting as the traditional gender stereotype” and then distorted by cissexists to mean that trans people misunderstand gender to be a sort of costume.<sup>81</sup> In reality, there are butch trans women, effeminate trans men, and genderqueer people of all types of expressions, and all of these gender expressions are legitimate. However not presenting as a traditional expression of their gender is often used by cissexists to portray trans people’s genders as “fake.” Having to delicately balance others’ perceptions with ones own preferred mode of expression daily is often exhausting. To say that somehow trans people “escape” gender is ridiculous. Trans people live genuine genders in a world that constantly delegitimizes them.

Since trans people are politicized in Ivy’s talk, she can make false connections between ineffective, individual-based environmentalist strategies, and trans people’s gender identities. “Dressing as or presenting as the traditional gender stereotype of the opposite sex is no more effective than living in a hut in the woods somewhere and expecting civilization to go on by itself,” says Ivy. “It doesn’t make any political difference on its own,” she continues. Living in a hut in the woods to protest civilization is an entirely political act, and she is right that it doesn’t do much, if anything, on its own. Trans people’s genders, though, are not political acts, they are deeply felt identities, and the mere *existence* of trans people across cultures, regions, and history is proof that the definition of gender that Ivy uses, as well as the notion of gender essentialism, is

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<sup>80</sup> Rachel Ivy, “The End of Gender: Revolution, Not Reform.”

<sup>81</sup> Rachel Ivy, “The End of Gender: Revolution, Not Reform.”



inaccurate. Trans people are not all political, are not all feminists, and are not all post-modern queer or gender theorists. Ivy's assertion that trans people think they destroy or escape the gender system simply through their own actions is preposterous. Serano tackles this type of argument beautifully.

If we step back for a minute, the assumption that we can subvert or overthrow the gender system by simply engaging in certain gendered or sexual behaviors (but not others) seems pretty silly. There have been gender outlaws and sexual outlaws of one stripe or another since the dawn of history, yet our mere presence has never once simply made sexism vanish into thin air. I would have to be pretty full of myself to believe that I could undo the gender system simply by behaving in one way or another. Such notions may be self-reassuring, but they ignore the fact that acts of sexism occur, not by how we dress, or identify, or have sex, but through the way we see and treat other people. Sexism occurs when we assume that some people are less valid or natural than others because of their sex, gender, or sexuality; it occurs when we project our own expectations and assumptions about sex, gender, and sexuality onto other people, and police their behaviors accordingly; it occurs when we reduce another person to their sex, gender, or sexuality rather than seeing them as a whole, legitimate person.<sup>82</sup>

What DGR is doing is not “dismantling gender,” but rather reinforcing the misogyny that already works to devalue women and femininity. Why is DGR so invested in gender anyway? How does this relate back to DGR's environmentalist ethic? The answer is in the organization's assertion that gender is *unnatural*, an idea they justify by construing gender as solely a cultural artifact, a symptom of civilization that must be dismantled if we are to overthrow society itself.

In *Excluded*, Julia Serano introduces the idea of *gender artifactualism* as “the tendency to conceptualize and depict gender as being primarily or entirely a cultural artifact.”<sup>83</sup> While some radical and lesbian feminists have been accused of *gender essentialism* (the idea that there are innate, essential differences between men and women, usually defined, in regards to women, as a “female essence” that binds all women together), Serano posits that what is often being used in radical and lesbian feminist analyses is gender artifactualism. *Social constructionism* falls somewhere in the middle of essentialism and artifactualism, and is the belief that “gender does not arise in a direct and unadulterated manner from biology, but rather is shaped to some extent

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<sup>82</sup> Julia Serano, *Excluded*. 137.

