



University
of Glasgow

Edgoose, Han (2025) *Ideology, epistemic injustice, and ignorance: an analysis of the trans panic*. PhD thesis.

<https://theses.gla.ac.uk/85421/>

Copyright and moral rights for this work are retained by the author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

This work cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

Enlighten: Theses

<https://theses.gla.ac.uk/>
research-enlighten@glasgow.ac.uk

Ideology, Epistemic Injustice, and Ignorance: An Analysis of the Trans Panic

Han Edgoose

BA CH (hons), MA

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate in Philosophy

School of Humanities

College of Arts and Humanities

University of Glasgow

May 2025

Abstract

This thesis is a philosophical analysis of the trans panic (the ongoing moral panic about trans people in the UK) which utilises the philosophical tools of ideology and epistemic injustice. Drawing on the work of Sally Haslanger, I define ideologies as epistemically defective networks of social meanings that function to uphold oppression. I describe how dominant ideologies cause hermeneutical injustice by failing to provide sufficient hermeneutical resources. I argue that an ideology I name ‘cissexist ideology’ functions to uphold the oppression of trans people and consists of social meanings about the supposedly binary nature of sex and gender, and stereotypes about trans people. I argue that notable features of the trans panic, such as its persistence and resistance to efforts to tackle it, and its wide scope, can be explained by a feedback loop between ideology and epistemic injustice. Although I don’t attribute ignorance with a substantial causal role in the trans panic, I also trace several ways that ideology leads to ignorance, including in the context of the trans panic.

I continue my analysis of the trans panic by providing accounts of two phenomena that are occurring within it. The first is a type of epistemic injustice that I term ‘hermeneutical sabotage’. Hermeneutical sabotage occurs when dominantly situated knowers actively worsen the available hermeneutical resources for understanding the experiences of a marginalised group. They do this by distorting hermeneutical resources necessary for understanding marginalised groups’ experiences, and introducing new, prejudiced hermeneutical resources. I explain how this is taking place within the trans panic and how hermeneutical sabotage is used as a tactic to further the aims of harmful political movements. I also give an account of the phenomenon I name ‘ideological true beliefs’: true beliefs about the world which are made true by ideological social construction and function to uphold an ideology. Ideological true beliefs are often expressed as claims and used to provide faulty evidence for false ideological claims. Even though they are constructed by ideology, it is not in the interest of activists to deny ideological true beliefs because they reflect the reality of the unjust world that activists must acknowledge. Activists therefore need other strategies to tackle them.

Finally, I turn to the question of how to tackle the trans panic. I argue that consciousness raising offers a method for generating warranted ideology critique. I then outline some tactics that activists can use to tackle the trans panic and explain how these intervene in the cissexist ideology/epistemic injustice feedback loop and tackle the phenomena I describe. Ultimately, I argue it will take a multiplicity of tactics to tackle the trans panic.

Contents

Lists of Tables and Figures	6
Acknowledgements	7
Definitions and Abbreviations	8
Author's Declaration	9
Introduction	10
Chapter 1: Ideology and Hermeneutical Injustice	18
1. Introduction.....	18
2. Ideology	19
2.1 Cognitive Conceptions	19
2.2 Haslanger on Ideology	21
2.3 Ideology and Oppression.....	23
3. Hermeneutical Injustice and Ideology	24
4. Ideology and Hermeneutical Marginalisation.....	27
5. Hermeneutical Resistance	28
6. Conclusion	30
Chapter 2: Challenging the 'Debate' Framing of the Trans Panic: On Cissexist Ideology and Epistemic Injustice	32
1. Introduction.....	32
2. The Trans Panic.....	35
3. Cissexist Ideology and Epistemic Injustice	38
4. The Trans 'Debate'	43
5. Ideological Distortions.....	48
6. 'Common Sense', 'Incontestable Facts', and 'Objectivity'	52
7. Conclusion	55
Chapter 3: Ideology and Ignorance	56
1. Introduction.....	56
2. Ignorance and Oppression.....	58
3. Ideology	60
4. Ideological Ignorance.....	61
4.1 Wilful Ignorance.....	62
4.2 Cognition.....	64
4.3 Practices	67
4.4 Interpretive Tools	68
4.5 Active Wrongdoing	71
5. Conclusion	76

Chapter 4: Hermeneutical Sabotage	79
1. Introduction.....	79
2. Hermeneutical Injustice	80
2.1 Individual Perpetrators and Hermeneutical Injustice	81
3. Hermeneutical Sabotage	82
4. Hermeneutical Sabotage: A Taxonomy.....	86
4.1 Distortion of Resistant Hermeneutical Resources.....	87
4.2 Appropriation of Resistant Hermeneutical Resources	88
4.3 Introduction of New Prejudiced Hermeneutical Resources	90
4.4 Introduction of Prejudiced Concepts Without New Terms	91
5. Differences from Other Forms of Epistemic Injustice and Oppression.....	92
5.1 Resource Obscuring Epistemic Appropriation.....	93
5.2 Wilful Hermeneutical Ignorance and Contributory Injustice.....	94
5.3 Deception-Based Hermeneutical Injustice	94
5.4 Positive Hermeneutical Injustice.....	95
6. Hermeneutical Sabotage as a Political Tool.....	96
7. Conclusion	97
Chapter 5: Ideological True Beliefs.....	99
1. Introduction.....	99
2. Ideology and Social Construction.....	101
2.1 Social Construction and Truth.....	101
2.2 Ideology.....	103
3. What Sort of Beliefs Does Ideology Make True?	104
3.1 Type 1 ITBs	106
3.2 Type 2 ITBs	107
3.3 ITBs in the Trans Panic	108
4. Epistemic Problems with ITBs	110
4.1 Beliefs Not Based on Evidence and Resistance to Counterevidence.....	111
4.2 Statistical Beliefs.....	113
4.3 Ideological Knowledge	115
5. The Role of ITBs in Upholding Ideology	116
5.1 Providing Evidence for Ideological Claims and Practices.....	117
5.2 Curtailing the Sharing of Ideology Critique.....	119
5.3 The Role of Truth	120
6. Conclusion	121
Chapter 6: Ideology Critique	123

1. Introduction.....	123
2. Challenges for Developing Warranted Ideology Critique.....	124
3. Potential Solutions	126
3.1 Limits on the Internalisation of Ideology.....	127
3.2 The Feminist Standpoint	130
3.3 Consciousness Raising	133
4. Further Challenges to Ideology Critique.....	137
5. Conclusion	139
Chapter 7: Tactics for Overcoming the Trans Panic.....	140
1. Introduction.....	140
2. Epistemic Virtues	141
2.1 Limitations of Epistemic Virtues.....	141
3. Marches and Rallies.....	144
3.1 Limitations of Marches and Rallies	147
4. Active Disruption and Embodied Protest.....	151
4.1 Boycotts.....	152
4.2 Output-Targeting Tactics	154
4.3 Communication Tactics.....	155
4.4 Further Limitations of Direct Action and Embodied Protest	157
5. Eliciting Moral Re-Appraisal.....	160
5.1 Building Solidarity Movements	161
5.2 Art.....	163
5.3 Limitations of Moral Re-Appraisal.....	165
6. Changing Practices	167
6.2 Limitations of Changing Practices	172
7. ‘Changing Hearts and Minds’: Responding to Individuals	174
7.1 Limitations of ‘Changing Hearts and Minds’	175
7.2 Potential Possibilities	176
8. Conclusion	177
Conclusion.....	179
Bibliography	182

Lists of Tables and Figures

List of Tables:

Table 1: A table illustrating the two axes and four subcategories of hermeneutical sabotage which produce four types of hermeneutical sabotage	87
--	----

List of Figures:

Figure 1: A diagram illustrating the cissexist ideology/epistemic injustice feedback loop	34
---	----

Acknowledgements

This work has benefitted from the help of many people over the course of several years. Firstly, I want to thank my supervisors, Mona Simion, Ruth Pearce, and Katharine Jenkins for their comments and advice on the PhD work itself, and for their support throughout my time at Glasgow. Mona provided helpful feedback for chapters 4 and 5 and has offered useful advice on publishing and responding to referee comments. Ruth's extensive feedback on chapters 2 and 7 has been invaluable. In particular, I am grateful for her last-minute help with ensuring that chapter 2 accurately reflects changes to the law that occurred 6 weeks before my submission date. Her comments have hugely improved my work, and her encouragement and enthusiasm for my research has helped my work reach new audiences.

I'm not sure it's possible for me to express how grateful I am for Katharine's help and input throughout the whole PhD process, and her comments and feedback on every part of this thesis. Both her academic and pastoral support have been invaluable throughout the process. I am leaving the PhD with skills I could not have developed without her help. More than anything, her insistence on the importance of taking time off has kept me (comparatively) stress-free throughout this process. I could not have asked for a better supervisor.

Chapter 2 has benefitted from the input of many anonymous reviewers from several journals; I am highly appreciative of their time. I would also like to thank members of the Scottish Feminist Philosophy Network (SFPN), and the audience at the Society for Women in Philosophy UK 2023 conference for their helpful feedback on this chapter. In addition, the audience at the 2024 'New Work in Epistemic Injustice' workshop at the University of Glasgow, including Miranda Fricker, provided some key contributions to this chapter. Thanks also go to Sophie for her technical skills in formatting the diagram, the creation of which substantially helped the process of focussing the thesis of this chapter.

Chapter 4 was enormously improved following the input of two anonymous reviewers for the Australasian Journal of Philosophy, to whom I would like to extend my thanks. This chapter also benefitted from feedback from a 2022 Scottish Epistemology Early Career Researchers (SEECRs) workshop at the university of Edinburgh, and staff and student feedback from attendees at the University of Glasgow postgraduate seminar. I would also like to thank the members of the SFPN postgraduate work-in-progress group for their comments on an early version of this chapter, in particular Rory Wilson.

Chapter 5 has also received reviewer comments that have substantially improved the chapter. Audiences at the SEECRs 'Applied Epistemology' conference held in Glasgow in 2024, and attendees at the University of Glasgow postgraduate seminar provided helpful feedback on a version of this chapter. I would also like to thank Lilith Mace and Nicolas Côté for their comments.

Lastly, I'd like to thank Sophie for her support throughout the whole PhD.

Definitions and Abbreviations

BBC – British Broadcasting Company, the UK’s public service broadcaster which provides some TV channels, as well as some radio and news coverage in the UK and abroad

DoS – Denial of Service, a form of cyber-attack that prevents access to a website or web service

EHRC – Equality and Human Rights Commission, the public body in charge of enforcing equalities legislation in the UK

Equality Act (2010) – The UK’s major piece of equalities legislation that outlaws discrimination on the basis of 6 protected characteristics, including ‘sex’ and ‘gender reassignment’

DSM – Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, published by the American Psychiatric Association and used for the diagnosis of mental disorders in the US

GIC – Gender Identity Clinic, specialist centres run by the NHS that provide access to gender affirming healthcare for trans people in the UK.

GRA – Gender Recognition Act (2004), the UK legislation that enables trans people to change the sex recorded on their birth certificate from male to female or vice versa. The GRA requires trans people to receive a diagnosis of ‘gender dysphoria’ and submit evidence to a panel to show they have been ‘living in their acquired gender’ for two years in order to gain recognition.

GRC – Gender Recognition Certificate, a certificate given to trans people who have changed their sex via the process set out in the GRA, which they are then able to use to change the sex recorded on their birth certificate

ICD – International Classification of Diseases, a globally used medical classification maintained by the World Health Organization

NHS – National Health Service, the publicly funded healthcare system in the UK which provides healthcare which is free at the point of use

Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Ideology, Epistemic Injustice, and Ignorance: An Analysis of the Trans Panic

Introduction

There is a risk when one embarks on a four year project to develop a philosophical account of an ongoing social phenomenon, that over the course of the time spent doing the project, the phenomenon one is attempting to explain will end, making the research less relevant, or change in ways that clearly show the analysis developed to be incorrect, or at the very least, outdated. I suppose in that sense I should be perversely grateful that since 2021, the situation in the UK as it relates to the public discussion and ‘debate’ about trans people has, if anything, gotten worse.

When I first submitted a PhD proposal about anti-trans feminism and transphobic backlash in the UK, it was 2019. In 2019, the media was gripped by an ongoing ‘debate’ playing out following proposals that had been brought forward by the government in 2017 and 2018 to amend the 2004 legislation that enables trans people to change the sex recorded on their birth certificates (the Gender Recognition Act) to make the process easier and less medicalised. In 2019, I thought the scale of transphobia that existed in the UK was concerning, but that this was a backlash against social progress that would eventually inevitably happen, regardless of the relatively small number of admittedly powerful and influential anti-trans voices that were prominent at the time. Now, I look back on 2017-19 as a time when the situation for trans people in the UK was substantially better than it is now. The idea that any UK national government, especially a Conservative government, would introduce proposals for improving trans rights as they did in 2017/18, is now fanciful.

The last eight years has seen a stalling and rolling back of legal rights for trans people in the UK. Proposals to improve the Gender Recognition Act have been dropped; though proposals for reform did pass in the Scottish Parliament, this was blocked by the UK government (Morton and Seddon 2023). In April 2025, a Supreme Court ruling gutted the protections given to trans people by the Equality Act, the UK’s major piece of equalities legislation, by defining ‘sex’ for the purposes of the Act as ‘biological ‘sex’’. Until full statutory guidance that considers the ruling is released, it is difficult to get a full picture of what the effects of the ruling will be.¹ The Labour government and the public body in charge of enforcing equalities legislation (the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, or EHRC) are interpreting the ruling as banning trans people from single-sex spaces that align with their gender identity: a form of bathroom ban (Phillips 2025; Equality and Human Rights Commission 2025). Meanwhile, in the last few years, the UK has

¹ Full statutory guidance is expected later in 2025, but it may be several months before there is legal clarity (Walker 2025).

seen access to transition-related healthcare for trans young people removed (Triggle 2024), proposed guidance from the government that schools should out trans kids to their parents (Bland 2023), and trans women banned from participation by many sporting bodies (e.g., Grierson 2023; Kearns 2025).

Following Gleeson and O'Rourke (2021, 26–27), I describe the ongoing situation in the UK as a 'trans panic', that is, a moral panic about trans people. I characterise the trans panic as 'ideological'. In chapter one, I develop a full account of how I understand ideology, but at this stage, it is worth explaining why I think that 'ideology' is such a useful tool for understanding the trans panic.

The moral panic about trans people in the UK has primarily operated through the media and political discourse, as well as in online spaces and forums. Though there have increasingly been attacks on the legal rights of trans people, and trans people face injustices that are directly related to their material conditions, this ongoing trans panic has been defined by the ways that ideas about trans people, sex, and gender, have been enforced and disseminated. For example, in April 2025, the press office of the Prime Minister Kier Starmer released a statement saying that Starmer does not believe that trans women are women (McKiernan and Zeffman 2025). This statement is just one example of how the trans panic in the UK has operated for the last eight years: through expressions, almost exclusively from cisgender people, about who or what trans people are, and what sex and gender is. The trans panic has also been characterised by expressions of, or allusions to, harmful stereotypes about trans people, particularly claims that trans women are a threat to cisgender women (e.g., Lowbridge 2021). This is the realm of ideology and is one key reason I have utilised *ideology* to help develop my account of the trans panic, rather than a broader notion of *transphobia* or simply the injustice or oppression faced by trans people. Whilst violence carried out towards trans people, and the material disadvantages faced by trans people in employment, housing, and education are crucially important to trans people's lives,² the oppression that has been perpetuated by the trans panic has been primarily ideological. I name the ideology operating here 'cissexist ideology' and describe it in full in chapter two.

The conception of ideology that I utilise is a critical one; to say that something is an ideology is to say that there is something epistemically, as well as morally or politically, wrong with it. The epistemic issues with cissexist ideology include outright falsities that trans people pose a threat to cisgender women, as well as more subtle distortions about the supposed binary nature of sex.

² For a study of trans people's experiences of discrimination, harassment (including in employment and education), and homelessness, see Bachmann and Gooch (2018).

However, the crucial part of a critical understanding of ideology that makes it so useful for developing an account of the trans panic is that ideology functions to uphold oppression by obscuring injustice. The obscuring of injustice has, as I argue in chapter two, played a key role in the trans panic. Dominant cissexist ideology means that injustices against trans people are not recognised as injustices, or if they are recognised as wrongful, they are deemed unimportant or dismissible. The failure to recognise the situation for trans people in the UK right now as unjust is a key feature of the trans panic and is what makes the tool of ‘ideology’ crucial for understanding what is happening.

The second key theoretical tool I utilise to conceptualise the trans panic is epistemic injustice. Epistemic injustice occurs when a person is wronged ‘in their capacity as a knower’ (Fricker 2007, 1). Miranda Fricker (2007) outlines two species of epistemic injustice: testimonial injustice, which occurs when a person’s credibility is wrongly deflated owing to stereotypes relating to the social group they are a member of, and hermeneutical injustice, which occurs when a person is unable to effectively communicate an aspect of their experiences (and may be unable to understand those experiences themselves) because of deficiencies in the widely available conceptual resources.

Epistemic injustice is a crucial tool for an analysis of the trans panic because it so clearly connects epistemic wrongs to other injustices taking place in the world. Epistemic injustice is a gateway to other forms of injustice, and epistemic injustice is clearly a contributing factor to other forms of injustice taking place in the trans panic. For example, no trans people were able to submit interventions to the Supreme Court when they made their decision on the definition of ‘sex’ for the purposes of the Equality Act (Casciani 2025). What trans people had to say about the effects of this legislation was not deemed to be worth hearing by the court, whose judgement instead closely reflects the language used by anti-trans groups who were permitted to intervene in the case. For example, the judgement embraces a trans-exclusionary conception of what it means to be a lesbian (*For Women Scotland Ltd (Appellant) v The Scottish Ministers (Respondent)* 2025, para. 206). The exclusion of trans people’s testimony and embrace of epistemic resources which exclude trans people is reflected in the ruling, which excludes trans people from services in ways that will restrict their ability to legally participate in public life and will cause difficulties in employment. Whilst the exclusion of trans people from being able to submit interventions in this case is unlikely to be the only reason why the case was ruled on in this way, their epistemic exclusion, especially when compared with the wholehearted embrace of trans-exclusionary concepts, shows the close connection between the epistemic injustices suffered by trans people and the practical and material harms they face. Epistemic injustice

connects the way that trans people are not recognised as knowers about the issues that affect them with the further injustices they experience because of this.

The third theoretical tool mentioned in the title of this thesis is ‘ignorance’. Ignorance does not play a substantial role in my analysis of the trans panic, but, as I describe in chapter three, it is worth considering the role played by ignorance in the trans panic, and its relationship with ideology, because ignorance is often cited by trans allies and some trans organisations and charities as a cause of transphobia.

I constrain my analysis of the trans panic to the UK as there are international variations in the content of the ideology that oppresses trans people and differing legal and political contexts which are significant for understanding differences in the ways that trans people experience oppression. However, as I outline in chapter two, the UK trans panic is part of a global backlash against trans people and trans legal rights. Reasons of space prevent me from exploring more than one local manifestation of the trans panic. The UK trans panic is notable, along with some other countries such as Australia and Spain, because of the prominent presence of a movement of self-proclaimed ‘feminists’, branding themselves as ‘gender critical’ who consider trans rights a threat to (cis) women’s rights. These anti-trans self-proclaimed feminists, often referred to as ‘TERFS’ have been the focus of much of the existing literature on anti-trans backlash (Pearce, Erikainen, and Vincent 2020; Ivy 2018; Bassi and LaFleur 2022). As I explain in chapter two, in this thesis I discuss all anti-trans groups, rather than focussing exclusively on those who utilise that language of feminism, as the conception of cissexist ideology I employ can be utilised to show how many different anti-trans groups share the same view of the nature of sex and gender, and uphold the same system of oppression.