<sup>83</sup> Julia Serano, *Excluded*. 117.

by culture—by socialization, gender norms, and the gender-related ideology, language, and labels that constrain and influence our understanding of the matter.”<sup>84</sup> While essentialism is the belief that all aspects of gender are inherent, and artifactualism is the belief that gender is entirely constructed, social constructionism acknowledges that gender is an infinitely complicated mixture of biology and culture. Serano herself identifies as a social constructionist, but she points out that many feminists who think they are using a social constructionist framework are actually using gender artifactualism. When this happens, any acknowledgement of the role, or possible role, of biology in creating and understanding gender, queerness, femininity, and transness is accused of being *biological determinism*, the idea that biology dictates or determines a fixed outcome.<sup>85</sup>

Since women, queer, and trans people<sup>86</sup> have had their identities, behaviors, and bodies pathologized by the sciences and medicine for centuries, many feel this definition of an entirely artifactual gender can be liberating. If there is no scientific or medical basis for difference, then difference is obsolete, and with it, the ability to build hierarchies upon those differences! However, what gender artifactualism *actually* does is destroy “any possibility that there might be non-social or intrinsic factors that influence or predispose one to cross-gender identification,”<sup>87</sup> meaning that the logic of gender artifactualists like DGR goes like this: “1) Gender is a cultural artifact; 2) Transsexuals mistake gender to be something real (rather than recognizing it as artificial); 3) Therefore, transsexuals reify the gender system.”<sup>88</sup> DGR’s trans-exclusive radical feminism is not gender essentialist, because they actively reject the idea of an innate, felt gender. They instead see gender as a classification that would disappear without the enforcement of a sex caste system.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, if gender is a cultural artifact and has no meaning outside of the caste system, then an organization whose primary priority is to end civilization would, of course, reject

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<sup>84</sup> Julia Serano, *Excluded*. 117-18.

<sup>85</sup> Julia Serano, *Excluded*.

<sup>86</sup> These are not mutually exclusive categories, of course. When I say women I am saying all women (cis and trans), and one can be queer AND trans, or even understand their being trans as being queer, etc

<sup>87</sup> Julia Serano, *Excluded*. 119.

<sup>88</sup> Julia Serano, *Excluded*. 121.

<sup>89</sup> Rachel Ivy, “The End of Gender: Revolution, Not Reform.”

gender in and of itself. For DGR, gender is unnatural, so true ecological justice and naturalness must reject gender.

### ***The Future According to DGR***

So far I have demonstrated that DGR uses gender artifactualism to erase the subjectivity of trans people, and, by defining femininity as artificial and inherently subordinate, specifically targets trans women. This analysis is based in DGR's investment in naturalness, as a part of its radical environmentalist ethic. The relation between its trans-exclusive radical feminism and its radical environmentalism is not serendipitous, but constitutively constructed.

What kind of future does DGR advocate for? If gender abolition is central to environmental and social justice, how is DGR working to dismantle gender? What does the end of gender even look like? Is it possible? Is it the right goal? Again, Serano's take on this type of argument proves that DGR's point of view is not new, radical, or revolutionary.

I cannot tell you how many times I have read and heard claims that feminists are trying to “move beyond gender,” or to bring on the “end of gender,” invoked in attempts to portray transsexuality and transgenderism as antithetical to feminism. Here is what I want to know: What exactly is the “end of gender?” What does it look like? Are there words to describe male and female bodies at the end of gender? Or do we purge all words that refer to male- or female- specific body parts and reproductive functions for fear that they will reinforce gender distinctions? Do we do away with activities such as sports, sewing, shaving, cooking, fixing cars, taking care of children, and of course, man-on-top-woman-on-bottom penetration sex, because these have been too closely associated with traditional masculine and feminine roles in the past? What clothes do we wear at the end of gender? Do we all wear pants? Or do we all wear skirts? Or do we have to come up with a completely different type of clothing altogether? Or perhaps we go naked because, after all, clothing has a long and troubled history of conspiring with the gender system. Who gets to make these decisions? Who gets to decide what is gender and what is not? By what criteria does one determine whether any given behavior is a wholesome natural human trait or an abominable social artifact?<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Julia Serano, *Excluded*. 128-29.

DGR, unsurprisingly, offers no answers to these questions. Rachel Ivy, the girl in DGR's video, wears a traditionally feminine skirt, has long hair, uses "she" pronouns, and makes very clear through her talk that she identifies as a woman. Additionally, she emphasizes that she believes escaping gender is impossible, especially on an individual level.<sup>91</sup> DGR's conception of gender abolition is self-defeating. The organization calls for the end of gender while simultaneously strictly policing the boundaries of gender. Serano, on the other hand, offers a more realistic strategy for overcoming hierarchies based on gender. She writes, "we should envision ourselves as working to bring an end to all double standards based on sex, gender, and sexuality, as well as any other double standard that is unjustly used to demonize, delegitimize, and dehumanize other human beings."<sup>92</sup> Rather than trying to erase difference, Serano encourages us to break down the misogynistic, queerphobic, transphobic, and transmisogynistic meanings that are connected to these differences in identity.