I also think that referring to anti-trans groups that utilise the language of ‘women’s rights’ as if they were a distinct movement from anti-trans religious movements or the far-right’s anti-trans campaign concedes too much to the image of themselves as genuine feminist or women’s rights groups that they promulgate. None of the ‘gender critical’ groups that utilise the language of women’s rights that I discuss in this thesis (For Women Scotland, Fair Play for Women, Woman’s Place UK, and Sex Matters, to name the key ones) existed prior to when the proposals to amend the Gender Recognition Act were put forward in around 2017, and all were set up with the express purpose to oppose trans rights.³ Though some of these groups now pay lip service to

³ From their own website, For Women Scotland state they were ‘founded in June 2018 amid growing unease about how women’s rights would be affected by the Scottish Government’s plans to reform the Gender Recognition Act to allow for self-declaration of sex’ (For Women Scotland 2025). Fair Play for Women (2025b) state that they were founded in 2017 as a group who were concerned about the inclusion of trans women in sport. Woman’s Place UK were founded in 2017 to oppose reform of the GRA, and all the original five aims of their organisation relate to

genuine feminist issues such as violence against women, their focus is and has always been the exclusion of trans people, and trans women in particular, from the services and spaces they need to have access to (public and workplace toilets, hospital wards, sports, domestic violence shelters, etc.) in order participate in life outside their own homes. I call these groups ‘anti-trans’ rather than ‘gender critical’, ‘women’s rights’, or ‘feminist’ groups because, like the far-right, social conservatives, and some religious movements, that is what they are.

The theoretical tools which I develop in this thesis also have applications beyond the case of the trans panic; I illustrate this in chapters three, four, and five with some wider examples. Though there are specificities to the trans panic, it is also important that the dynamic of the trans panic (and the anti-trans movement more broadly) isn’t viewed as ‘exceptional’. Though the moment in time in which the trans panic is happening influences the mode through which this ‘debate’ occurs, the role of ideology and epistemic injustice in obscuring injustice and quietening or discrediting the testimony of those who experience it is not unique. I do not explore other applications of this dynamic in any depth in this thesis, but I anticipate that a similar analysis could be made of the homophobic moral panic that occurred in the 1980s that saw widespread homophobia in the press towards gay people and led to the passage of Section 28.⁴

The tactics employed by anti-trans activists have been used before: Taylor (2020, 163–64) describes how in 1828, during a period of public debate over proposals to abolish slavery in the British Empire, when a member of the pro-slavery ‘Interest’ was not granted a platform to speak at an anti-slavery meeting, he complained that he had been ‘silenced’ in an article he wrote in the national press, and depicted abolitionists as ‘fanatics who would not engage in reasoned debate’. Likewise, national newspapers give anti-trans campaigners a prominent platform for their claims that they are ‘silenced’ and similarly portray trans people as unreasonable for not participating in a ‘debate’ on their terms (Kirkup 2019; Weaver 2023; Doward 2018; Alston 2018). By recognising the ways that the current trans panic and anti-trans movement reflect dynamics and use tactics which have been used before, we can draw on examples from the past to better develop strategies for tackling the trans panic.

This thesis proceeds as follows. In chapter one, I give my account of what I take ideology to be, drawing largely on the work of Sally Haslanger (2017a; 2017b; 2021a), and I explain how ideology is related to hermeneutical injustice. I define ideology as a network of epistemically

policies that affect trans people (2025). Sex Matters (2025) was established in 2021 and campaigns to promote their trans-exclusionary conception of ‘biological sex’ in culture, law, and policy, and to defend trans-exclusionary views.
⁴ Section 28 of the Local Government Act was passed by Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government in 1988 and forbade the ‘promotion’ of homosexuality in schools. It was repealed in Scotland in 2000 and the rest of the UK in 2002.

defective social meanings that function to uphold oppression, and I explain how the social meanings and hermeneutical resources ideology provides for interpreting the world are deficient in ways that lead to hermeneutical injustice. This chapter provides the key theoretical tools that are utilised for the remainder of the thesis.

In chapter two, I set out the central argument of this thesis. I describe how ideology and epistemic injustice form a feedback loop which can explain the large scope of the trans panic, and why it is so persistent and resistant to efforts to tackle it. I name the ideology that plays this role in the trans panic ‘cissexist ideology’. Cissexist ideology consists of social meanings about gender and sex as binary and immutable that appear to exclude the possibility of trans existence, as well as stereotypes that trans women are threatening or sexually predatory. This ideology shapes hermeneutical resources relating to sex, gender, and trans people which result in trans people experiencing hermeneutical injustice, and the stereotypes it shapes about trans people are internalised as prejudices that lead to testimonial injustice. I argue the feedback loop can also explain why the ‘debate’ framing of the trans panic has emerged and can account for the prominent role played by misunderstandings of the effect of proposed changes to the law, and the rhetoric of ‘common sense’ and ‘objectivity’ which is frequently employed by anti-trans campaigners. I focus on claims that trans rights pose a ‘threat’ to cisgender women, claims which misinterpret the law and draw on prejudicial stereotypes about trans women.

Chapter three outlines what I take to be the relationship between ideology and ignorance. Ignorance is not one of the main theoretical tools that I utilise to describe what is happening in the trans panic, but widespread ignorance is closely connected to ideology and is often cited as a cause of widespread transphobia in the trans panic, so is worth some further consideration. I describe five ways that ideology leads to ignorance: through incentivising wilful ignorance, through shaping cognitive capacities, through the provision of hermeneutical resources that fail to properly describe the world, through the shaping of practices, and lastly by incentivising active wrongdoing that upholds the ignorance of others. I give examples of how cissexist ideology leads to ignorance through these different means.

One way that individuals can engage in wrongdoing that upholds the ignorance of others is through actively distorting the new hermeneutical resources developed by oppressed groups to describe their experiences, and by creating new, prejudiced hermeneutical resources that misdescribe those experiences. I identify this phenomenon by developing the novel concept of ‘hermeneutical sabotage’, and this is the subject of chapter four of my thesis. I outline how hermeneutical sabotage is a form of epistemic injustice which occurs when dominantly situated knowers actively perpetuate the hermeneutical marginalisation of an already hermeneutically

marginalised group. They do this by distorting hermeneutical resources developed by marginalised groups and by introducing new prejudiced hermeneutical resources. I outline some examples of hermeneutical sabotage which have taken place as part of the trans panic, and some further examples of cases of hermeneutical sabotage of resources necessary for anti-racist and migrant activism. I describe how hermeneutical sabotage can be used as a political tactic to further the aims of oppressive social movements, and outline how it is being used to this end by anti-trans activists.

In chapter five, I consider another epistemic phenomenon I argue is employed by anti-trans activists in ways that make the trans panic harder to tackle, especially within the context of a 'debate'. I name the phenomenon I outline in this chapter 'ideological true beliefs': these are true beliefs that reflect ideology and are made true by social construction, which function to uphold an ideology. I argue that these true beliefs make ideology harder to tackle because it is not in the emancipatory interests of activists to deny these beliefs when they are expressed as claims because they illustrate the reality of oppression. I focus on claims made by anti-trans activists that some cisgender women feel threatened by the prospect or presence of trans women in all-women spaces. This claim is true because it has been made true by the internalisation of ideological social meanings about trans women and the campaigning of anti-trans activists. This true claim is often utilised by anti-trans activists to support false claims that trans women are a threat, and to uphold unjust practices such as the exclusion of trans women from women's spaces. I argue that the true claims are particularly difficult for activists to engage with because it is not in their interest to deny these claims: the fact that some cis women *feel* that trans women are a threat reflects the reality of the transphobic world that activists are invested in tackling, and to deny these claims would leave activists vulnerable to accusations that they are denying reality, which is rhetorically disadvantageous. This makes these true claims particularly difficult to engage with, and activists must develop different tactics if they are to engage with them. ITBs are employed in the trans panic 'debate', and their usage serves as another reason for activists to avoid participation in the 'debate' framing.

In chapter six, I consider the question of how warranted ideology critique can be developed. As the trans panic is ideological, answering this question is essential for considering how we should go about tackling the trans panic and engaging in critique of cissexist ideology. Following Haslanger (2021b), I argue that consciousness raising is a way to develop warranted ideology critique, as through the sharing of experiences, people are able to recognise patterns of discrimination and oppression and collectively articulate the nature of the wrong that has been done to them.

In my final chapter, chapter seven, I turn to the question of how the trans panic can be tackled. I explore several potential tactics for tackling the trans panic that each target the feedback loop between ideology and epistemic injustice in different ways and point towards how they can also be used to tackle ignorance, hermeneutical sabotage, and ideological true beliefs. I largely reject Fricker's (2007) proposal that we should develop epistemic virtues to tackle epistemic injustice and 'changing hearts and minds' approaches to tackling transphobia that emphasise developing relationships between trans people and those with anti-trans views. The tactics I argue have more promise for tackling the trans panic include protests, direct action, changing practices that have been shaped by cissexist ideology, and encouraging moral reappraisal through the development of solidarity movements and activist art. All these tactics face potential challenges, and none can solve the trans panic alone. Instead, I argue that only by pursuing multiple tactics that each tackle the feedback loop in different ways can we bring about an end to the trans panic. Having presented an, at times, bleak picture of the climate that trans people are facing in the UK, with my final chapter I end on a more optimistic note.

In the call for papers for the 2022 UK Workshop in Trans Philosophy, the organisers invited submissions in response to prompts including 'Rainy fascism island: what the hell is going on in the UK right now?' ('The UK Workshop in Trans Philosophy' 2021). In many ways, I see this thesis as a response to this question; how on earth can we make sense of what has been happening to trans people in the UK for the last several years, and the political and media furore that continues to batter us? But in the final two chapters, I turn to a different question: what can we do, and what are activists already doing, to stop this? I hope that by providing an answer to the first question, we are better placed to answer the second. Though much of this thesis is concerned with describing injustice, my hope is that by properly understanding the nature of the injustice being done to trans people, we are better placed to develop the strategies we need to end it.

Chapter 1: Ideology and Hermeneutical Injustice

1. Introduction

The project this thesis is engaged in is to understand what the trans panic is, and what can be done to tackle it. I argue that the trans panic is best understood by utilising the tools of ideology and epistemic injustice. Therefore, in this introductory chapter, I set out what I take ideology to be, and its relationship with hermeneutical injustice, as well as establishing the crucial role played by hermeneutical resistance, an issue I return to in greater detail in chapters six and seven. I explore the relationship between ideology and other forms of epistemic injustice, including testimonial injustice, further in chapter two. In the present chapter, I begin by endorsing a broadly Haslangerian conception of ideologies as epistemically defective networks of social meanings that function to uphold a system of oppression (2017a; 2021a). As outlined in the introduction, this critical conception of ideology is what provides a way of understanding how injustice is not recognised in the trans panic. As I explain in this chapter, considering ideologies as networks of social meanings, rather than beliefs, also enables me to describe the different ways that ideologies can be sustained and reproduced, even by those who do not believe in them.

Though much has been written on the role of ideologies in explaining why oppressed groups themselves do not strike or otherwise resist the conditions that harm them (Celikates 2018, 3; Rosen 2000; Heath 2000), this is not the main focus of this chapter. The role of ideology in the trans panic, as I describe in full in chapter two, largely concerns the way that it is reproduced by oppressors. Moreover, as I outline in my final chapter, the dominant ideology that functions to uphold the oppression of trans people is being actively resisted by trans people. As Finlayson (2015, 139–40) puts it ‘the fact that the majority of the hungry don’t steal and the majority of the exploited don’t strike is not obviously more mysterious than the fact that, sometimes, they do.’

Drawing on the work of Haslanger and others, I show the importance of considering hermeneutical injustice in conjunction with ideology. I explain how ideologies provide deficient dominant hermeneutical resources, and that these deficiencies produce systematic hermeneutical injustices. I also explore the relationship between hermeneutical marginalisation and ideology. Having considered the close connection between hermeneutical injustice and ideology, hermeneutical resistance emerges as a necessary form of ideology critique, and I explore this in the final section. If ideology is partially constituted by hermeneutical resources, challenging ideology must involve challenging the hermeneutical resources it provides.

2. Ideology

2.1 Cognitive Conceptions

Many accounts of ideology are cognitive; they describe ideology as systems or sets of beliefs, or forms of social consciousness (Shelby 2003; Mills 2017; Rosen 2000; Jaeggi 2009; Stanley 2015).⁵ One such account is Tommie Shelby's; he defines ideologies as epistemically defective forms of social consciousness that function to establish or reinforce oppression, whose wide acceptance can be largely explained by false consciousness (2003, 172). Beliefs held in false consciousness are beliefs held because they serve a non-cognitive motive. This is a pejorative, functionalist definition of ideology. To call something an ideology on this account, like most accounts in the ideology and critical theory literature, is to critique it both epistemically and morally (Shelby 2003, 156–57). The epistemic critique is derived from the fact that the ideology is false, misleading, or in some other way epistemically defective. Ideologies may consist of some false beliefs, but not all ideological beliefs are necessarily false; they may be otherwise epistemically defective by being 'illusory, distorting, or misleading' (Rosen 2000, 394; Shelby 2003, 163). The moral critique of ideology comes from the fact that ideologies play some role in 'establishing or reinforcing relations of oppression' (Shelby 2003, 173). This differentiates accounts of ideology in the Marxist and critical theory literature from the use of the term 'ideology' in ordinary language, which is often non-pejorative. I will use the term 'ideology' exclusively in the critical, pejorative sense to refer to ideologies (broadly conceived) that play some role in upholding and reinforcing oppression. As already stated, a critical conception of ideology is essential for understanding the trans panic, and using a critical conception avoids the necessity of referring to 'bad' or 'flawed' ideology (strategies employed by Srinivasan (2016) and Stanley (2015)).

According to Shelby, ideologies operate at the level of belief. In fact, Shelby states that ideologies could not have the social impact that they do without being held as beliefs by individuals (2003, 157). Shelby argues ideologies are a subset of forms of social consciousness. Forms of social consciousness are beliefs that are widely shared by members of a group, form coherent systems of thought, are part of an outlook or self-conception, and have a significant impact on social action or institutions (Shelby 2003, 158). Forms of social consciousness are not

⁵ I use the term 'ideology' in the singular to describe the general phenomena, but 'ideologies' in the plural to describe ideologies that exist in the world, as I take it that different ideologies are operating in different social locations, and that different systems of oppressions may have overlapping and interconnected but distinct ideologies (e.g. the dominant ideology in Utah, USA will be different to the dominant ideology in Scotland, and a racist ideology may be co-constitutive with a sexist ideology, but nonetheless distinct (Dembroff 2024)). This is different to the way Haslanger (2024) understands the relationships between forms of oppression that are ideological, but for my purposes in this thesis, the difference only matters for my usage of terminology, such as naming specific ideologies such as 'sexist ideology'.

necessarily ideological; they are only ideological when they are epistemically deficient (false, misleading, or obscuring) and these deficiencies sustain patterns of oppression. As Shelby notes, things that are not beliefs are often described as ‘ideological’. These include social practices, laws, rules, symbolic representations, and cultural products. However, Shelby treats the description of these things as ideological as a derivative usage, arguing that these things are ideological ‘insofar as they represent, transmit, or reinforce ideological beliefs’ (2003, 158).

However, considering ideology as comprised of beliefs fails to capture the public nature of ideology. Though forms of social consciousness are shared beliefs rather than individual ones, understanding ideology as beliefs (rather than something that *can be internalised as* beliefs) cannot account for the ways that ideology guides action and coordination even when the individuals involved do not necessarily share the same beliefs (Haslanger 2021a, 17–18). An account that only considers beliefs as part of ideology fails to capture what look like paradigm cases of ideology influencing a person’s actions. For example, sexist ideology dictates norms about what styles of dress are ‘appropriate’ for women, and which are considered ‘slutty’ or ‘too revealing’. A woman may consciously reject this ideology, and not hold a relevant ideological belief - for example, the belief that women who wear short skirts are sexually promiscuous, or are ‘deserving’ of unwanted sexual remarks. However, even though she doesn’t hold this belief, the ideology may still govern the way that she acts. She may be concerned about how she will be treated if she wears the short skirt, or the social norms about appropriate dress may be so deeply ingrained that not wearing a short skirt has become habit for her, even though she consciously rejects the ideology.⁶ In this case, ideology is guiding her action and practices in a way that is oppressive but is not operating at the level of belief. Though ideologies are typically internalised as beliefs by at least some people, I take it that it is theoretically possible for an ideology to operate without being believed in by anyone; all that is required for ideology to uphold a system of oppression is for it to guide action, behaviour, and practices that uphold a system of oppression.⁷ As I explain in the next section, to account for the way that ideology can shape action without being internalised as a belief, I will use a non-cognitive definition of ideology.

⁶ An account of ideology as higher order belief (beliefs about the beliefs of others) could explain why ideology governs her behaviour to avoid being treated by others in accordance with ideological norms but cannot account for how ideology can become internalised and reproduced as ‘habit’, even if it is consciously rejected.

⁷ To take a theoretical scenario, we can imagine a sexist ideology that objectifies women that is upheld through the production of violent and objectifying pornography that presents women as sexual objects. The makers of the pornography need not believe that women are sexual objects to make this pornography; they may in fact hold non-objectifying beliefs about women but make pornography that responds to market pressures to produce pornography that objectifies women. The consumers of this pornography also need not believe that women are sexual objects; they may all be wracked with guilt about their consumption of objectifying pornography because it contradicts with their consciously held beliefs about women. Nonetheless, I would argue that in this world, there is still an ideology that objectifies women, even though nobody has any objectifying beliefs.

2.2 Haslanger on Ideology

Haslanger considers ideologies to be problematic ‘cultural technē’ (2017a, 159). Cultural technē includes social meanings, tools for understanding the world and coordinating action (such as concepts), scripts, heuristics, and schemas, which all shape social practices (Haslanger 2017a, 155–56; 2017b, 15). Schemas are ‘patterns of perception, thought and behaviour’ which form part of the common ground we rely on to communicate (Haslanger 2012b, 462). Haslanger’s account is functionalist and pejorative (ideologies function to sustain practices of domination and oppression) and non-cognitive (it is not comprised of beliefs) (Haslanger 2017a, 150).⁸

Following Haslanger, I take it that ideologies should be understood as comprised of networks of social meanings.

Social meanings are public, accessible, and can guide our action, regardless of whether we endorse or believe them. I take the social meanings that make up an ideology to include both propositions (e.g., ‘women are naturally submissive’) and tropes and hermeneutical resources (e.g. ‘the nagging mother-in-law’, ‘slut’). This account more accurately captures the way that ideologies operate and can account for cases where ideology is clearly operating, but the person whose actions are clearly guided by ideology does not hold ideological beliefs. For example, a woman who does not believe that women who wear revealing clothing or are sexually promiscuous are ‘sluts’ and who may even disagree with the usage of the word ‘slut’ to denigrate women for their clothing or sexual behaviour may nonetheless find that the sexist ideology that brands certain women as ‘sluts’ shapes her choices of what to wear (such as avoiding certain clothing) and her perceptions of other women. While a cognitive account of ideology cannot account for the role of ideology in guiding her actions (as she doesn’t believe that certain women are sluts or should be called sluts) a non-cognitive account of ideology that considers the way her actions are still shaped by the way she internalises this ideological social meaning can do so. Ideologies are networks of social meanings, not individual social meanings, which jointly function to uphold a system of oppression. For example, sexist ideologies are the epistemically deficient set of social meanings that jointly function to uphold the oppression of women.⁹

⁸ This is different to Haslanger’s earlier usage of the term ‘ideology’ to describe frameworks that provide meaning within a social system which are essential to coordinate action and are not necessarily problematic (Haslanger 2012b).

⁹ I take it that ideologies such as racist and sexist ideologies are intersecting and therefore play a role in upholding multiple systems of oppression but are nonetheless distinct (Dembroff 2024). As I mentioned in footnote 5, this is different to the view taken by Haslanger (2024) that systems cannot be individuated (but can nonetheless be described as patriarchal or racist), but the details of this disagreement do not matter for my purposes. I refer to ‘sexist ideology’ (and later, importantly, ‘cissexist ideology’), but aside from individuating the content of this ideology, I believe that my analysis is largely compatible with ‘single system’ approaches such as Haslanger’s (2024).

However, I worry that Haslanger's account over-inflates what counts as an ideology in a way that makes critique more difficult. Social meanings have obvious content which can be the subject of critique. For example, social meanings include 'controlling images', a form of stereotype described by Collins that make injustices 'appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life' (2009, 77). The controlling image of the 'jezebel' is a stereotype of the Black woman as sexually promiscuous, which, as Collins describes, functions to 'relegate all Black women to the category of sexually aggressive women, thus providing a powerful rationale for the widespread sexual assaults by White men typically reported by Black slave women' (2009, 89). The concept of a 'jezebel' is a hermeneutical resource provided by an ideology for understanding the world in a way that functions to uphold the oppression of Black women, and it can be critiqued on that basis. However, psychological schemas and heuristics lack such content and aren't publicly accessible.¹⁰ Including psychological schemas as part of ideology would make the task of ideology critique more complicated, at it is not clear what the object at which critique should be targeted is, and we cannot know if a critique is successful since psychological schemas are private and internal. Whilst ideologies may shape our psychological schemas and heuristics, I will treat these as derivatives of ideology, rather than as part of the ideology themselves. For example, the social meaning of the 'jezebel' is the content of ideology, and the resulting heuristic (seeing a Black woman and assuming she is sexually promiscuous and consequently treating her with a lack of respect or not believing her when she reports sexual assault) is a consequence of ideology that helps to uphold oppression, but not part of the ideology itself. By limiting the charge of 'ideology' to sets of social meanings, this also helps to clarify the object of epistemic critique of ideology. Social meanings can be false, or otherwise distorting or misleading. For example, the controlling image of the 'jezebel' reflects a falsehood that black women are especially promiscuous. The controlling image can be subject to epistemic critique on this basis.

Therefore, when I refer to ideologies providing 'tools for understanding the world', I am referring to conceptual and hermeneutical resources provided by an ideology, not psychological schemas and heuristics as internalised by specific individuals. I treat my conception of ideology as Haslanger-inspired, but distinct from Haslanger's in this respect, as the set of things I consider to be constituting an ideology is narrower than the set of things she considers to be constituting an ideology. To clarify, the conception of ideology I will use for the remainder of the thesis is as follows:

¹⁰ I understand Haslanger's usage of 'schema' in 2017 (when she includes 'schemas' in her definition of culture, which she then clarifies as cultural *technē*) to be referring to 'psychological schemas', of the kind defined in her 2012 book. In later work, she has largely avoided the term 'schemas', which she had previously used to describe both psychological schemas and what she calls 'cultural schemas'. In later work, she instead refers to 'cultural schemas' as 'cultural *technē*' (Haslanger 2019b, 7).

Ideology: An ideology is an epistemically defective system of social meanings, which functions to uphold oppression.

2.3 Ideology and Oppression

One way ideologies function to uphold oppression is by shaping and upholding practices. Practices include the way things are done, the way people treat each other, and explicit or implicit rules. However, ideology is rarely the origin of oppression. Rather, ideology often functions as a post-hoc rationalisation for existing oppression and oppressive practices.

Ideologically shaped practices serve to uphold ideology, often because when ideologies are dominant, the practices they shape are treated as just a part of the way that things are, so the social meanings ideology consists of become part of ‘common sense’ (Shelby 2003, 159).

Ideological oppression can be distinguished from repression, as repressive practices are enacted through violence and coercion, whereas ideological oppression is typically enacted without coercion, often unthinkingly both by those who benefit from the ideology, and sometimes also by those it oppresses. However, many cases of oppression are hybrid, comprised of both ideological and repressive practices, with ideology often justifying, rationalising, or obscuring repressive violence (Haslanger 2017a, 149–50).

The obscuring of injustice, including the injustice of repressive practices, is a further way that ideology functions to uphold oppression. Ideology obscures injustice by providing ways for interpreting the world that fail to recognise the existence of certain kinds of injustice or that circumscribe the limits of what counts as an injustice so as to rule out many cases. For example, contemporary racist ideology typically permits the existence of racism, but limits ascriptions of racism to overtly racist statements said by people who profess overtly racist attitudes. This obscures the injustice of, among other things, structural racism and racist micro-aggressions, with those who point out these things and criticise them as unjust dismissed for ‘making a fuss over nothing’. Ideology can also obscure injustice by shaping who or what is considered valuable or important (Haslanger 2017a, 162). Ideological social meanings shape attributions of value that mean that certain issues, people, or places are not paid attention to, or are easily dismissed, whereas others are deemed highly important and valuable. For example, ableist ideology includes social meanings that devalue the lives of disabled people, such that when disabled people experience injustice such as a lack of access to public spaces, this isn’t deemed to be something important or worth addressing, or in some cases, even recognised as wrongful at all. Naturalisation is a further way that ideologies obscure injustice. Practices, states of affairs, and properties and characteristics of groups that are either contingent products of human interventions and actions, or that simply do not exist, are treated as part of the ‘natural’ ways that

things are, and therefore considered good, unchangeable, or beyond critique (Shelby 2003, 177). Examples of naturalising ideological social meanings include the idea that working-class people are ‘naturally’ intellectually inferior, that women are ‘naturally’ suited to childcare, or that black men are ‘naturally’ violent (Haslanger 2012b).

I take dominant ideologies to be ideologies that shape practices throughout a society to such an extent that they are largely inescapable. Ideologies are dominant relevant to a specific place or domain, for example, a country or a linguistic community. Dominant ideologies may be implicitly or explicitly endorsed by a state, and may shape the activities of major institutions, bureaucracies, and education. When an ideology is dominant, it will be particularly difficult to recognise, because of the way that dominant ideologies are so often treated as ‘given’. The social meanings dominant ideologies consist of serve as the background assumptions or ‘common ground’ to conversation, action, and coordination (Haslanger 2021a, 18–21). However, even when an ideology is dominant there will usually still be some resistance to that ideology and some people who recognise its existence; dominant ideologies are not fully hegemonic.

Non-dominant ideologies may function to uphold the oppression of a smaller sub-group or may play a smaller role in upholding a wider system of oppression. For example, the sexist ideology of a small minority religious community may uphold the oppression of women within that small community but play little role in upholding the oppression of women in the wider society or country and therefore is a non-dominant ideology in a country (though dominant within the small community). The ideology of an extremist neo-Nazi group in the UK may function to uphold racist oppression within wider society (for example by encouraging its members to engage in racist violence) but would not be a dominant ideology because it does not shape broader, inescapable practices in society in the way that dominant forms of racist ideology do.

As I have established in this section, ideologies are not located within the minds of individuals but consist of networks of social meanings which are epistemically deficient and function to uphold a system of oppression. Social meanings are tools for understanding the world, such as concepts, stereotypes and terminology. In other words, ideology partially consists of hermeneutical resources. This conception of ideology therefore provides a clear foundation for understanding the relationship between ideology and hermeneutical injustice.

3. Hermeneutical Injustice and Ideology

One way ideologies function to sustain patterns of oppression is through the provision of hermeneutical resources which fail to describe morally relevant aspects of the world. When an ideology is dominant, the hermeneutical resources it provides will be part of the dominant

hermeneutical resources: the widely available and understood tools for describing and interpreting the world such as ‘stories, concepts, meanings, and interpretive tropes’ (Davis 2018, 705). This means that ideology is a cause of a phenomenon termed ‘hermeneutical injustice’.

Hermeneutical injustice is a type of epistemic injustice. Epistemic injustice occurs when a person is wronged ‘in their capacity as a knower’ (Fricker 2007, 1).¹¹ Fricker describes hermeneutical injustice as occurring when there is a gap or lacuna in hermeneutical resources where ‘the name of a distinctive social experience should be’ (2007, 150–51). People are wronged in their capacity as knowers when they are unable to properly communicate significant aspects of their experiences, or properly understand their own experiences, owing to deficiencies in the collective hermeneutical resources (Fricker 2007, 155).¹² Fricker gives the example of a woman named Carmita Wood, who, on the telling that Fricker draws on, was unable to understand her own experiences of unwanted and inappropriate sexualised behaviour from her male boss, or explain these experiences to someone else, because the concept of ‘sexual harassment’ did not yet exist (2007, 150–51).

Charles Mills links the ‘lacuna’ in dominant hermeneutical resources that causes hermeneutical injustice to ideologies of domination; he argues that misrepresentations of the world and omissions in the dominant hermeneutical resources are generated from the perspectives of dominantly situated knowers and reproduce the existing social order (2017, 105). Mills defines ideology cognitively; he uses Shelby’s conception of ideology as forms of social consciousness which justify domination (2017, 103–4). His claim that the lacunas in hermeneutical resources are generated from the perspective of a dominant group reflects this: he argues the lacuna is a product of the interests of dominant groups and reflects their experiences or lack of experiences (Mills 2017, 105). However, the link between lacunas in dominant hermeneutical resources and ideology is compatible with a non-cognitivist view of ideology. Instead of the claim that deficiencies in hermeneutical resources are motivated by group interests and experience (Mills 2017, 105), a view of ideology as constituted by a problematic network of social meanings removes the reliance on group members’ perspectives and beliefs. Dominant ideologies shape

¹¹ As other authors have emphasised, many of the themes of Fricker’s work were expressed previously in Black feminist and anti-colonial literature (Ivy 2016). Whilst I adopt Fricker’s framing, and some of her terminology, I also engage with critique of her work, including by those who work within Black feminist and anti-colonial traditions. I return to critique of Fricker in chapter four (section 2), where I also engage with Dotson’s concept of ‘epistemic oppression’ (2012; 2014) and in chapter seven (section 2.1). I take seriously Dotson’s critique that Fricker’s efforts to conceptualise epistemic injustice in a way that doesn’t make it too easy to commit fails to recognise the pervasiveness of epistemic injustice (2012, 37), and this is reflected in my own analysis of the way ideology leads to epistemic injustice; I consider epistemic injustice to be highly pervasive.

¹² Though Fricker uses the term ‘collective hermeneutical resources’ to describe the location of the lacuna this is more accurately described as ‘dominant hermeneutical resources’ to account for the fact that marginalised communities often develop their own conceptual resources to describe their experiences which are not taken up by the wider community (Mason 2011).

dominant hermeneutical resources, including by failing to provide ways to describe the injustice that ideology upholds, resulting in hermeneutical injustice (Haslanger 2017a, 149). By failing to provide hermeneutical resources to describe certain experiences or identities, ideology renders certain experiences unintelligible or seemingly impossible, resulting in hermeneutical injustice. The lacuna itself is a component of ideology, and Haslanger explicitly links ideologies to a lack of hermeneutical resources (Haslanger 2021a, 47).

However, hermeneutical injustice doesn't just result from gaps in hermeneutical resources; it also occurs because of the presence of hermeneutical resources that offer alternative explanations that fail to appropriately describe experiences and can distort interpretations of them, resulting in a marginalised people being unable to recognise or communicate their experience (Falbo 2022). Arianna Falbo refers to this as 'positive hermeneutical injustice', which can be contrasted with lacuna-based 'negative hermeneutical injustice' (2022). In the case of hermeneutical injustice described by Fricker of Carmita Wood, who experienced what was later termed 'sexual harassment' but lacked appropriate language to communicate what happened to her, it was not the case that there were *no* terms available to describe her experience (2007, 150). The problem was that the available terms were ineffective or misleading, and they failed to capture important aspects of her experience. Alternative terms available to describe what happened to Carmita Wood might have included 'harmless flirting', 'just a joke', or 'being overly friendly'. These terms or alternative explanations are part of a sexist set of social meanings about appropriate behaviour in the workplace, and the sort of treatment women can expect from men. These social meanings are part of an ideology because the interpretation of actions such as those undertaken by Carmita Wood's boss as harmless organises people in unjust ways: it excuses his actions and obscures the injustice of the treatment she received in the workplace. Ideologies shape actions so that they perpetuate oppression, and provide interpretations for those actions that similarly perpetuate oppression by obscuring injustice (Haslanger 2021a, 12). When the acts now understood as sexual harassment are interpreted as harmless, in a social context where these acts are overwhelmingly performed by men towards women, this perpetuates the oppression of women by men.

Haslanger also argues that Fricker's focus on 'lacunas' as gaps in hermeneutical resources overlooks the productive power of the hermeneutical resources provided by ideologies (2019b, 15). Ideologies are epistemically deficient; they sometimes (but not always) include false representations, they portray the facts misleadingly, and may contain distortions or occlusions (Shelby 2003, 166; Haslanger 2017a, 150). These occlusions can manifest as lacunas in hermeneutical resources, or as deficiencies in hermeneutical resources that reflect and reproduce

patterns of oppression (Haslanger 2021a, 47). As I have outlined in this section, ideology can produce hermeneutical injustices in two ways. The set of meanings provided by an ideology may miss things, producing a lacuna in hermeneutical resources in the sense that there is literally no term for an experience. Ideologies can also provide a tool for understanding such as a framework of social meanings or a concept that may distort interpretations in harmful ways that produce hermeneutical injustices, as exemplified by the potential alternative explanations for sexual harassment.

4. Ideology and Hermeneutical Marginalisation

Understanding hermeneutical injustice and the deficiencies in dominant hermeneutical resources through ideology may appear to conflict with the explanation for hermeneutical injustice developed by Fricker. She argues that it is hermeneutical marginalisation, the exclusion of certain groups from equal contribution to the development of hermeneutical resources, that causes hermeneutical injustice (Fricker 2007, 153). In systematic cases of hermeneutical injustice (which are the cases that are connected to ideology because they are the cases of hermeneutical injustice related to systems of oppression), hermeneutical marginalisation is a consequence of other forms of marginalisation (Fricker 2007, 155). Groups can be hermeneutically marginalised because they lack access to positions of social influence due to economic or political oppression and because they lack social markers of prestige and respect (Fricker 2007, 153–56). When these group-based forms of oppression occur, members of the group are less able to make contributions to the dominant tools for social understanding. This means the experiences of oppressed and marginalised groups are not reflected in the dominant hermeneutical resources, which produces hermeneutical injustice.

However, explaining the deficiencies in dominant hermeneutical resources in terms of ideology does not deny the role of hermeneutical marginalisation, as the two are related. Ideologies can naturalise oppression and the conditions that create systematic hermeneutical marginalisation. Shelby gives the example of the racist ideology about racial mixing according to which contact and especially relationships between Black and White people would threaten white ‘racial purity’. This ideology was used to support segregation in the US south, under which Black Americans were denied access to the material goods and opportunities, especially education, available to white people (Shelby 2003, 175). This perpetuated their hermeneutical marginalisation. The effects of ideology added additional barriers to the hermeneutically marginalised group’s ability to make epistemic contributions. This worsens the epistemic oppression (systematic prevention from making epistemic contributions) experienced by systematically hermeneutically marginalised groups (Dotson 2014). Ideologies can cause

deficiencies in dominant hermeneutical resources directly as they partially consist of hermeneutical resources that fail to properly describe the world, but this can occur in addition to hermeneutical marginalisation, so an ideological account of epistemic injustice does not conflict with Fricker's account of hermeneutical marginalisation.

Ideologies contribute towards hermeneutical marginalisation because when the social conditions that produce hermeneutical marginalisation are naturalised by an ideology, persuading people that those conditions should be changed is significantly more challenging, since the conditions are accepted as 'part of the way things are' rather than being recognised as unjust. Ideologies can 'reify' social conditions, so arrangements which are the product of human organisation are seen as natural and unchangeable (Shelby 2003, 177). Ideology ties the available resources for understanding the world to the conditions of social injustice that produce hermeneutical marginalisation (Mills 2017, 110). Hermeneutical marginalisation necessitates hermeneutical resistance: the development of new hermeneutical resources by marginalised groups which challenge dominant ideologies and provide marginalised people with ways to understand and explain their experiences.

5. Hermeneutical Resistance

Drawing on Haslanger (2019b; 2021a) and Mills (2017), I have explained the connection of ideology to hermeneutical injustice in cases (such as those originally described by Fricker) where the victims of hermeneutical injustice lack appropriate hermeneutical resources to describe their own experiences. However, as others (including, later, Fricker herself) have noted, hermeneutical injustice and other, similar forms of epistemic injustice can be experienced by marginalised knowers when they can use hermeneutical resources that are not shared or understood by a socially significant person who they need to communicate with (Fricker 2016, 166–68). In these cases, marginalised people have hermeneutical resources to understand their own experiences, but still experience an injustice because they are unable to properly communicate those experiences to others (Mason 2011; Medina 2012; Goetze 2018). Dominant ideologies are not hegemonic, and new hermeneutical resources which explain the experiences of the marginalised emerge from hermeneutical resistance, especially in situations where marginalised people are able to form their own epistemic communities in groups where dominantly situated knowers are not present (Collins 2009). Resistant hermeneutical resources are hermeneutical resources developed within the epistemic communities of marginally situated knowers which fill gaps in dominant hermeneutical resources, or hermeneutical resources that re-describe experiences where the understanding offered by dominant hermeneutical resources is insufficient. I use the term 'hermeneutical resistance' to refer to practices which challenge, change, or aim to replace

the dominant hermeneutical resources provided by an ideology, such as hermeneutical invention (the development of new hermeneutical resources).

Deficiencies in hermeneutical resources are part of ideology. Therefore, hermeneutical resistance (the development of resistant hermeneutical resources, the sharing and spreading of these resources, and the challenging of existing dominant ideological hermeneutical resources) is a way of challenging ideology. As ideology partially consists of deficiencies in the dominant hermeneutical resources, challenging ideology must involve changing and improving dominant hermeneutical resources. Similarly, Haslanger notes that offering a critique of concepts is one method of ideology critique (2017b; 2021a, 68). Ideology critique is a way of disrupting and changing a problematic set of social meanings that organises people in unjust ways and guide unjust practices, and of remedying injustice (Haslanger 2017a, 160). Practices of hermeneutical resistance which aim to change hermeneutical resources that reflect ideologies or fill the hermeneutical lacunas which are shaped by ideologies are one form that ideology critique can take.

Gaile Pohlhaus claims that ‘marginally situated knowers’ are better placed than dominantly situated knowers or those who don’t experience relevant marginalisation or oppression to develop resistant hermeneutical resources as they have experiences which are insufficiently described by the dominant hermeneutical resources (2012, 719). She argues that marginally situated knowers are in a better position to recognise inadequacies in existing hermeneutical resources and that the resources they develop are generally more suitable for describing the world (Pohlhaus 2012, 720–21). Hermeneutically marginalised knowers can find that the dominant resources available for understanding their experiences are insufficient for making those experiences intelligible, and this provides the impetus for engaging in practices of hermeneutical resistance and invention within groups (Fricker 2007, 148). This is not an essentialist position about the knowledge available to marginally situated knowers. The ability to recognise the need for different hermeneutical resources is a product of experience, not identity, and the process of developing those resources is not an individual one but rather occurs within groups where individual experiences are connected so patterns of oppression and marginalisation are made apparent.

The existence of the phenomenon of hermeneutical resistance in the world shows that members of oppressed groups sometimes challenge their oppression. However, ideology can also be internalised by those it oppresses, and oppressed groups themselves can sometimes fail to challenge the conditions of their oppression, or fail to properly identify the cause of their oppression (Celikates 2018, 3; Rosen 2000; Heath 2000). This appears to conflict with

Pohlhaus's claims that marginally situated knowers are better placed to develop hermeneutical resources to explain their experiences (2012, 720). Pohlhaus's concept of 'wilful hermeneutical ignorance' explains how dominantly situated knowers dismiss hermeneutical resources developed by marginalised groups because the experiences of the dominantly situated knowers mean they fail to recognise the need for the new hermeneutical resources (2012). However, people, regardless of their social position relative to the deficiencies in dominant hermeneutical resources, may also reject resistant hermeneutical resources because they challenge dominant ideologies. In what follows in this thesis, I will take into account both that hermeneutical resistance is possible and occurring, and that those who are oppressed can fail to recognise their oppression or can misdiagnose its cause. This view of how the marginalised are able to engage in resistance, but also sometimes act to perpetuate their oppression, shapes the characterisation of a form of epistemic injustice that I lay out in chapter four. I return to the question of how people who are oppressed by ideology are able to recognise that ideology and engage in resistance in chapter six.