Finally, I want to be clear about the type of world that DGR's politics strive to create. Without civilization, there is no technology. This does not just mean that humans will have to learn how to live without Google, microwaves, and Roombas. In DGR's ideal, "radical" world, there is no technology for medical care. This means there would be no hormone replacement, no birth control, no surgeries, and millions of people would have their lives severely altered, or ended. Apparently, DGR lacks members with an understanding of disability, illness, and the concerns of trans people. DGR's world is a throwback to the Progressive Era's founding principles of environmentalism: that fit, abled-bodied people are the only ones who deserve to be in nature or serve as representatives of humanity.<sup>93</sup> Their world is one that calls for a genocide of people who rely on technology for life. Their world is one that wants to dismantle technology, even though it has enabled the building of communities of oppressed peoples that would have never been possible even thirty years ago. Their world is one of violence.

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<sup>91</sup> Rachel Ivy, "The End of Gender: Revolution, Not Reform."

<sup>92</sup> Julia Serano, *Excluded*. 128-29.

<sup>93</sup> Sarah Jaquette Ray, *The Ecological Other*.

## Moving Forward

Through this thesis I have shown how transmisogyny manifests within environmentalism, specifically focusing on activism and the framing of environmental issues. Firstly, activist communities who privilege “naturalness” explicitly and implicitly create boundaries that define what type of behaviors, choices, and identities are “good” for nature, and which are “bad.” The definition of naturalness that these groups use is typically one of a romanticized and socially constructed Nature, one that reflects the social values of dominant groups, rather than having any basis in the natural world itself. The exclusion of trans women in activist communities is rooted in an objectifying link between trans women’s bodies and technology, and trans women are portrayed as farther from nature or too reliant on technology. By excluding trans women, however, we miss out on many important conversations around gender and misogyny, the possible future of corporeality, and the nexus of the human body and technology. These are questions that the environmental movement is, and should continue to be, concerned with. Trans women’s voices are necessary to add perspective and nuance for understanding the ways in which nature is constructed and used, and how our own understandings of nature will change. In the discussion of non-human animals who do not conform to human cis-heteronormative expectations, I proved that social categories permeate broader ecological frameworks in a way that limits our imaginative capacity when understanding the social structures and bodies of non-human animals. By imposing cis-heteronormative expectations onto animal bonding, family structures, mating, and sexed bodies, non-human animals have been misunderstood. Circularly, these misunderstandings are used to propagate dominant social ideologies by attempting to ground them in Nature.

Transmisogyny is rooted in ideas of the “naturalness” or “unnaturalness” of gender. American conceptualizations of Nature and naturalness have been constructed by racist, ableist, and misogynistic social reforms, infusing environmentalism with problematic and exclusionary definitions of the natural. Starting as early as the 1890’s, before the emergence of what we often think of as “environmentalism” in the 1970s, notions of the environment were being shaped by politics, immigration fear, racism, eugenics, and classism.<sup>94</sup> Today’s environmentalism has

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<sup>94</sup> Sarah Jaquette Ray, *The Ecological Other*.

continued to be influenced by political agendas, racism, ableism, and other exclusionary and oppressive frameworks. This causes environmentalism to police the boundaries of naturalness in a way that furthers social paranoias and the continued privileging of cis, straight, white, wealthy, men.

Environmentalism's fears of the body are articulated through the policing of what types of bodies and expressions are "natural" or "unnatural." This naturalness or unnaturalness is determined by what types of bodies are argued to be good or bad for nature. Any body that interacts with the environment through an indirect or mediated means is determined to be unnatural.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, cissexism informs notions of the naturalness of gender by portraying cisgender people as having more legitimate genders because of the illusion that their genders are expressed and embodied in unmediated ways. However, gender is constructed. Gender is always achieved, understood, and expressed through choices made about dress, body modification, and behavior. Cisgender people make as many choices as trans people about the way they gender themselves.<sup>96</sup> Like our interactions and relationships with the environment, our relationships to gender are always mediated in some way, whether by physical objects, boundaries, or concepts of "naturalness" that affect how we relate to both nature and gender.