6. Conclusion

Having discussed some wider literature on ideology, I have set out my own Haslanger-inspired view of ideologies as networks of epistemically deficient social meanings which function to uphold systems of oppression. This critical conception of ideology enables me to explain how ideology obscures injustice, which, as I outline in the next chapter, plays a key role in the trans panic. I've traced how this conception of ideology is closely related to hermeneutical injustice, such that ideology is a cause of systematic cases of hermeneutical injustice because, when ideologies are dominant, the resources they provide to understand the world are part of the dominant hermeneutical resources, and these often fail to properly describe the experiences of oppressed people. This has established the connection between the two main conceptual tools that I utilise for the remainder of the thesis to explain the ongoing dynamic of the trans panic. I develop my account of how ideology and epistemic injustice are further interrelated, and the role this plays in the trans panic, in chapter two. Hermeneutical resistance, the development of new hermeneutical resources that fill gaps or replace ideological hermeneutical resources, is therefore an important part of ideology critique. However, this means that hermeneutical resistance must confront the problems that face ideology critique. Those who are oppressed sometimes fail to recognise ideology, or misdiagnose it, and there are further questions of how warranted ideology critique, including warranted hermeneutical resistance, can be generated. I return to the issue of how warranted ideology critique can be developed in chapter six. This provides the necessary

background for my account of how this resistance is taking place, and potential avenues for further tactics, which I develop in chapter seven.

Chapter 2: Challenging the ‘Debate’ Framing of the Trans Panic: On Cissexist Ideology and Epistemic Injustice

1. Introduction

The current social and political mess surrounding the lives of trans people in the UK is best described as a ‘trans panic’ (Gleeson and O’Rourke 2021, 27). The trans panic is an example of a moral panic. Moral panics, according to the ‘attributional model’, are defined by several key characteristics (Cricher 2016, xx–xxi). These include: increased levels of ‘concern’ about a group’s behaviour including increased ‘media coverage and lobbying activity’; hostility towards those who are deemed ‘deviants’ whose behaviour is seen as a threat ‘to the values and interests of society’; consensus among some parts of society that there is a real threat posed by the behaviour of a group; and a disproportionate response to this (Cricher 2016, xx–xxi). The current trans panic displays these key features.¹³ The political right considers trans people a threat to the prevailing moral order and naturalised gendered practices. The spectre of this threat was amplified in the UK in 2017 by proposed changes to the Gender Recognition Act (GRA)¹⁴ which has led to a backlash against transgender rights and trans people more generally that has continued since then (Pearce, Erikainen, and Vincent 2020, 678).

In this chapter, my aim is to provide an explanation of three key dynamics of the trans panic in the UK: its large scope, its resistance to efforts to tackle it, and its persistence. Whilst the trans panic’s resistance to efforts to tackle it is a factor in why it is so persistent, persistence itself requires a further explanation, as moral panics are typically ‘fleeting’ (Cricher 2016, xxi). Though other moral panics have lasted for several years, the trans panic’s persistence is notable because it has lasted through substantial political changes in the UK. The trans panic began during a period of UK politics when the Conservative party struck a more moderate tone on social issues, continued as they moved further to the right and embraced ‘culture war’ tactics, and is ongoing under a Labour government. The trans panic is no longer a response to a political moment; it is shaping the political moment.

¹³ However, the trans panic notably doesn’t display the fifth element of a moral panic on this model, ‘volatility’; it is not ‘fleeting’ and shows no sign of subsiding quickly (Cricher 2016, xxi).

¹⁴ The Gender Recognition Act 2004 (henceforth the GRA) enables some trans people in the UK to change the sex recorded on their birth certificate from male to female or vice-versa by obtaining a gender recognition certificate (henceforth a GRC). Acquiring a GRC requires a diagnosis of gender dysphoria and submission of evidence to a panel which shows a person has been ‘living in the acquired gender’ for two years. Many trans people consider this process to be overly medicalised and demeaning (Government Equalities Office 2016, 12). The Women and Equalities Select Committee (2016) recommended reform of the GRA to introduce a system based on self-declaration (removing the requirement for medical diagnosis and submission of evidence) in 2016. Public consultations on reform of the GRA opened in Scotland in 2017 and in the rest of the UK in 2018. Although most responses to the consultation favoured reform, the GRA remains largely unchanged (D. King et al. 2020). A bill to introduce self-declaration-based reform in Scotland was blocked by the UK government.

The trans panic has been framed as the trans ‘debate’ in the UK; an explanation of the trans panic must be able to describe the role that this framing plays and why it has emerged, as well as to account for puzzling features of this ‘debate’ such the central role of misinformation about the effects of proposed legal changes¹⁵ and the use of ‘common sense’ and ‘objectivity’ rhetoric.

Some, though by no means all, of the harm experienced by trans people in the trans panic is epistemic injustice, as has been noted by George and Goguen in the case of trans youth panics (2021). Epistemic injustice is often a gateway to other injustices, and it is in this case.¹⁶ While epistemic injustice begins to account for the difficulty trans activists face in tackling the trans panic, epistemic injustice alone cannot explain its persistence or scope. What I term ‘cissexist ideology’ explains why the trans panic has such a large scope, is so persistent, and why misinformation and controlling images were able to facilitate the development of the ‘debate’ framing.

I argue that epistemic injustice and cissexist ideology form a feedback loop, illustrated by figure 1, which is central to the trans panic and gives a fuller explanation for why it is so resistant to efforts to tackle it. The feedback loop also accounts for the dynamic of ‘debate’ and explains why misinformation in the trans panic has persisted, as well as the role played by ‘common sense’ and ‘objectivity’ rhetoric. In this chapter, I discuss the UK trans panic as a case study, but this feedback loop can also help with understanding the interplay between cissexist ideology and epistemic injustice in other contexts. As outlined in chapter one, I utilise a conception of ideology that draws heavily on Haslanger’s account of ideology as a problematic network of social meanings which obscure injustice; Haslanger’s account of ideology explains how ideologies provide resources for understanding the world which are defective (2021a). This includes hermeneutical resources and, I argue, stereotypes, which lead to hermeneutical and testimonial injustice (2021a, 47). In this chapter, and drawing on ideas I developed in chapter one, I expand on Haslanger’s argument to explain the connection between ideology and epistemic injustice, which has received little discussion in existing literature. My goal in this chapter is not to explore this purely as an area of theory; it is to apply this connection to make sense of an ongoing social issue.

¹⁵ Though misinformation is now a common feature of political discourse, the role of misinformation in the debate framing of the trans panic is notable because it is spread by legacy media outlets (e.g. the BBC and the Guardian) who are not typically sources of misinformation on many other issues and are engaged in fact checking.

¹⁶ My focus will remain on epistemic injustice, but other harms which have arisen because of the trans panic include an increase in reported hate-crime against trans people (Nagesh 2022), and a move away from international best practice guidelines in the healthcare of trans children (John 2024).

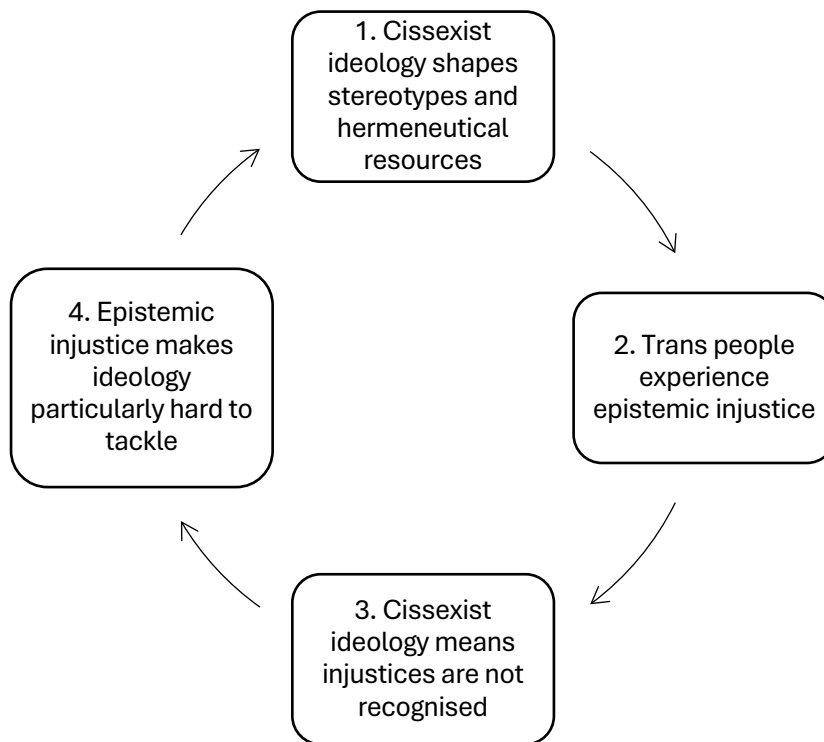


Fig. 1 *The cissexist ideology/epistemic injustice feedback loop*

In section 2, I provide an overview of the trans panic in the UK. In section 3, I explain cissexist ideology using a Haslanger-inspired account of ideology and detail how ideology shapes stereotypes and hermeneutical resources, forming the first part of the feedback loop. In section 4, I use the connection between ideology and epistemic injustice to discuss the ‘debate’ framing of the trans panic. I explain that the ‘debate’ framing is harmful because, given the way ideology shapes epistemic resources, debate inevitably produces epistemic injustice towards trans people. This is part 2 of the feedback loop. The trans panic is often referred to as a debate in media coverage, but I use the term ‘debate’ in inverted commas to reflect the fact that this is not a legitimate debate; it lacks features that make a debate legitimate such as fairness between debaters. Ideology means that injustice, including epistemic injustice, is not recognised, and efforts to tackle the trans panic are deemed attacks on free speech; this forms part 3 of the feedback loop, and explains the trans panic’s resistance to efforts to combat it. This crucial part of the feedback loop highlights the important role played by ideology in causing and maintaining the current dynamic of the trans panic and illustrates one reason why an analysis in terms of epistemic injustice alone is insufficient; we need ideology to explain why injustices towards trans people aren’t recognised even when the dynamics of epistemic injustice have been identified.

In section 5 and 6, I consider notable features of the ‘debate’. In section 5, I demonstrate how an ideological understanding of the trans panic helps to make sense of why the trans ‘debate’ has

centred around falsehoods about the effects of proposed changes to the GRA and appeals to prejudiced stereotypes relating trans women to sexual predators. These prejudices are not recognised as wrongful because of cissexist ideology, which is an example of part 3 of the feedback loop. I also detail how epistemic injustice makes it harder to tackle ideological misinformation and stereotypes, which forms part 4 of the feedback loop. In section 6 I consider the mobilisation of the language of ‘common sense’, ‘biological fact’, and ‘objectivity’ by those opposed to trans liberation. I account for the use of this rhetoric through appealing to the way that ideology shapes ‘common sense’ (returning to part 1 of the loop) and elucidate how the use of ‘objectivity’ rhetoric exacerbates testimonial injustice experienced by trans people.

2. The Trans Panic

Though my focus is on the trans panic in the UK, the situation in the UK is part of a global climate of increased hostility towards trans people led by right-wing political actors, including a global ‘antigender’ movement led by conservative currents in the Catholic Church (Corredor 2019), large numbers of anti-trans bills introduced by Republican politicians across states in the US, and the rolling back of trans legal recognition by the far-right government in Hungary (Pearce, Erikainen, and Vincent 2020, 680–82). My analysis of the feedback loop between epistemic injustice and ideology in the UK trans panic is a case study of a broader phenomenon of the interaction between these two factors in global trans panics. Whilst the phenomenon of the feedback loop between cissexist ideology and epistemic injustice is occurring in trans panics globally, my analysis will focus exclusively on the UK as there are international variations in the content of the dominant cissexist ideology, and the political and legal contexts for trans people, which have shaped how the trans panics in these different settings have played out. Reasons of space preclude me from exploring more than one local manifestation of the trans panic and applications of the feedback loop to other moral panics in the level of detail required for my analysis.

One key feature of the trans panic is its scope. ‘Transgender issues’ play a prominent role in politics and the media in the UK. There are regularly news stories in multiple media outlets related to the trans panic which cover issues relating directly to trans people such as their inclusion in sport, or trans children’s healthcare, but the trans panic has also intruded into many other aspects of everyday life. The so called ‘trans debate’ has included topics as varied as the inclusion of trans girls in Girlguiding (Marsh 2018), language used on NHS websites (Ely 2022a), and freedom of speech within academia (Observer Editorial 2021). Policies towards trans people formed part of the Conservative Party’s 2024 election pledges (McDonald 2024).

The scope and prominence of the trans panic mean that it is difficult for a person in the UK to not be aware of it.

The topics of the trans panic have been framed by commentators as issues of the colliding interests of cisgender women and trans people, particularly trans women (e.g., The Guardian 2018). Many groups that have emerged to oppose reform of the Gender Recognition Act such as Fair Play for Women (2025a), and For Women Scotland (2025) emphasise what they argue is a clash between trans rights and (cisgender) women's rights. The framings of 'protecting women' and 'women's rights' are also used by conservative religious movements, who additionally appeal to traditional gender roles to oppose trans rights. This is reflected in responses to Scotland's GRA consultation from the Catholic Bishops Conference of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland.¹⁷ These purportedly 'women's rights' organisations and socially conservative activists share the rhetoric of the 'clash' between trans and women's rights besides many political goals; for example, For Women Scotland have worked with right-wing Christian groups to organise opposition to LGBTQ+ content and sex education in schools (Moore 2022b). There is also opposition to trans people and trans rights from far-right groups. These groups make appeals to traditional gender roles, share conspiracy theories, and are engaged in targeted harassment of trans people. They are also invested in the 'rights clash' view of the trans panic. For example, a Glasgow protest organised by 'Let Women Speak', a group who claim that women's rights are being eroded by rights for transgender people, was attended by members of far-right groups and Holocaust deniers (Yours 2023). At a protest organised by Let Women Speak in Australia, neo-Nazi groups performed Nazi salutes (Ore 2023). The 'Let Women Speak' tour has been supported by For Women Scotland, Fair Play for Women, and other anti-trans 'women's rights' groups ('Let Women Speak in New Zealand' 2023).

Claims of a clash of rights caused by reform to the GRA are inaccurate. The supposed rights 'clash' arises, it is claimed, because changes to the GRA would 'threaten' single sex spaces for women. This is sometimes articulated as a threat from men who would abuse the self-declaration system to gain access to women's spaces, and sometimes as the idea that GRA reform would mean trans women could access women's spaces based on self-declaration, and that spaces would thus cease to be (cis) women only and that this would pose a danger to cisgender women using these spaces (Women and Equalities Committee 2019, 46). This understanding is inaccurate because trans people have long used single-sex spaces including toilets that align with their gender identity, regardless of whether or not they have a GRC, including before the passage

¹⁷ These responses to the GRA consultation in Scotland can be found here: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/organisation-responses-to-gender-recognition-consultation-scotland-a-g/> [accessed 27/03/2025].

of the GRA in 2004 (and before the Equality Act 2010 was passed) (Whittle 2002, 115–16; Whittle, Turner, and Al-Alami 2007, 35–36). Because access to single-sex spaces is governed by the Equality Act not the GRA, amendments to the GRA would not affect access to single-sex spaces. Claims that cisgender men would abuse the proposed self-declaration system to harm women are not borne out in countries where self-declaration governs legal access to single-sex spaces (Sharpe 2020, 544–47). The idea that trans women’s inclusion threatens cis women also draws on stereotypes of trans women as sexual predators; I discuss the role of these stereotypes play in inaccurate portrayals of the law in section three.

Prior to April 2025, trans people, regardless of whether they had a GRC, were understood to have the right to use single-sex services and spaces under the Equality Act. The Equality Act also permitted the exclusion of trans people, including those with GRCs, from single-sex spaces, if this could be deemed ‘a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim’ (*Equality Act* 2010 schedule 3 para. 28)¹⁸. The only exception to this was single-sex membership clubs which do not provide a service, which were understood to be able to exclude people on the basis of their sex as recorded on their birth certificate, meaning that a trans woman with GRC could not be excluded from a woman’s single-sex membership club, but a trans woman without a GRC could be excluded (*Equality Act* 2010 Schedule 16 para. 1). The government stated they would not amend the Equality Act when they launched the first public consultation into GRA reform (‘Trans People in the UK’ 2018).

This interpretation of the law was contradicted by an April 2025 Supreme Court judgement which defined ‘sex’ as ‘biological sex’ for the purposes of the Equality Act (*For Women Scotland Ltd (Appellant) v The Scottish Ministers (Respondent)* 2025). Following this ruling, the EHRC (the Equality and Human Rights Commission) have released interim (non-statutory) guidance saying that trans women, including those with GRCs, should not use women’s single-sex spaces and that trans men should not use men’s single-sex spaces (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2025). The EHRC guidance also allows for trans people to be excluded from all single-sex spaces (i.e. it allows trans men to be excluded from women’s spaces as well as men’s spaces) (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2025). The ruling also states that trans people must be excluded from single-sex membership clubs on the basis of their ‘biological sex’, even if

¹⁸ This interpretation of the Equality Act was the one given in the statutory guidance produced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC): the public body that enforces equalities legislation in the UK. Their guidance on schedule 3, paragraph 28 of the Equality Act (referenced above) was: ‘If a service provider provides single- or separate sex services for women and men, or provides services differently to women and men, they should treat transsexual people according to the gender role in which they present. However, the Act does permit the service provider to provide a different service or exclude a person from the service who is proposing to undergo, is undergoing or who has undergone gender reassignment. This will only be lawful where the exclusion is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate [aim]’ (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2011, para. 13.57).

they have a GRC (*For Women Scotland Ltd (Appellant) v The Scottish Ministers (Respondent)* 2025, paras 207–209). The legal case brought by For Women Scotland against the Scottish Government, and subsequent Supreme Court ruling, is both an outcome of the trans panic, and a causal factor in its continuation.

While trans people appear to have lost the right to use single-sex spaces, the claim that amendments *to the GRA* would result in trans women using single-sex spaces, and that their presence in these spaces would threaten the safety of cisgender women, remains inaccurate.¹⁹

3. Cissexist Ideology and Epistemic Injustice

As I have previously mentioned, many different anti-trans groups involved in the trans panic use similar rhetoric and share the same political goals. In this section, I argue that the connection between these groups is deeper than rhetoric and is non-coincidental: anti-trans activists are united by a shared commitment to cissexist ideology.

As I outlined in chapter one, following Haslanger, I understand ideology as an epistemically problematic network of social meanings which shapes practices and organises people in unjust ways (Haslanger 2017a, 150). This conception of ideology is functionalist and pejorative; ideologies function to sustain patterns of domination and oppression as the practices they shape ‘systematically disadvantage’ certain groups (Haslanger 2017a, 150, 159). Ideologies are epistemically deficient because the social meanings they consist of are false or misleading, and the tools they provide for understanding the world occlude things that are morally relevant (Haslanger 2017a, 159, 168). The practices shaped by ideologies are often naturalised; they are not recognised as the products of ideological systems and are treated as natural and unchangeable.

The tools to understand the world provided by ideologies include hermeneutical resources, and when ideologies are dominant, ideological hermeneutical resources are part of the dominant hermeneutical resources (the widely shared resources used to communicate such as concepts and systems of meaning). Ideologies cause hermeneutical injustice; hermeneutical injustice occurs when a person is unable to properly communicate their experiences due to deficiencies in the dominant hermeneutical resources (Fricker 2007). Because ideology shapes our tools for understanding the world, we can lack hermeneutical resources to describe the world in ways that conflict with ideology (Haslanger (2021a, 47) explicitly links ideologies with gaps in our

¹⁹ I say ‘appear to have lost the right’ as the EHRC’s interim guidance is non-statutory, and only full statutory guidance (expected to be released later this year) will provide a clear picture of the actual legal rights trans people have lost in this ruling. Moreover, the guidance is likely to be subject to an appeal on the basis that it contravenes trans people’s human rights (Casciani 2025).

hermeneutical resources). However, I argue that ideology can also cause what Falbo (2022, 354) refers to as ‘positive hermeneutical injustice’ which she distinguishes from lacuna-based ‘negative hermeneutical injustice’. Positive hermeneutical injustice occurs because of the presence of distorting concepts which can prevent the application of appropriate concepts where they exist (Falbo 2022, 352). Ideologies cause hermeneutical injustice because they shape our available resources for understanding the world. Ideologies fail to provide resources to describe aspects of the world which causes lacuna based ‘negative’ hermeneutical injustice and provide hermeneutical resources which obscure injustice and describe the world in ways that are misleading, and this causes positive hermeneutical injustice.

Cissexist ideology is a network of social meanings relating to gender and sex which shapes practices in ways that uphold the oppression of trans people.²⁰ The concept of ‘cissexism’ I am using is similar to ‘cultural cisgenderism’ as described by Kennedy (2013). Features of cultural cisgenderism include the ‘systematic erasure’ of trans people, the ‘external imposition’ of binary gender, and an understanding of gender as ‘immutable’ and ‘biologically determined’ (Kennedy 2013, 2, 4). However, I use the term ‘cissexism’ because the network of social meanings I am discussing relates to sex as well as gender, and because ‘cissexism’ is a more widely used and recognised term. The cissexist network of social meanings includes a binary sex/gender system in which people are assigned male or female and appears to exclude the possibility of trans existence by establishing these categories as lifelong, without the possibility of movement between them (Pearce 2018, 85–86). Cissexist ideology is manifested through practices based on binary sex and binary gender roles. The division of people into binary sex and gender categories shapes, among other things, the provision of public toilets, clothing, and administrative systems. Cissexist ideology shapes practices which harm trans people such as limited legal rights, restrictions on transitioning, and exclusion of trans people from gender segregated spaces, but also means these practices are not recognised as harmful – ideology obscures injustice. In a clear example of this, the Supreme Court judges said that their ruling that ‘sex’ means ‘biological sex’ for the purposes of the Equality Act ‘does not cause disadvantage to trans people’, who as a result of the ruling now face legal restrictions that threaten their access to public space, employment, healthcare, and sport (*For Women Scotland Ltd (Appellant) v The Scottish Ministers (Respondent)* 2025, para. 265 xvii). Cissexist ideology shapes practices that constitute

²⁰ This is different to the way Julia Serano describes cissexism in ‘Whipping Girl’ as a belief in the inferiority of transsexual people’s identities, and as a type of prejudice which doesn’t apply to transgender people who are not transsexual (2016, 12). Dembroff (2020a) describes a similar phenomenon to cissexist ideology as ‘Western dominant gender ideology’, but I use the term ‘cissexist ideology’ to emphasise the way this ideology oppresses trans people. Cissexist ideology also upholds racism and imperialism which compounds the oppression of racially othered transgender people, an issue I return to later in this section. Cissexist ideology is also sexist because the practices it shapes often uphold the oppression of women, but my focus will remain on cissexism.

a system of transphobia. Injustice and oppression are not recognised because the dominant set of social meanings is ideological and the network of social meanings of the binary sex/gender system is part of ‘common sense’.

Cissexist ideology is a dominant ideology because it shapes practices and provides tools which are dominant in society. I take dominant ideologies to be identifiable by their widespread nature, the way they are established as undeniable and ‘natural’ parts of ‘the way things are’, and their centrality to key societal institutions. Cissexist ideology is embedded in practices that shape people’s lives, such as government bureaucracy, the law, and healthcare systems. Cissexist ideology may not govern practices in all spaces; particularly in resistant communities such as feminist and trans spaces, harmful practices may be abandoned, and cissexist social meanings questioned. For example, within LGBT spaces, practices such as asking peoples’ pronouns may be adopted. However, because cissexist ideology is dominant, it is not possible to entirely ‘opt out’ as it shapes practices that people cannot chose to be removed from. For example, it is not legally possible to entirely avoid the assignation of a binary sex by British bureaucratic systems.

As a result of cissexist ideology, trans people have been understood through ‘controlling images’, a form of stereotype which make ‘social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable’ (Collins 2009, 77). Controlling images provide ‘powerful ideological justifications’ for the continued existence of oppression (Collins 2009, 76). I take the controlling images of trans people to be that they are sexual deviants and predators, or mentally ill and deluded objects of pity. The ‘sexual predator’ controlling image is usually applied to trans women while the ‘mentally ill’ controlling image is applied to trans people more broadly. Serano (2016, 36) likewise refers to media depictions of trans women as falling into two archetypes of ‘deceptive’ and ‘pathetic’. Bettcher (2007, 44, 51) describes how trans women are stereotyped as sexually deceptive and presented as rapists and are only exempted from this trope to the extent that they are seen as engaging in ‘harmless make-believe’, reflecting a similar dichotomy.

The controlling image of trans women as predatory emerges from cissexist ideology because cissexist ideology shapes practices of gendered presentation such as the practice that people wear particular types of clothing depending on if they are a man or a woman. Trans people who do not conform to these practices, including those who undergo medical transition and surgery, are seen as deceptive for ‘hiding’ what is taken to be their ‘true’ sex according to cissexist ideology, and this ‘deception’ is deemed predatory (Bettcher 2007, 48–49). Additionally, cissexist ideology deems trans women to be ‘really men’ and therefore to be sexually predatory as men. The ‘trans women as sexual predators’ controlling image has been employed frequently in the trans panic, such as in a BBC News article claiming trans women were pressuring cis women into sex

(Lowbridge 2021). This article failed to provide any robust evidence of this being a widespread problem and relied on an unscientific twitter poll. The controlling image of trans women as sexual predators is false and prejudicial; permitting trans people to use gender segregated places does not increase the likelihood that crimes will be committed in those spaces (Hasenbush, Flores, and Herman 2019) and trans people are more likely to be victims of intimate partner violence than cis people (Peitzmeier et al. 2020).

The controlling image of trans people as delusional or mentally ill reflects ideological social meanings and practices which treat being trans as a mental illness. Trans people are often deemed mentally ill because they claim to be something ‘impossible’, whereas cisgender identities are considered natural and legitimate (Serano 2016, 161). During the trans panic some anti-trans activists have drawn on this controlling image to argue that trans people should not be allowed to change their legal sex, with one conservative campaign group claiming that trans people are ‘deeply troubled’, and the law should not seek to affirm what they consider to be a mental illness (Rawlinson 2017).

These controlling images ‘explain away’ injustice experienced by trans people. The controlling image of trans women as predators can be seen to justify what would otherwise be considered wrongful treatment as something that trans women ‘deserve’ and therefore not an injustice; Bettcher (2007, 51) describes how the ‘deceptive’ controlling image of trans women is used to excuse transphobic violence. The controlling image of trans people as mentally ill or pathetic means their suffering is viewed as inevitable. Controlling images form part of the dominant cissexist ideological network of social meanings surrounding trans people and are used to interpret their experiences. Ideology naturalises and normalises oppression; controlling images, which make ‘racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life’ (Collins 2009, 77), are part of that process.

Cissexist ideology shapes the controlling images of trans people, and these controlling images are a form of prejudicial stereotype which cause trans people to experience testimonial injustice, which occurs when a person’s testimony is not given due credibility because of prejudice (Fricker 2007). Ideologies can cause testimonial injustice when the social meanings they consist of include prejudicial stereotypes that downgrade the credibility of a group. Cissexist ideology also shapes dominant hermeneutical resources which fail to properly reflect trans experiences, which lead to trans people’s experiences of hermeneutical injustice. For example, Fricker and Katharine Jenkins (2017, 272) note how trans people suffer both hermeneutical and testimonial injustice in healthcare settings where a lack of sufficient language to explain their experiences can increase the likelihood that their testimony will be dismissed because of stereotypes that

trans people are mentally ill. This connection between cissexist ideology and epistemic injustice begins the feedback loop.

The lack of concepts to describe trans people and their experiences means that trans communities often develop novel concepts (such as ‘misgendering’) which enable them to understand their own experiences. Some of these concepts have been adopted outside of trans communities, but trans people still experience hermeneutical injustice because they remain unable to effectively communicate their experiences to others when the new resistant hermeneutical resources are not widely shared (Mason 2011). Even when new hermeneutical resources exist, dominantly situated knowers may fail to take them up owing to wilful hermeneutical ignorance (the refusal to accept new resources developed within marginalised communities because dominantly situated knowers don’t recognise the resources as useful (Pohlhaus 2012, 721)). In these cases, trans people experience what Fricker terms ‘midway’ cases of hermeneutical injustice, where they are able to understand their own experiences, but are prevented from properly communicating them due to a paucity of appropriate shared hermeneutical resources (Fricker 2016, 167).

Cissexist ideology also reflects implicit assumptions about race. Cissexist ideology shapes social meanings of gender and sex, including the idea that women are vulnerable and require protection. This stereotype reflects racist ideas of white women as being particularly vulnerable and therefore requiring protection, whereas women of colour, particularly Black women, are often characterised as overly masculine, reflecting the racist idea that Black people are more ‘aggressive’ (Pearce, Erikainen, and Vincent 2020, 680). What it means to be a woman within cissexist ideology is to be vulnerable, but Black women are not characterised as vulnerable and are therefore seen to deviate from norms of womanhood. Racially othered people are more likely to be deemed to deviate from white bodily norms (Pearce, Erikainen, and Vincent 2020, 680). In his book *Black on Both Sides*, C. Riley Snorton (2017, 20) discusses how Black women’s bodies were constructed as deviating from white norms through abusive medical practices. This compounds the ways that racially othered trans people are rendered as ‘deviant’.

Cissexist ideology has also served as a tool of colonialism; binary sex/gender systems have been imposed through imperialism on cultures which previously had alternative understandings of sex/gender, and deviance from European gender norms was taken to indicate that a culture was less ‘civilised’, or ‘primitive’ (Pearce, Erikainen, and Vincent 2020, 687). While I refer to this ideology as ‘cissexist ideology’, it manifests wider trends within white Eurocentrism, including eugenicist logics (Horbury and Yao 2020, 451). This is reflected in the anti-trans movement, who draw on ‘fictions of white female vulnerability’ to justify transphobia and racism (Horbury and Yao 2020, 448); far-right movements frame trans women as a threat to white women’s safety in

the same way that immigrants, Muslims, and Black men are characterised as sexual threats (Hermansson 2022).

Though others have analysed ‘TERF ideology’ (Ivy 2018; Pearce, Erikainen, and Vincent 2020), understanding the mobilisation around women’s rights in the trans panic as a manifestation of cissexism helps to show how the political goals of trans-exclusionary feminist and self-styled ‘gender critical’ groups reflect a dominant ideology. There are some genuine differences in the beliefs of groups currently involved in the trans panic, but adherence to cissexist ideology is common to all of them, likely because it is a dominant ideology. O’Donnell (2019) notes how ‘terf’²¹ movements share a commitment to a strict binary and hierarchical view of gender with conservative religious movements, especially Catholic theology. Similarly, Jenkins (2023, 204) describes many of the differences between religious anti-gender campaigns against so-called ‘gender ideology’ run by the Catholic church as described by Corredor (2019) and purportedly feminist anti-gender movements as ‘surface level’, pointing to their shared political aims and language. By understanding the trans panic in terms of cissexist ideology, it is easier to see how seemingly different groups opposed to the goals of trans liberation movements all uphold the same system of oppression.

4. The Trans ‘Debate’

While I refer to the current moment as a ‘trans panic’, in the media and political discussion this issue has been dubbed the trans ‘debate’ (Faye 2021, xii, 8–9). The framing of ‘debate’ is one of the reasons why the trans panic has been so harmful to trans people. This is because the ‘debate’ framing necessarily produces epistemic injustice. When one side of the concocted ‘debate’ are unable to properly communicate their experiences because most of the audience will fail to understand the concepts they need to use to do so, and their testimony is likely to be unjustly disregarded due to pervasive stereotypes, epistemic injustice is inevitable and no ‘debate’ can truly be fair. Because of epistemic injustice, arguments for trans liberation are harder to make and less likely to be taken seriously, meaning anti-trans activists are more likely to be seen to ‘win’ a debate, resulting in additional non-epistemic harms towards trans people.

The role of cissexist ideology is crucial for explaining the trans panic ‘debate’. The ‘debate’ framing has emerged because of false claims that trans rights pose a threat to women’s safety; this framing draws on ideological social meanings of trans women as a threat and relies on

²¹ O’Donnell (2019, 82–83) uses the term ‘terf’ in lower case as an adjective to describe ‘perspectives and activities’ and not as an identity label. The acronym ‘TERF’ stands for ‘Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist’. Though I use ‘TERF’ in citations of others’ work, I will not use it myself because the term does not accurately describe the groups my work focusses on as they are not radical feminist groups. To describe people who are opposed to the goals of trans liberation movements I use the term ‘anti-trans’.

misinformation concerning proposed changes to the GRA, which isn't recognised due to cissexist ideology. Without cissexist ideology, this 'debate' would likely not have emerged, because the existence of 'debate' about the GRA relies on widespread misinformation and transphobic stereotypes which, as I explain further in section 5, exist due to cissexist ideology.

An account of what is occurring in trans panic that exclusively considers epistemic injustice without ideology cannot account for why the 'debate' has emerged and has such a wide scope. As I explain further in subsequent sections, it is the feedback loop between ideology and epistemic injustice that explains why the trans panic is so persistent and so resistant to efforts to tackle it. While hermeneutical and testimonial injustice have been occurring during the trans panic 'debate', the existence of hermeneutical and testimonial injustice does not tell us why the 'debate' framing, or the trans panic itself, has emerged.

George and Goguen offer an account of how trans panics have emerged in terms of epistemic injustice by developing the concept of 'hermeneutical backlash', a type of epistemic injustice which they argue describes what is taking place in trans youth panics (2021). Hermeneutical backlash is characterised by the reframing of hermeneutical liberation movements as sinister or harmful. 'Hermeneutical backlash' would explain the trans panic as emerging in response to a push for hermeneutical liberation from trans people; on this account, the reason why the 'debate' has emerged is because people are attempting to defend an 'unjust hermeneutical regime' against a hermeneutical liberation movement (George and Goguen 2021, 1).

However, George and Goguen's analysis cannot account for the scope of the trans panic because the trans panic has not only emerged in backlash to hermeneutical liberation. Whilst, as I demonstrate later in this section, an epistemic injustice-based analysis can explain how trans people are systematically disadvantaged and experience harm in the context of a debate, this can't explain why the trans panic has emerged in areas where there hasn't been a relevant hermeneutical liberation movement for anti-trans activists to engage in backlash against, nor can it explain cases in the trans panic where the injustice experienced by trans people was not primarily epistemic. The tool that can explain why the trans panic has emerged in all these areas, and how the trans panic is resulting in many kinds of injustice, is cissexist ideology.

For example, the debate that arose about the inclusion of trans women and girls in Girlguiding occurred in response to a change in policy instituted by the leaders of the organisation, not as backlash against the hermeneutical liberation of trans people, and the resulting injustice was not primarily hermeneutical (Marsh 2018). The debate emerged because the trans-inclusive policy adopted by Girlguiding contradicts the cissexist ideological conception of gender. Because cissexist ideology is a dominant ideology, it influences practices and people's beliefs in many

aspects of everyday life, so can explain why the trans panic has emerged in areas beyond the areas where trans people experience hermeneutical marginalisation. The debate framing itself emerged because of misinformation about the effect of proposed changes to the GRA. This was not a hermeneutical liberation goal; it was a legal one. Amending the GRA would not have disrupted any dominant epistemic resources. It would have included more trans women in the legal category of ‘woman’, but some trans women had already been included in this category since at least 2004.²² The best explanation for why this debate emerged was because these proposed legal changes challenged the dominant ideological conception of gender and primed ideological controlling images of trans women. Though epistemic injustice can help to explain what is occurring in the subsequent debate, it cannot answer the fundamental questions of why the trans panic emerged and has such a large scope.

When an epistemic injustice-based analysis of the trans panic is supplemented with recognition of the widespread nature of cissexist ideology and its feedback loop with epistemic injustice, we can see why the scale of the trans panic is so big; where backlash is occurring, this is not only a hermeneutical backlash against hermeneutical liberation but an ideological backlash against trans liberation movements and policies which challenge cissexist ideology.²³ Widespread dominant cissexist ideology is what makes the level of backlash particularly high. Ideology prevents the recognition of injustice including epistemic injustice, which exacerbates the harm experienced by trans people in the trans panic ‘debate’ and enables the appearance of legitimate debate by obscuring the harm of the arguments made by anti-trans campaigners.

The ‘debate’ framing of the trans panic inevitably produces epistemic injustice because resistant hermeneutical resources from trans communities which are required for understanding the ‘pro-trans’ side of the ‘debate’ face at best a reception of confusion from wider audiences and often require extended explanation from trans people. For instance, non-binary people advocating for rights or against harassment often have to begin discussions with an explanation of their identity or pronouns, how they should be used, and why this is important. When the trans panic is framed as a ‘debate’ those opposed to trans liberation are at a significant advantage because they can

²² Though the April 2025 legal ruling means that trans women with a GRC are not considered women for the purposes of the Equality Act, a trans woman with a GRC is still considered a woman in other aspects of the law, such as for the purposes of marriage (*For Women Scotland Ltd (Appellant) v The Scottish Ministers (Respondent)* 2025, para. 182).

²³ While I do not use the term ‘hermeneutical backlash’ in my analysis of the trans panic this is not to make a claim about the distinctness of the epistemic injustice I am discussing, rather it is to highlight that I seek to explain a different aspect of the trans panic to George and Goguen. While hermeneutical backlash can explain *some* of *what* is occurring in the trans panic, my analysis can explain *more* of what is occurring and is also concerned with *why* this is occurring.

draw on widely understood hermeneutical resources which are shaped by cissexist ideology, while trans activists have to devote time and efforts to explaining terminology.

The influence of ideology on dominant hermeneutical resources reveals why trans people experience such a high level of opposition when they develop their own hermeneutical resources. For example, backlash to the NHS's guidance for staff on inclusive language for trans people who are pregnant (which did not replace gendered language for those who prefer it) became a national news story (Ely 2022a). There may also be some influence of age-based stereotypes which lead to the rejection of new conceptual resources. Many new conceptual resources introduced by trans communities are created and popularised on social media. Due to their association with young people, the new resources are often dismissed as part of a 'fad' and not worthy of serious consideration. The newness of the conceptual resources is related to their dismissal due to ideology; the new conceptual tools challenge an older, established ideological system of meaning which is regarded as 'common-sense'. In a debate, this is likely to advantage anti-trans campaigners who can draw on established hermeneutical resources which are not dismissed, whereas those campaigning for trans liberation may experience hermeneutical injustice.

Trans people also experience epistemic injustice when the trans panic is framed as a debate because of the comparable credibility excess granted to cisgender people. Credibility excess is an undeserved epistemic privilege; though credibility is not a finite resource, it is assessed contrastively, meaning that credibility excesses can constitute epistemic injustices, the harms of which are directed towards those with the relative credibility deficiency (Medina 2011).²⁴ Within the context of the trans panic, those advocating for anti-trans positions are often granted credibility excesses; sometimes this occurs because anti-trans campaigners include people in positions where credibility excess is often given, such as well-known journalists and politicians, and sometimes just because those opposed to trans liberation are cisgender. Although there are trans supportive allies in high profile positions there are very few trans people, so trans people are not granted the same credibility as those who oppose trans liberation movements. In this dynamic, trans people who already experience testimonial injustice due to identity prejudices are disadvantaged further by a misplaced trust in those who are granted credibility excesses.