I argue that one way we can begin to incorporate trans women's voices into environmentalism is to understand work by trans women as environmental literature. Eva Hayward is a perfect example of this. A student of Donna Haraway, her interdisciplinary work in art, marine ecology, and queer studies gives her a unique perspective on inter-species relationships. Her "Lessons from a Starfish" is a beautiful account of her relationship with the song "The Cripple and the Starfish" by Antony and the Johnsons. The essay suggests her corporeality as a trans woman as being similar to that of a starfish, who can grow back limbs from their own flesh. Rather than describing herself in the way that Susan Stryker articulates, as a "monster," as othered from Nature, Hayward suggests a link to non-human animals whose bodies also undergo an experience of separation, change, and rejuvenation.<sup>97</sup> Neither of these

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<sup>95</sup> Sarah Jaquette Ray, *The Ecological Other*.

<sup>96</sup> Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl*, Berkeley: Seal Press, 2009.

<sup>97</sup> Eva Hayward, "Lessons From a Starfish," *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*. New York: Routledge. 2013. 178-88.

descriptions are more right than the other by any means, but they offer interesting ways to interpret all people's relationships between their bodies and non-human bodies. Additionally, Eli Clare is a genderqueer trans man who wrote the memoir "Exile & Pride" about his experience as a rural queer, balancing issues of gender, sexuality, ecological destruction, small town politics, and the urban emphasis of both queer and environmental activism.<sup>98</sup> While he is not a trans woman, I think his work could be expanded on by people of many genders. My hope is that future environmentalism or post-environmentalism understands the unnaturalness that has categorized queer people and issues as inherently flawed, and dedicates time and energy toward incorporating these frameworks, problems, and goals.

None of this work will truly be meaningful or possible without a common language. One issue I came across while writing this paper was the dissonance between the language used by biologists and that which is used by trans people themselves, specifically the issue of using "male" and "female" to speak about human bodies. A trans woman's body should never be referred to as male (unless she identifies as a woman with a "male" body), so when we use simplified definitions of male and female, we run into complications that can be potentially offensive, hurtful, or confusing, and at any rate make the conversations between biology and trans studies more difficult. Will there be a way to talk about similarities between animals and humans without using these words? Will we be able to speak about the political implications of how environmental and gendered issues are talked about without this common language? I cannot offer much of a solution, as I believe that vocabulary should come from trans women themselves. My hope for cisgender environmentalists and those interested in queer, trans, and feminist theory is that we will be very careful about the language we use, knowing that it is imperfect at best, and at its worst, can be extremely harmful.

There are some important ways in which my argument could be further explored. One is through examining how "naturalness" in arguments about race has intersected with issues of gender. How do whiteness, cisness, and naturalness inform each other? How can analyses of the construct of the "ecological Indian" be complicated by the stories of Native trans women? How do the experiences of trans women who immigrate to the United States shed light on

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<sup>98</sup> Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride*, Cambridge: South End Press. 1999.

environmentalists' insecurities about boundaries and purity? How do trans women of color make sense of their identities and experiences, and how has naturalness been used for or against them?

There are a multitude of ways in which this thesis' work could be expanded upon. This project is only the beginning of what I hope will be an intentional and passionate reworking of environmentalism to end exclusion of trans women, and more generally trans people. Cis environmentalists should not write off the presence of transmisogyny within the movement as simply a "special interest" issue. If we are to cultivate an environmental movement that prioritizes justice and intersectionality, the voices of the most marginalized people need to be brought to the front of our discussions. We must interrogate claims of un/naturalness with regards to human identities and behaviors. We must ask why entire groups of people are absent from our conversations. We must question the supposedly value-neutral tenets of our movement. Because without the willingness to work toward justice, build coalitions across social boundaries, and acknowledge the monsters within each one of us, environmentalists will continue to be complicit in oppression.



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