²⁴ This is different to the way that Fricker understands credibility excesses, which she argues are not 'automatically correlated with a credibility deficit' on the behalf of someone else (Medina 2011, 16; Fricker 2007, 19–20). However, I agree with Medina that while credibility is not a finite good, it is nonetheless assessed contrastively (2011, 20). Fricker argues that being attributed a credibility excess does not constitute an epistemic injustice towards the person who is in receipt of the credibility excess (2007, 21), but in this section, drawing on Medina, I am concerned with the injustice done to people who receive a comparative credibility deficit, when compared with those in receipt of excess credibility.

Testimonial and hermeneutical injustice interact, so cis opponents of trans liberation are also considered more credible because they can draw on widely understood hermeneutical resources which reflect cissexist ideology. Because opponents of trans liberation benefit from a comparative credibility excess compared with trans people, the framing of ‘debate’ produces epistemic injustice towards trans people. The privileged positions associated with comparative credibility excess also mean that anti-trans campaigners are more able to utilise the media to share their views. Anti-trans campaigners include politicians and national newspaper columnists, whereas trans people lack access to the social power and physical resources to share their side of the ‘debate’, which has resulted in media coverage that substantially favours the anti-trans ‘side’ (Pearce 2021, 2–3).

Cissexist ideology prevents the recognition of harms towards trans people in the trans panic – both the harms of transphobia, and the harm of epistemic injustice. When transphobia isn’t recognised, efforts to combat it get reconstrued as authoritarian attacks on free speech (Pearce, Erikainen, and Vincent 2020, 658). Anti-trans campaigners claim accusations of transphobia are used to ‘silence’ them, a particularly forceful accusation when the trans panic is framed as a debate, where both sides should have the ability to voice their views (Ahmed 2016, 24). Hermeneutical resistance by trans people which aims to combat the hermeneutical injustice they experience is characterised as an attack on free speech, or even as dangerous. In an extreme example of this, one anti-trans online blogger compared referring to trans people by their correct pronouns with the use of a date rape drug, claiming that using a trans person’s pronouns forces people to ignore how they perceive a trans person’s sex, and that this purported added cognitive load has a damaging psychological impact on people and is ‘meant’ to lower inhibitions and stop people responding instinctively to ‘danger’ (Kerr 2019). The re-framing of hermeneutical resistance or pointing out transphobia as an attack makes the trans panic considerably harder to tackle as it inhibits the ability of trans people to combat the injustice they experience; this partially accounts for why the trans panic is so resistant. The trans panic is framed as a debate, but when trans people participate in that ‘debate’ by drawing attention to the transphobia they experience, they are framed as attacking the free speech of anti-trans campaigners or ‘silencing’ them. When trans people attempt to participate in the trans ‘debate’ their interventions, such as asserting the importance of using their pronouns, are positioned as antithetical to debate itself. The debate framing of the trans panic is part of the epistemic injustice and ideology feedback loop. Cissexist ideology causes epistemic injustice by shaping stereotypes and hermeneutical resources, and the debate framing of the trans panic makes epistemic injustice an inevitability. Cissexist ideology means these injustices aren’t recognised which makes tackling them

particularly difficult and this makes the trans panic resistant to efforts to tackle and engage with it.

Having recognised that the ‘debate’ framing of the trans panic perpetuates injustice, many trans activists have refused to participate in programs or events that position them in a ‘debate’ with anti-trans activists. However, when they refuse to participate in a debate, trans activists are portrayed by anti-trans campaigners as demonstrating irrationality and unreasonableness, and this ‘shutting down’ of debate is portrayed as another attack on free speech (Weaver 2023). In this context, the feedback loop not only perpetuates existing cissexist ideology; it intensifies it, as one of the only tactics available to trans activists results in them being portrayed as affirming the stereotypes that cissexist ideology makes them out to be.

5. Ideological Distortions

A clear example of the interaction between epistemic injustice and ideology can be seen in the public discussion of whether amending the GRA would endanger cis women in female spaces, and widespread misinformation and misunderstanding about the existing law and the effects of amending it. This element of the trans ‘debate’ is a defining issue of the trans panic in the UK and is a key part of how the trans panic is framed as a ‘conflict of interest’ between trans people and cisgender women (Jenkins 2023, 222). While epistemic injustice can explain why misunderstandings of the effects of GRA reform have been hard to tackle, cissexist ideology is required to explain why this misunderstanding emerges in the first place. Misunderstanding of the effects of the law is not caused by a lack of hermeneutical resources to understand trans experiences, the misunderstanding emerges because the actual effects of the proposed changes to the law conflict with the ideological worldview provided by cissexist ideology. Epistemic injustice systematically prevents trans people from contributing to knowledge about this, but the misinformation emerges because of cissexist ideology.²⁵

Defenders of cissexist ideology are invested in upholding the perceived social order, whether or not this reflects reality (Corredor 2019, 618). The perceived social order includes the idea that trans women are a threat to cisgender women when or if they use single-sex spaces, and that cisgender women in these spaces require ‘protection’ from the threat that trans women supposedly pose. However, trans women have long used women’s single-sex spaces regardless of whether they have a GRC, and prior to April 2025, were understood to have the right to do so under the Equality Act (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2011, para. 13.57). As access to

²⁵ Whilst misinformation has become common in public discourse, this misinformation at the heart of the trans panic requires further explanation because it is presented as a ‘reasonable’ position by media outlets which otherwise purport to take a position of neutrality, or are involved in efforts to tackle misinformation in other spheres (e.g., the discussion of anti-trans positions by Weaver 2023)

single-sex spaces is covered by the Equality Act, changing the GRA would have no effect on access to them.²⁶ Ideologies are epistemically deficient and distorting, and the idea that trans women pose a threat, and the idea that amending the GRA would somehow increase the number of trans women accessing single-sex spaces, are both examples of such distortions.

Cissexist ideology establishes sex and gender categories as binary and separate, with no possibility of movement between these categories or experiences outside of the binary. To acknowledge that trans women have long been using women's spaces and that this has not resulted in any danger towards cisgender women would be to acknowledge the flawed nature of cissexist ideology (Sharpe 2020, 542–43; Hasenbush, Flores, and Herman 2019). The arguments made by anti-trans activists that trans women would pose a threat to cis women in single-sex spaces draw upon claims that trans women commit crimes, in particular sexual assault, in ways that reflect 'male patterns' of offending (Stock 2018). However, these claims are often based upon the misrepresentation of statistics, such as misrepresentation of the number of trans women prosecuted for rape (Moore 2022a).²⁷ In reality, trans people, and especially trans women, are disproportionately at risk of violence, including sexual and intimate partner violence (Blondeel et al. 2018; Peitzmeier et al. 2020; K. A. King, Yockey, and Vidourek 2022).

The pre-existing social order is assumed to reflect dominant understandings of the world. Therefore, changing the GRA is perceived as a threat to this social order, the logic being that if more trans women can be legally recognised as women this would result in more trans women using women's single-sex spaces and threaten the safety of cisgender women using them.

A potential non-ideological explanation for why the trans panic 'debate' has been focussed on misinformation about the effects of proposed changes to the GRA on access to single-sex spaces is that anti-trans campaigners who are opposed to greater rights for trans people, such as would be gained through amendments to the GRA, chose to conflate issues covered by the Equality Act with the GRA because this is rhetorically advantageous to them. Making GRA reform seem as if it were about letting men access women's spaces was an effective way of galvanising support. However, even if this is the case, ideology still has a role to play in the uptake of misinformation, and its centrality to the 'debate'. Whilst there may be a non-ideological explanation for why this

²⁶ The Supreme Court ruling, which appears to ban all trans women from accessing women's single-sex spaces, affirms this, as whether a trans woman has a GRC makes no difference to her legal ability to access a single-sex space.

²⁷ Anti-trans campaigners have argued that women are over-represented in rape statistics because trans women who commit rape are being recorded as women in these statistics. In reality, there is no significant difference between the number of women prosecuted for rape before and after trans women were recorded as women for the purpose of these statistics (Moore 2022a). Though the act of rape can only be committed by a person with a penis, cis women can also be charged with rape in the UK when they are an accomplice.

tactic was chosen by anti-trans campaigners, its success, and the endurance of the misinformation among the public, is owed to cissexist ideology. Cissexist ideology explains why people are more receptive to arguments that link trans women with predators (there are already dominant social meanings that reflected this prejudice), and why they are particularly resistant to evidence that challenges their false belief about the effect of changes to the law (they are invested in upholding the perceived social order). There is a potential non-ideological explanation for why this tactic was *chosen* by anti-trans campaigners, but not for why it was so widely *embraced* as the frame for all news coverage of trans issues, and its widespread uptake. However, in the spirit of interpreting anti-trans positions in good faith, I will assume that anti-trans campaigners do believe the arguments they are making, and therefore that they misinterpreted the effects of proposed legal changes because of the influence of ideology on how they understand the world.

Trans activists and campaigners attempting to engage with this issue face multiple barriers. They suffer epistemic injustice and so are systematically prevented from contributing to knowledge about this issue. This is a case of ideological misinformation: a falsehood which is widely accepted because it is what ‘makes sense’ in terms of cissexist ideology. Therefore, those attempting to correct the record face an enormous task as cissexist ideology is widespread, and an especially difficult task because the ideological distortion reflects deeply entrenched social meanings. This illustrates the final part of the feedback loop; epistemic injustice hampers efforts to tackle cissexist ideology. In this case, testimonial injustice is particularly pronounced because the prejudice that results in testimony being dismissed relates to the content of the misinformation activists are trying to correct; trans women’s testimony that they are not a danger to cis women in all female spaces is rejected due to prejudices that they are dangerous and sexually predatory. The feedback loop therefore serves to uphold a powerful transphobic status quo position, by reinforcing the dominance of cissexist ideology.

The idea that including trans women in women’s spaces would endanger cis women draws on false transphobic stereotypes of trans women as sexual predators, sometimes explicitly. The organisation ‘Fair Play For Women’ produced an advert prompting people to respond to the GRA reform consultation, which asked readers ‘Do you think adult males should be able to enter female-only sleeping and changing areas or domestic violence refuges?’, and claimed that self-ID based GRA reform ‘put women and girls at risk’ (Duffy 2018), the implicit message being that trans women (who were referred to as ‘adult males’) would sexually assault cis women. As previously mentioned, this misrepresents the effects of GRA reform. Cissexist ideology affords (white) cisgender women a position of vulnerability through social meanings and practices which

position women's bodies as needing of protection from men. According to cissexist ideology, trans women are 'really men' because cissexist ideology prescribes that people 'really are' members of the gender that is consistent with their sexed body at birth. Understanding trans women as 'adult males' means they are not only cast as sexual predators owing to transphobic myths, but also that they are understood through cissexist ideology as men.

The role of ideology makes sense of why the misrepresentation of the effects of proposed changes to the GRA has been commonplace in the trans panic. The combined effects of ideology and epistemic injustice explain why this distortion is so resistant, that is, why it is so hard to tackle. Trans women's claims that they are not a threat to women's safety are unlikely to be taken seriously because of identity prejudices. This means they are unable to correct misinformation. Identity prejudices that cause testimonial injustice form part of the set of dominant social meanings that cissexist ideology consists of, and testimonial injustice prevents trans people from challenging ideological distortions, alongside other epistemic injustice they face in the context of a 'debate'. By considering the intertwined roles of epistemic injustice and ideology in the trans panic, it becomes obvious why a 'debate' which is structured around the falsity that changes to the GRA would put cisgender women at risk in single-sex spaces has endured for so long. Ideology ensures the coherence of the myth, and epistemic injustice thwarts efforts to correct it.

Allies to trans people may also find their efforts to challenge transphobic misinformation thwarted because of epistemic injustice. Both Davis (2021) and Dembroff and Whitcomb (2023) argue that 'content-based epistemic injustice' can occur when a person's testimony concerns an oppressed group that there are prejudices towards. Audiences reject the testimony not because of prejudices toward the identity of the speaker (though members of oppressed groups may experience content-based and testimonial injustice at the same time), but because the content of the testimony relates to an oppressed group that there are prejudices towards. The harms of content-based epistemic injustice are directed towards the targets of the prejudice (Dembroff and Whitcomb 2023). The argument that trans rights do not pose a threat to cisgender women is an example of what Davis (2021, 222) describes as an 'identity coded' discourse as it is taken to reflect the interests of trans people. Therefore, even when this argument is made by cis people, it still results in epistemic injustice towards trans people because its rejection 'systematically thwarts' their epistemic interests (Davis 2021, 244). Content-based epistemic injustice also reinforces hermeneutical injustice experienced by trans people because it prevents concepts developed by them from being properly shared (Dembroff and Whitcomb 2023, 66). Cissexist ideology means distortions are treated as facts, and these distortions, such as the idea that trans women threaten the safety of women's spaces, lead to injustices. Testimonial and content-based

epistemic injustice hinder attempts by trans people and their allies to combat these distortions, continuing the feedback loop.

6. ‘Common Sense’, ‘Incontestable Facts’, and ‘Objectivity’

Understanding the trans panic as ideological explains the mobilisation of ‘common sense’ ideas, appeals to biology as incontestable, and claims of ‘objectivity’ made as part of the anti-trans backlash. Ideological distortions often form part of unquestioned common sense; they reflect what is widely understood, and often go unchallenged (Shelby 2014, 67).²⁸ Common sense is something that ‘everybody knows’, which produces challenges for those whose lives and needs depend on understandings that are contrary to ‘common sense’, such as trans people. For example, cissexist ideology shapes dominant social meanings so common sense includes ideas like ‘there are only two genders’. Both current Prime Minister Kier Starmer and former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, on the one hand, and anti-trans activists and columnists of the other, have made appeals to ‘common sense’ to argue for views such as that trans people are not members of the gender they say they are, that they should be excluded from sport, or that anti-trans views should be given a platform (Cho 2023; Jackson 2024; Rosario Sánchez 2022; Walden 2022). These ‘common-sense’ ideas are widely held and easily understood so the task of those whose political goals require recognition of the deficiencies of common-sense positions is necessarily more challenging. Ideological common sense is closely connected to hermeneutical marginalisation and hermeneutical injustice. Oppressive practices exclude trans people from contributing to knowledge, resulting in deficiencies in common-sense understandings, and ideology prevents recognition of these deficiencies, sustaining the feedback loop.

‘Common sense’ is often mobilised by political campaigns to support agendas that defend status-quo positions and encourage unquestioning adherence to them. Philosophers’ use of ‘commonsense methodology’ (and, I argue, the use of ‘common sense’ as a rhetorical tool and a methodology in public debate) explains why cissexist ideology is taken for granted (Dembroff 2020b, 403). Widespread reliance on common-sense understandings of gender which reflect cissexist ideology is one of the reasons why the testimony of trans people is so often disregarded and why new and resistant hermeneutical resources are rejected or even mocked, as occurred when the NHS updated guidelines which informed staff of some gender-neutral terms used by trans parents (Ely 2022a). Trans people’s testimony concerning their experiences of gender, their

²⁸ Shelby understands ideological common sense as part of a doxastic understanding of ideology, but ideology’s role in producing common sense can still be understood when ideologies are considered as problematic network of social meanings that shape practices. Ideological practices and social meanings shape widely held beliefs, producing widely held ‘common sense’ (Haslanger 2017b, 10).

political demands, and new concepts developed by trans communities, challenge ideological common sense leading to increased backlash.

A prominent feature of the trans panic has been the ‘weaponization’ of biology against transgender people (Ahmed 2016, 30). Biology is appealed to by anti-trans campaigners as if it were a non-defeasible refutation, but these appeals to biology are often false, misleading, oversimplified, or only give a snapshot of truth on a complex subject. For example, the Supreme Court ruling which defined sex for the purposes of the Equality Act as binary ‘biological sex’ and claimed that this concept is ‘self-explanatory and...require[s] no further explanation’ was condemned by the resident doctor’s wing of the British Medical Association as ‘biologically nonsensical’ and ‘scientifically illiterate’ (*For Women Scotland Ltd (Appellant) v The Scottish Ministers (Respondent)* 2025, para. 171; Cooke 2025). Appeals to biology are made to support the tenets of cissexist ideology: that there are two binary sexes which are immutable, and that a person’s sex should affect how they are treated by others. Naturalisation is a feature of ideology, and cissexist ideology shapes practices and systems of meaning which are sometimes also reflected in scientific understandings. Appeals to biological fact and science often involve presenting anti-trans views as incontestable, even though science is not immune from the influence of ideology and prejudice, and these appeals to biology often misrepresent contemporary scientific understandings of sex and trans identity (Pearce, Erikainen, and Vincent 2020, 689). As others have noted, decades of feminist scholarship challenge the ‘biology 101’ understanding of sex employed by anti-trans campaigners (Ahmed 2016, 30; Pearce, Erikainen, and Vincent 2020, 688).

Cissexist ideological social meanings, supported by appeals to ‘biological fact’, are widely accepted as true and are part of ‘common sense’ because cissexist ideology shapes widely held beliefs about what is true. This means that activists’ challenges to cissexist arguments are portrayed as attacks on truth; ‘truth’ is appealed to by anti-trans campaigners to undermine trans activism (Pearce, Erikainen, and Vincent 2020, 684). Trans people and their allies are accused of attempting to ‘erase’ biological sex or ‘erase women’.²⁹ When activists contest these appeals to ‘biological fact’ or point out the irrelevancy of claims about science to the issues at hand, they suffer epistemic injustice because trans people who contest things that ‘everybody knows’ are likely to be stereotyped as irrational and have their testimony dismissed. Pointing out that things that are widely accepted as facts are not relevant or not true is likely to require new hermeneutical resources not shaped by cissexist ideology. If a trans person does not have those resources, they are likely to come across as non-sensical, compounding their experience of

²⁹ For example: Rustin (2022), Sandeman (2021).

testimonial injustice. If they can draw on hermeneutical resources developed in trans communities, those resources may not be recognised or may be rejected by their interlocuters. For example, concepts developed in trans spaces such as ‘assigned sex at birth’ may need to be used, but this hermeneutical resource is frequently rejected by anti-trans campaigners (e.g., Ely 2022b).

Anti-trans campaigners have claimed they have ‘faced opposition specifically for their commitment to truth’ (Pearce, Erikainen, and Vincent 2020, 685). Similarly, the language of ‘reality’ is regularly used by anti-trans activists to defend their political positions, including in the previously mentioned Fair Play for Women advert which implores people to ‘choose reality’. As Jenkins (2023, 206) puts it, ‘the directive to “choose reality” carries the connotation that any other choice would be unreasonable’. Anti-trans campaigners are able to use the language of ‘facts’, ‘truth’, and ‘reality’ to justify their arguments because the parts of the truth and misleading facts they use are easily understood because of cissexist ideology. Ideologies provide tools for understanding the world, and the world as described by the ‘facts’ given by anti-trans campaigners is more easily understood with these tools than the realities of trans experiences. The framing of anti-trans positions as facts that are incontestable is ideological and compounds the epistemic injustice faced by trans people.

Relatedly, anti-trans campaigners often contrast purportedly ‘objective’ understandings of sexed bodies with ‘subjective’ gender identity, or ‘feelings’ (Jenkins 2023, 205; Jones and Slater 2020, 840). This framing exacerbates testimonial injustice experienced by trans people by calling their credibility into question. Anti-trans campaigners frame themselves as ‘rational’ and ‘objective’, whereas trans people are conversely ‘irrational’ and ‘emotional’. For example, the organisation ‘Sex Matters’ claims that the question on the census asking a person’s sex concerns ‘objective fact’ reflecting important ‘reality and truth’, and the suggestion the question should be answered in accordance with someone’s gender identity is ‘fanciful’ (Sex Matters 2022). Similarly in an opinion piece opposing reform of the GRA, Rustin (2022) characterises those advocating for reform of the GRA as campaigning for ‘subjectively determined human identities to take precedence over biology’, combining the subjective/objective framing with an appeal to biology as ‘truth’.

Sometimes these framings exacerbate other prejudices about trans people to discredit their testimony, such as contrasting the supposedly calm and rational anti-trans campaigners with ‘aggressive’ or ‘bullying’ trans activists (Ahmed 2016, 28). Jones and Slater describe how in debates about public toilets, trans activists are constructed as ‘emotional and volatile’ whereas anti-trans researchers are portrayed as objective (2020, 840). Trans people’s credibility is

questioned both by portraying them as emotional and irrational, and by relating this supposed irrationality to prejudices about trans people as dangerous predators; any anger expressed by trans people is interpreted as evidence of this prejudicial stereotype, leading to the dismissal of trans people's testimony. This is another example of how ideology and epistemic injustice form a feedback loop; cissexist ideology establishes 'common sense' and shapes prejudicial stereotypes about trans people. When trans people attempt to challenge common sense understandings and question the way appeals to facts are used, they suffer testimonial injustice, sometimes because of explicit appeals to prejudiced stereotypes. This loop maintains the oppressive system experienced by trans people and explains the persistence of the trans panic.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I've given an account of the epistemic injustice and ideology feedback loop, which, along with the wider ideological context, explains why the trans panic has such a large scope, and why it is so persistent and resistant to efforts to tackle it. Cissexist ideology is a dominant ideology which shapes practices that affect all areas of life, accounting for the scope of the trans panic. Cissexist ideology can explain why the trans panic 'debate' is built around misrepresentations of the effects of legal changes, and epistemic injustice explains why these misrepresentations are so difficult to tackle. The use of 'common sense' rhetoric in the trans panic is also a product of cissexist ideology, which again is made difficult to tackle by epistemic injustice, particularly because anti-trans campaigners portray trans people as lacking 'objectivity'. Cissexist ideology prevents the recognition of injustice, and epistemic injustice means that ideology is particularly difficult to tackle, so the feedback loop continues. This explains the persistence of the trans panic. By drawing on these insights on the nature of ideology, we can see why exclusively identifying the epistemic injustice in the trans panic is insufficient as a tactic to tackle oppressive anti-trans movements: the fact that what is currently occurring to trans people in the UK is an injustice at all is likely to be rejected. An analysis of the interaction between ideology and epistemic injustice is necessary to underpin efforts to tackle this dynamic successfully both in this case study and in other contexts.

Chapter 3: Ideology and Ignorance

1. Introduction

Both in casual conversations and in referee reports, people have suggested to me that some kind of ignorance is what is causing the trans panic, or that ignorance is behind widespread transphobia.³⁰ On what I call ‘simple ignorance’ views of the trans panic, the solution to the trans panic is to educate cis people about trans people and the issues that affect them, to run ‘awareness’ campaigns, and to introduce those who may be confused about or hostile towards trans people to trans people, the idea being that those who know trans people are less likely to be hostile towards them.³¹ The kind of ignorance that ‘simple ignorance’ views consider as the cause of the trans panic is propositional ignorance about the existence of trans people or the struggles they face, and a lack of acquaintance knowledge of trans people. I will not consider the ‘simple ignorance’ views in detail. I argued in chapter two that the feedback loop between cissexist ideology and epistemic injustice explains the existence of the trans panic; as I explain at the end of this chapter, a lack of knowledge of and about trans people is insufficient to explain the features I highlighted there. However, those who cite some role for ‘ignorance’ in the trans panic are not entirely wrong: ignorance does play a role in the trans panic through the way it is related to ideology.

The kind of ignorance that ideology is related to in the case of racist ideology, is ‘white ignorance’. Charles Mills emphasises how racist ideology leads to white ignorance through its effects on cognition (2013, 39; 2007, 23), and also mentions how white ignorance can be caused by social-structural processes. The kind of ignorance that is playing a role in the trans panic is a kind of widespread and motivated ignorance similar to ‘white ignorance’; it is not just a simple propositional ignorance of facts about trans people and the issues that affects them, nor a lack of familiarity with trans people themselves. As I show in this chapter, the ignorance involved in the trans panic is fundamentally ideological.

As I discussed in chapters one and two, the conception of ideology as a problematic network of social meanings which shape practices and tools for understanding the world offers ways of understanding some forms of epistemic injustice as ideological; epistemic injustice can be

³⁰ Whilst not a view that is defended in the academic literature, these views are often expressed by well-meaning allies to trans people. An indicative position on ignorance as the cause of widespread transphobia is expressed by American musician Adam Lambert: “I think sometimes people just need to learn because they haven’t learned yet. So many people that are anti-trans, for example, don’t have anybody in their lives that’s trans that they’ve spoken to.... How can you be anti-trans if you don’t know anything about it? If you have no first-hand experience with it? It’s a pretty ignorant way to live your life.” (James 2023)

³¹ The idea that getting to know a trans person would make someone less transphobic was expressed to me in a referee report, and is expressed in the previously mentioned Adam Lambert quote.

caused by the problematic social meanings and faulty or limited hermeneutical resources provided by an ideology. Mills discusses ‘ideology’ as an explanation for the limited set of concepts available for interpreting the world (2007, 21,25). Mills (2013) argues this lack of concepts leads to white ignorance, but the possibilities and exact nature of this connection have been debated by José Medina (2012) and Fricker (2016; 2013). Given the connections between ideology and ignorance, and ignorance and hermeneutical injustice, these issues are worth considering in the context of the trans panic and cissexist ideology.

Using the Haslanger-inspired approach to ideology that I outlined in chapter one, I describe five ways ideology leads to ignorance. I term the type of ignorance ideology leads to ‘ideological ignorance’, of which I consider ‘white ignorance’ to be the sort of ignorance which is a product of racist white supremacist ideology. We might also think of ‘male ignorance’ as the kind of ignorance that patriarchal ideology leads to, and ‘cis ignorance’ as the kind of ignorance cissexist ideology leads to. I say ‘leads to’ as I think there are a variety of different causal mechanisms that connect ideology to ignorance, which I will elaborate on. Different ideologies may lead to more or less ignorance by each of these methods, and ideology may lead to ignorance in an individual due to one or several of these methods. These ways that ideology leads to ignorance are not mutually exclusive; as I will describe, they often interact so ignorance is caused by multiple mechanisms.

Ideological ignorance plays a role in the maintenance of ideologies as it ensures that people continue to uphold ideological practices and systems of meanings. When people know that ideologies are false, those ideologies become less dominant. Whilst ignorance is not an integral or necessary part of the ideology/epistemic injustice feedback loop that I argue explains the key features of the trans panic, it nonetheless contributes to that feedback loop.

Of the five ways I identify that ideology leads to ignorance, two are connected to forms of epistemic injustice described in the existing literature – ideology leads to wilful ignorance, including wilful hermeneutical ignorance, which is a form of epistemic injustice, and ideologically shaped hermeneutical resources produce hermeneutical injustice which is also leads to ignorance. The final way that ideology leads to ignorance that I describe (through incentivising active wrongdoing) can also occur through epistemic injustice – I outline this further in chapter four. The role of ignorance in the feedback loop is largely to help sustain cissexist ideology. Ignorance is a part of the social conditions created by an ideology that enables injustice to be obscured and ensures dominant ideological social meanings are widely accepted.

This chapter proceeds as follows. Firstly, I give a rough outline of the existing literature on ignorance that is related to oppression and injustice. I give a brief recap of the account of

ideology I am using, before moving on to define ‘ideological ignorance’. I then outline the five ways ideology leads to ignorance and give examples of how this is occurring within the trans panic. I conclude by explaining the overall role ignorance is playing in the trans panic.

2. Ignorance and Oppression

My analysis of ideological ignorance doesn’t focus on what Nadja El Kassas terms ‘propositional conceptions of ignorance’ where ignorance is simply a lack of knowledge or a case of false belief (2018, 301). Instead, I’m looking at kinds of ignorance which are part of an ideological system of oppression, play some role in upholding that system of oppression, and are part of a person’s worldview. This draws together accounts of white ignorance with ignorance as discussed in literature on epistemic injustice and oppression such as active and wilful ignorance (Medina 2013; Pohlhaus 2012), and some ignorance which is a product of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice (Fricker 2016; Fricker and Jenkins 2017).

Not all epistemic injustice is ideological, and not all ignorance which is a product of epistemic injustice is the sort of ignorance which is a constituent part of an ideological system. Fricker and Jenkins (2017, 270) give an example a person whose mistrust of foreigners means that they fail to uptake relevant information about their health from a Pakistani doctor; this is a case of ignorance which is a product of testimonial injustice. While this ignorance is a consequence of prejudice, it is not the sort of ignorance I’m talking about as ‘ideological ignorance’ because the ignorance itself is not part of an ideological system where certain areas of the world are systematically the topics of ignorance. Ignorance of one’s own medical problems has in this case been incidentally produced by racial prejudice (whether explicit or implicit), but ignorance of one’s own health is not systematically produced by anti-immigrant ideology.³² Ideological ignorance is a sort of ignorance which sustains injustice (Martín 2021, 865–66). El Kassas has also distinguished between approaches to ignorance as a ‘simple doxastic’ phenomenon and ignorance ‘as a complex epistemological phenomenon that is constituted by a doxastic component and by other epistemic components’ (2019, 31). This second approach to ignorance is the one I take in my discussion of ideological ignorance.

The sort of ignorance which is most clearly a result of ideology is ‘white ignorance’ as characterised, though not explicitly defined, by Mills (2007). White ignorance is largely described by Mills as a cognitive phenomenon. Mills describes white ignorance (which can be

³² This is not to say that ignorance of health-related matters is never ideological. Epistemic injustice in healthcare has been discussed extensively (e.g. Carel and Kidd 2017; Blease, Carel, and Geraghty 2017; Lakeman 2010), and ideologies may systematically produce areas of non-knowledge about aspects of health, such as the influence of patriarchal ideology on knowledge of women’s health. However, this is not what occurs in the case described by Fricker and Jenkins (2017).

displayed by people of any race under conditions of white supremacy) as a type of ‘group-based cognitive handicap’ (2007, 15) whereby people fail to understand or lack knowledge relating to racism and racially oppressed groups. Mills focusses on white ignorance as a type of cognitive failing, but he also mentions some other mechanisms by which racism and white supremacist ideology may lead to ignorance, such as through limiting the concepts available to knowers, and through ‘social-structural causation’, such that racism leads to ignorance even if an individual themselves is not a ‘straightforwardly racist cogniser’ (Mills 2007, 21).

The cognitive conception of white ignorance fails to account for cases of ignorance where an individual’s cognition is not involved in producing their ignorance, but their ignorance is nonetheless part of ‘the epistemic dimensions of white racial domination’ (Martín 2021, 866, 874). Annette Martín gives the example of a child who is educated in a country with a history of slavery and colonialism who may fail to learn about this history, and may be taught mythological stories about their country’s origins and treatment of racial and ethnic minorities (2021, 872). The process of racist causation here is clear: white supremacist ideology and colonialism shape curricula leading to widespread ignorance about the reality of race-related history. The child whose beliefs are shaped by such a curriculum has false beliefs, and also lacks beliefs about certain subjects (Martín 2021, 874). The ignorant child is not displaying any faulty cognition, but this case is nonetheless best described as a case of white ignorance as it is a case of ignorance which is part of a racist social system where people, particularly white people, fail to know about matters pertaining to racism.

Martín also notes deficiencies with ‘wilful ignorance’ accounts of white ignorance, such as those taken from accounts given by Pohlhaus (2012), Woomer (2019) and others. On ‘wilful ignorance’ accounts of white ignorance, white ignorance is the result of individuals avoiding ‘inconvenient truths about race’ because these truths challenge an established system from which they benefit, such as an epistemic or social system (Martín 2021, 869). However, Martín argues these accounts of white ignorance cannot explain why members of racially oppressed groups also display white ignorance, because she claims they do not stand to gain by actively maintaining their ignorance on racial matters (2021, 870). In light of these issues with existing accounts of white ignorance, Martín proposes her own structuralist account of white ignorance, where it ‘systematically arises as part of some social structural process(es) that systematically gives rise to racial injustice’ (2021, 875). This definition can account for white ignorance displayed by non-white people, and ignorance that doesn’t arise from faulty cognitive processes such as ignorance that is a result of faulty education.

However, this structuralist account of white ignorance lacks detail about how structural processes give rise to ignorance, and it is not clear on this account of white ignorance if a person is blameworthy or responsible for their ignorance (Martín 2021, 881). Unlike Martín, I think that wilful ignorance and faulty cognition do play a role in white ignorance, and other forms of ideological ignorance, however, a structural explanation is also needed to account for all the different mechanisms by which ideology leads to ignorance. Mills thought of white ignorance as a type of ignorance for which a person is culpable, and this is reflected in other accounts of privileged ignorance such as ‘active ignorance’ (Medina 2013). Martín includes cases in which people are not culpable, meaning simply labelling a case of ignorance as ‘white ignorance’ on her account is insufficient for ascribing culpability. My account of ‘ideological ignorance’ aims to maintain the benefits of Martín’s structural account and allow for cases of non-culpable ignorance, while providing detail on the processes through which ideology generates ignorance.

I do not focus on the culpability people have for their ignorance, as it is not relevant to the task here of illuminating how ideology leads to ignorance and the role of ignorance in the trans panic. The question of responsibility for ignorance could be relevant to my broader goal of identifying ways to tackle the trans panic. However, in part due to the dominant nature of cissexist ideology, if people are responsible for addressing their own ignorance, many people are unlikely to fulfil their responsibilities or recognise that they have them at all. Therefore, in areas where addressing ignorance may be a way of tackling the trans panic, the possibility that people who display cis ignorance are responsible for addressing their own ignorance won’t change the fact that efforts to address ignorance will fall on trans liberation activists, so ascertaining the exact nature of people’s responsibility for their ignorance is unlikely to be helpful to my project.

3. Ideology

Mills draws on Shelby’s account of ideology in his work on white ignorance (2013, 39; 2017). Shelby’s account of ideology is doxastic (it consists of beliefs and is a form of social consciousness), pejorative, and functionalist (it functions to uphold oppression) (Haslanger 2017b, 3). Ideology on this account is a set of beliefs that form part of a person’s worldview, typically held in false consciousness, that are epistemically deficient and legitimate and obscure domination and oppression (Shelby 2003). This account of ideology as belief fits together well with Mills’ cognitive conception of white ignorance: faulty and problematic beliefs lead people to be ignorant of the world through faulty cognition. However, as already noted, the cognitive conception of white ignorance fails to account for all cases of white ignorance. White ignorance, understood more broadly to include ignorance caused by socio-structural mechanisms, is more adequately explained through its connection to a Haslanger-style account of ideology as a

problematic network of social meanings that function to uphold oppression. As I outlined in chapter one, accounts of ideologies as beliefs can't make sense of the ways ideologies shape language and social meanings, and are reproduced and reinforced by those who reject them. (Haslanger 2017b, 7,9; 2021a, 17–18). The account of ideology as a system of social meanings is also functionalist and pejorative; ideologies function to uphold systems of oppression (Haslanger 2017a, 150). However, ideologies are not doxastic. Ideologies are systems of social meanings which shape practices and the organisation of the world, as well as our tools for understanding it (Haslanger 2017a, 155–59).

Though the Haslanger-inspired account of ideology I use is non-doxastic, holding that ideology is not a set of beliefs or social consciousness, ideology shapes beliefs and lack of belief. Ideologies are epistemically deficient as they lead us to interpret the world in ways that are faulty, and the social meanings they consist of are false or misleading. They are also morally defective as they lead us to fail to appropriately attribute value to things and to fail to recognise things which are morally objectionable.

4. Ideological Ignorance

I draw the following account of ideological ignorance from a broad literature on privileged ignorance, incorporating many existing accounts of ignorance as differing ways that ideology leads to ignorance. In general, I define ideological ignorance as follows:

Ideological Ignorance: the kind of ignorance that ideology systematically leads to through socio-structural processes, and which plays a role in maintaining ideology and a system of oppression.

Ideological ignorance is not lack of knowledge of an individual fact, it is displayed as lack of knowledge or false beliefs about a subject area that ideology systematically leads to, typically including lack of knowledge about oppression, injustice, and privilege.³³ In this section, I detail five ways that ideology leads to ignorance. Ideological ignorance can be a consequence of wilful and active resistance to knowledge (4.1) or a problematic cognitive attitude (4.2). I draw particularly on Haslanger's account of practice-based ideology and Martín's account of structural

³³ A person may (as one reviewer has), question why I don't simply replace discussion of 'ideology' in my account of the trans panic (chapter two) with discussion of ignorance such as 'active ignorance'. Widespread ignorance, after all, could include widespread false beliefs about trans people, and ignorance of the concepts trans people need to use to explain their experiences. Though, as I illustrate in this chapter, the two phenomena are related, they are importantly distinct. Firstly, ignorance is at least partially a doxastic phenomenon. This means that replacing talk of ideology with that of ignorance would befall the same issues as doxastic accounts of ideology – it could not account for the way that ideology shapes the actions of those who do not believe in it, or who do not display it. Secondly, ignorance doesn't account for the way that ideology makes itself true, so that a person who internalises ideological social meanings as beliefs may have true beliefs. The phenomenon of ideology making itself true plays a role in the trans panic that I need to account for; I return to this topic in chapter five.

white ignorance to explain how ideological practices can shape ignorance (4.3), and debates about the link between hermeneutical injustice and white ignorance to explain how ideology generates ignorance through faulty and misleading interpretive tools (4.4). The final means by which ideology can lead to ignorance is currently under-explored in existing literature on ignorance: ignorance can be caused and upheld by the active wrongdoing of those who are invested in upholding ideological systems (4.5).

These means by which ideology leads to ignorance are not mutually exclusive, in fact, they often interact and are related. In this chapter, I focus my attention on cis ignorance: the sort of ignorance that cissexist ideology systematically leads to, and that plays a role in upholding cissexist oppression.

4.1 Wilful Ignorance

On ‘wilful ignorance’ views of white ignorance, white ignorance is a result of individuals actively avoiding the truth, which is motivated by their desire to protect their own interests and their ‘psychological interest in seeing themselves as a good person in a mostly just world’ (Martín 2021, 869). I argue that one way ideology leads to ignorance is through incentivising and enabling wilful ignorance. Multiple authors have identified ways that privileged individuals are actively and wilfully ignorant because of a desire to protect their own interests. For example, Medina describes how what he calls ‘active ignorance’ can ‘function as a defence mechanism that is used to preserve privilege’ (2013, 34). Medina argues that active ignorance is a form of culpable ignorance that is supported by the epistemic vices of epistemic arrogance, epistemic laziness, and close-mindedness (2013, 39). These epistemic vices do not just lead to the ignorance of individual knowers, but ‘create and maintain bodies of ignorance’ – topics or areas of which there is widespread ignorance (e.g., of the realities of colonialism, or the way white people continue to benefit from racist social systems) (Medina 2013, 39). Pohlhaus (2012) has described how dominantly situated knowers display wilful hermeneutical ignorance as a kind of epistemic injustice that occurs when they actively reject hermeneutical tools developed by marginalised groups because they fail to recognise the need for new hermeneutical resources, preventing wider uptake of the hermeneutical resources. This preserves their own ignorance of the realities of marginalised people’s experiences, and other’s ignorance as well (Pohlhaus 2012). Bailey describes ‘privilege-preserving epistemic pushback’ as a type of wilful ignorance that members of dominant groups engage in when they are asked to consider injustices experienced by members of marginalised groups (2017). These experiences are subject to intense scrutiny, questioned, and doubted by members of dominant groups, who then remain ignorant of injustices.

Ideology leads to this form of privileged ignorance because those who benefit from the unjust social system created by ideology seek to uphold it by rejecting information or resources that challenge the ideology. They often do this in false consciousness: they are ignorant of the reason why they do this and may believe that they are rejecting information because it is inaccurate, but the true reason why they reject information and resistant resources is to maintain their own position of advantage within an oppressive society (Shelby 2003, 170). Because ideology functions to uphold oppression, it also functions to uphold the interests of those who benefit from the existence of oppression, which explains why it is typically members of dominant groups who display wilful ignorance. The role of false consciousness helps to explain what facilitates and incentivises people to be wilfully and actively ignorant and reject both new information and new hermeneutical resources: those who internalise ideologies as beliefs ‘cling’ to them ‘because [they] serve some noncognitive interest’ (Shelby 2003, 170).

Wilful and active ignorance is facilitated by social systems, shaped by ideologies, which enable and encourage those who stand to benefit from ideological systems to remain ignorant of certain things (Woomer 2019). Ideology helps to create the social conditions under which wilful ignorance is possible and actively supported. The epistemic vices that lead to active ignorance may be fostered in social environments shaped by ideologies. For example, thinking of oneself as highly knowledgeable to the point of developing a conceited attitude is a vice typically developed by those who attend elite private schools, and the private school system is one of the practices shaped by an ideology that functions to uphold a class system that benefits the upper classes (Medina 2013, 30–31).

This way that ideology leads to ignorance is present in the trans panic. In chapter two, I discussed some examples of wilful hermeneutical ignorance occurring within the trans panic, where anti-trans campaigners refuse to accept the hermeneutical resources developed by trans people, such as ‘assigned sex at birth’, ‘misgendering’, and ‘cisgender’³⁴. The refusal to take up the hermeneutical resource of ‘cisgender’ is clearly shaped by cissexist ideology; naming the experience of being ‘cisgender’ troubles the idea that cisgender people are simply ‘normal’ or ‘default’. It names a specific position of privilege and advantage, and by refusing to accept the hermeneutical resource, cisgender people help to uphold their position of advantage. Those who reject hermeneutical resources developed by trans people wilfully maintain their own ignorance to serve their own interests, and they also help to maintain the ignorance of others by resisting the introduction of new resistant hermeneutical resources.

³⁴ For example, Elon Musk has restricted the usage of the term ‘cisgender’ on X (formerly Twitter), claiming that the term amounts to a slur (Cuthbertson 2024).

Paradigmatic cases of wilful ignorance involve it being displayed by those who are members of privileged or dominant groups to protect their own interests; Pohlhaus argues that it is ‘dominantly situated knowers’ who display wilful hermeneutical ignorance (2012, 716). Members of oppressed groups seem less likely to display wilful ignorance because they are disadvantaged by the unjust world that is upheld by an ideology and, as a group, they do not have privilege to uphold. However, members of oppressed groups may display wilful ignorance in an attempt to uphold some kind of situational advantage over other members of their groups, or because they gain a false sense of reassurance or safety from remaining ignorant of the reality of oppression and wish to maintain the illusion that they live in a mostly just world. For example, a trans woman who insists that trans identity is at least in some cases caused by ‘autogynephilia’, a scientifically baseless theory that all lesbian trans women transition because they are sexually attracted to themselves as women, has received significant media attention and writes a column for a national right wing news magazine, opportunities she would likely not receive if she didn’t remain wilfully ignorant of the nature of trans identity (Hayton 2022). The ‘autogynephilia’ theory of trans identity has been widely critiqued, as has the data and methodology used by the sexologist Ray Blanchard who coined the term (Bettcher 2014, 617–18; Moser 2010; Serano 2020).

4.2 Cognition

Ideology is non-doxastic, and ideological ignorance is not purely cognitive, but ideology does shape cognition in ways that lead to ignorance via ‘localised and global cognitive dysfunctions’ (Mills 1999, 18). Mills emphasises that the causes of cognitive white ignorance are not biological but ‘social-structural’ and that racism plays a ‘crucial causal role’ (2007, 20). Ideology shapes patterns of perception and attention, cognitive biases, and the way that we attend to information in ways that mean people fail to appreciate parts of the world which are obscured by ideology (Haslanger 2021a, 47). These are all ways that ideology can be internalised that lead to ignorance through affecting cognitive capacities and can affect those who don’t hold ideological beliefs since dominant conceptions of what is valuable can shape what we pay attention to even if we reject the explicit claims made about value. Shelby lists the many types of deficient ‘ideological thinking’ of those who hold ideological beliefs as: ‘inconsistency, oversimplification, exaggeration, half-truth, equivocation, circularity, neglect of pertinent facts, false dichotomy, obfuscation, misuse of “authoritative” sources, hasty generalization, and so forth’ (2003, 166). When an ideology is internalised, these are also ways that it affects cognition that can lead to ignorance. Mills focusses on the ways that white ignorance is related to ‘perception, conception, memory, testimony, and motivational group interest’ (2007, 23). For

example, deficiencies in the memories of people who display white ignorance lead them to embrace the doctrine of ‘colour blindness’, where they reject the idea that changes need to be made in the present to account for past racial injustice, effectively denying the continued impact of historical racism though forgetting the important role racism played in shaping social practices historically (Mills 2007, 28).

Ideology is also ‘mindshaping’ because engagement in ideological practices shapes our cognition (Haslanger 2019b; 2021a, 47). Ignorance which is a result of faulty cognition is linked to the way that ideology creates ignorance through shaping practices. Ideological social meanings also directly shape our cognitive processes such as patterns of attention and memory, as we tend to attend to or remember those things which confirm our existing worldview, or the worldview which is widely understood to reflect truth. Especially when ideological social meanings are internalised and accepted, this can shape an individual’s cognition in problematic ways so that they are ignorant.

Ideology can shape cognitive biases which lead to ignorance. Holroyd and Puddifoot (2019) discuss how implicit bias can affect our knowledge seeking practices in various ways, and this can lead to us failing to gain information. For example, ableist ideology shapes cognitive biases that affect the way that people understand disability or disabled people. These cognitive biases may mean certain information or testimony is ignored, or certain avenues of research are not pursued. For example, disabled people often report that their romantic partners are presumed to be their carers, and these assumptions shaped by dominant ableist ideology mean that people remain ignorant of disabled people’s experiences of romantic relationships.³⁵ Testimony from disabled people about their quality of life is often disbelieved, or they are assumed to be unhappy because of assumptions that disabled people cannot have a good quality of life (Shakespeare 2014). These assumptions in turn are shaped by ideological social meanings about what things make lives valuable. Ideologically produced cognitive biases can lead to testimonial injustice, which preserves ignorance by preventing marginalised knowers from sharing information, and produces ignorance by preventing marginalised knowers from contributing to socially shared knowledge and conceptual resources, which worsens their hermeneutical marginalisation (Fricker and Jenkins 2017, 270). The ignorance which is a result of effects on cognition can therefore worsen ignorance caused by ideologically deficient and defective conceptual resources, which I discuss further in section 4.4.

³⁵ Disabled people share testimony of these kinds of experiences in Taylor (2021).

An example of how cissexist ideology has led to ignorance through the shaping of cognition is shown by the treatment of trans people and trans identities as ‘new’ and ‘faddish’. Cissexist ideology presents trans identity and gender non-conformity as aberrations from the norm, and in particular frames trans identities among young people and teenagers as a new phenomenon. Anti-trans activists, particularly those who belong to conservative religious groups and the far right, often appeal to a past where binary gender norms were obeyed and upheld.³⁶ These aspects of cissexist ideology shape memory; explicit appeals to a past where there were no or very few trans or gender non-conforming people require significant lapses in memory. For example, anti-trans campaigners have protested and objected to ‘drag queen story hour’ events at local libraries, claiming that exposure to drag is confusing for children, that these events are an attempt to ‘force-feed gender ideology’ to children, that these events sexualise children, and have equated drag queens to paedophiles (Knight 2022). Making these kinds of arguments requires lapses in memory and perception. Either those in the grip of cissexist ideology fail to remember that pantomimes, predominantly featuring pantomime dames,³⁷ have long been a part of entertainment for children in the UK, or ideology shapes their perception so that they view drag in a pantomime as fundamentally different to all other kinds of drag. Ideology has shaped their cognition so that they have forgotten the past or are failing to adequately perceive the present; either way, ideology is leading to ignorance through shaping their cognition.

The ignorance that ideology’s effects on cognition lead to is not only limited to dominant groups; those oppressed by ideologies may also display faulty cognition that leads to ignorance, depending on the extent to which the ideology is hegemonic (Mills 2007, 22). For example, a female teacher may perceive girls who are good at maths as exceptions to an ideologically supported norm that girls are bad at maths, rather than as evidence of the falsity of this norm, because she has internalised ideology which shapes her perception. Those who are oppressed by ideologies do sometimes internalise them.

Unlike wilful ignorance, ignorance that is the result of ideologically influenced faulty cognition is not usually motivated ignorance, strictly speaking. Whilst wilfully ignorant knowers actively maintain their own ignorance through their refusal to accept information or conceptual resources, ignorance which is a result of faulty cognitive processes is often unmotivated, meaning it is not maintained out of self-interest (though the ignorance may still serve self-interest). These faulty

³⁶ For example, views expressed by A.N. Wilson (2017) and the position of the Catholic church on what they call ‘gender ideology’ as a ‘threat’ to nuclear heterosexual families (Caldwell 2024).

³⁷ Pantomimes are a form of British traditional theatre which typically follow the plot of a well-known children’s story and are often put on by local theatres around Christmastime. Pantomimes usually feature a ‘pantomime dame’, a comedic older female character (often the mother of the hero or heroine) played by a man in cartoonish drag.

practices of cognition may be displayed even by those who are attempting to critique ideologies, as has been explored in literature on implicit bias (Holroyd, Scaife, and Stafford 2017).

4.3 Practices

Ideology shapes practices: this is a key feature of ideology on Haslanger's account (2017a), which my account of ideology heavily draws on. Practices are 'certain kinds of normatively unified regularities' and include 'patterns in behaviour that are the result of shared cultural schemas or social meanings' which function to coordinate our behaviour (Haslanger 2018, 235–40). Where dominant social meanings are ideological, the practices they shape, which may be dominant or unavoidable practices, reflect that ideology. Martín's structuralist account of white ignorance explains how social structural processes and practices can give rise to white ignorance. For example, practices in education shaped by racist ideology mean that children are not taught about certain topics relating to race, and education reflects ideological social meanings which may include falsities and distortions (Martín 2021, 874). Martín also gives the example of a doctor who doesn't know if a particular medication will work on her indigenous Latina patient because some studies have suggested that the effectiveness of the drug depends on a person's genetic group, but studies on the effectiveness of the drug have primarily been carried out on people with European ancestry (2021, 878). In this case, ideology (in particular, conceptions of which ethnic group is the 'default' group) influences practices in scientific research, leading to less research into the way that the drug affects people of minority ethnic groups, which leads to ignorance.

Dominant social practices may shape perception and attention in faulty ways. In this way, ideological practices may also produce ignorance through their effects on cognition. One example of the way that ideology shapes ignorance through practices and through shaping cognition is the way dominant gender ideology shapes practices of what toys or activities are given to children, so that toys are treated and marketed as 'girls' toys' and 'boys' toys'. These practices inscribe dominant social meanings about gender, which are then internalised as beliefs, so people hold false beliefs about what boys and girls 'naturally' like, and what sort of activities they will be good at and are appropriate for them (Fine 2011, 189–91, 208). As well as shaping ignorance directly through inscribing false ideas about what is 'natural' or 'appropriate' for children, this practice shapes perception and inference, so even when toys are not explicitly gender-allocated people perceive certain toys as 'for girls' or 'for boys', leading to false beliefs.

Because ideological practices are often naturalised, ideology can cause ignorance by preventing people from gaining knowledge about alternative ways of organising the world. When an ideology is dominant, ideology shapes practices which are treated as unquestionable, which can

preclude the possibility of knowing about alternative practices. This ignorance may also be supported through effects of ideology on cognition which encourages unquestioning attitudes towards ideological social meanings and practices. For example, many people find it difficult or impossible to imagine that we could have identity documents that do not record a person's sex, or that we could not record a person's sex at birth. These practices, shaped by cissexist ideology, are so dominant that it is often hard for people to consider the possibility of alternatives. There is an assumption that the recording of sex on identity documents must be important because it is what is done. Ideological social meanings shape what is considered valuable or important, and a person's sex is deemed to be an incredibly important fact about them which must then be included on documentation. Dominant ideological practices shape ignorance by circumscribing the limits of what is considered possible.

Additionally, ideological practices can shape and maintain hermeneutical marginalisation, which leads to hermeneutical injustice and ignorance, a point that I elaborate on further in section 4.4. Ideology shapes and maintains practices which determine who is given access to positions of respect and influence, from which they are able to influence dominant social meanings. Practices shape who is granted opportunities, and can determine where we live, the quality of our housing and healthcare, and education. Those who are ideologically oppressed are less able to contribute to dominant conceptual resources and social understandings, so their experiences are not reflected in these resources, meaning that others remain ignorant of them.

4.4 Interpretive Tools

Ideology leads to ignorance through the interpretive tools it shapes. As I explained in chapter one, ideology shapes both hermeneutical lacunas and inadequate hermeneutical resources which can help to block the uptake of new and resistant hermeneutical resources (Falbo 2022; Haslanger 2019b, 15; 2021a, 47). Where ideologies are dominant, the hermeneutical resources they shape will be part of the dominant hermeneutical resources. Ideology provides and shapes interpretive tools that lead people to interpret the world in ways that are factually inaccurate or incomplete, and morally deficient. This is one way ideology produces moral ignorance ('incorrect judgments about the rights and wrongs of moral situations themselves' (Mills 2007, 22)), as well as ignorance of parts of the world that are not properly explained by dominant ideological hermeneutical resources.

Ideology shapes hermeneutical resources in ways that result in hermeneutical injustice. Hermeneutical injustice is related to ignorance in several ways. Firstly, in cases of hermeneutical injustice where people lack adequate hermeneutical resources to describe their own experiences, they may fail to understand those experiences. A lack of hermeneutical resources to describe a

certain experience as a moral wrong or an injustice may mean that some marginalised people fail to interpret their own experiences as wrongful. This is one way that ideology produces ignorance among those who are oppressed by ideologies. It may seem strange to refer to the ignorance of one's own oppression as a kind of ideological ignorance, because it is not the kind of ignorance that is typically discussed under the label of 'white ignorance' or 'active ignorance'. However, ignorance of one's own oppression which is a result of a lack of access to appropriate hermeneutical resources to describe the experience systematically arises as a result of ideology's influence on hermeneutical resources, and functions to uphold a broader system of oppression by obscuring injustice.

Secondly, hermeneutical injustice preserves ignorance by preventing those who experience it from communicating an important aspect of their experience to others (Fricker and Jenkins 2017). In cases where gaps or problematic distortions in dominant hermeneutical resources are shaped by ideologies, hermeneutical injustice will lead to ignorance among the wider population about the experiences of those who are oppressed. This occurs in cases when the person whose experience is not properly captured by dominant hermeneutical resources doesn't possess concepts to describe their experiences, and also cases where they do possess concepts, but these concepts are not shared by a socially significant other who they are communicating with (Mason 2011). Ideology also shapes hermeneutical resources in ways that mean that experiences of privilege are not properly understood. In these cases, although it is the experiences of those who benefit from ideologies that are misunderstood or not fully explained, the patterns of ignorance reflect ideologies which oppress others (Fricker 2013, 52). Ideologies function to obscure injustice, and the effects ideologies have on conceptual resources for interpreting the world is one way they do this, as they sustain ignorance about the existence of injustice.

Fricker thinks that hermeneutical injustice and white ignorance (of the kind described by Mills) are distinct and there will be few cases where they overlap (2013). Contrary to Fricker, I contend that, under conditions of dominant ideology, the cases where hermeneutical injustice and ideological ignorance such as white ignorance overlap are in fact prevalent, not 'non-standard' as she claims (2016, 174). Fricker takes white ignorance to be exclusively a kind of culpable ignorance, whereas she argues that hermeneutical injustice is usually a structural phenomenon which is non-culpable, and argues there are only a small number of cases where a racist cogniser is ignorant, culpable for that ignorance, and the ignorance is caused by some sort of hermeneutical lacuna (2016, 174). This occurs in cases where hermeneutically marginalised communities have developed their own hermeneutical resources, and a racist cogniser fails to possess those resources because of some culpable reason, or because of their faulty cognition

(Fricker 2016, 175). However, these types of cases cannot be described as ‘non-standard’ under conditions of ideology. Because ideology shapes hermeneutical resources, hermeneutical injustice will be widespread in ideological social conditions. The development of resistant hermeneutical resources is a frequent occurrence when hermeneutically marginalised knowers are able to form their own epistemic communities. And, given the effects of ideology on cognition and wilful ignorance, it is likely that dominantly situated knowers will be culpably ignorant of those hermeneutical resources because to display this kind of ignorance a person does not need to be a straightforwardly racist cogniser; they merely need to have their attitudes in some way shaped by racist ideology. Medina notes how perpetrators of hermeneutical injustice may be culpable when they are embedded within, and uphold, social systems that prevent the development and sharing of new and resistant hermeneutical resources (2012, 216–17). Perpetrators can fail to gain knowledge of the experiences of the marginalised or of matters pertaining to injustice because they fail to acknowledge or accept the hermeneutical resources developed by oppressed groups which are necessary for understanding their experiences. Through failing to uptake those resources, they also hinder the attempts of oppressed groups to make contributions to the dominant hermeneutical resources and uphold the ignorance of others. In cases such as these, ideology is leading to ignorance both by shaping hermeneutical resources, and through wilful ignorance.

In the trans panic, the ignorance that ideology leads to through shaping the available hermeneutical resources forms part of the background social conditions that means that cissexist ideology remains dominant. Widespread ignorance caused by a lack of appropriate hermeneutical resources to understand and describe trans experiences is part of what makes the ‘debate’ framing of the trans panic so bad for advancing a ‘pro-trans’ position; many people viewing the ‘debate’ occurring in the media, politics, and online will lack the resources necessary to understand trans people’s experiences or reject resistant resources through wilful ignorance, and will therefore remain ignorant of those experiences. This ignorance is a consequence of dominant ideology and helps to uphold it, as those in the grip of ideology are ignorant and therefore fail to recognise oppression and injustice and are less receptive to the appeals of those who do recognise injustice. In the trans panic, the effects of wilful ignorance on the wider available hermeneutical resources also help to uphold widespread ignorance of trans people. In particular, anti-trans activists who stand to personally gain from maintaining the oppression of trans people are wilfully ignorant and reject the hermeneutical resources developed by trans people, as I outlined in chapter two and section 4.1. This wilful ignorance and subsequent rejection of the resistant resources developed by trans people in the context of public ‘debate’ prevents these hermeneutical resources from making their way into the dominant hermeneutical

resources, so helps to uphold the ignorance of others. Ignorance here is a consequence of ideology and plays a role in the way that ideology prevents the recognition of injustice because ideologically shaped hermeneutical resources lead to ignorance of injustice, and therefore meets my definition of ideological ignorance.

4.5 Active Wrongdoing

A final way ideology leads to ignorance occurs when individuals who are invested in an ideology engage in active wrongdoing which upholds the ignorance of others. Individuals may be motivated to uphold an ideology specifically because they stand to gain from the dominance of a particular worldview, or they may be motivated to uphold the ideology derivatively, as they stand to benefit from the oppression that the ideology upholds, and upholding ideology is a way of upholding that oppression. Though all these cases are cases of active wrongdoing, not all of them are cases of deliberately upholding ignorance. Though in some cases, people deliberately act to uphold ignorance, in other cases, they may engage in actions that they do not consider to be wrongful, or that they believe share information or correct misinformation, but that nonetheless function to uphold or spread ignorance which itself helps to uphold an ideology.

Though it is not discussed in these terms, Mills includes an example of a case of deliberate active wrongdoing to uphold ignorance in his discussion of white ignorance. Mills draws on accounts of how documentation of Belgian colonial atrocities in Congo was systematically destroyed by burning, the result being that few Belgians were aware of the atrocities that had occurred (2007, 29). The failure of (mostly white) Belgians to know about colonial atrocities committed against Africans is clearly a case of white ignorance, of course, it is a case used by Mills in his account of white ignorance. But this ignorance is not generated by any of the previously mentioned mechanisms. Had Belgians had access to this information, they may have been wilfully ignorant of it, but this information was kept from them, so this is not a case of wilful ignorance. Mills includes this as an example of cognitive white ignorance because he argues this is a case of a failure in memory. But failures in memory can only make sense of the white ignorance of a single generation.³⁸ Subsequent generations, at least in part, had the truth kept from them because records were destroyed, presumably by those who were aware of what those records showed. Those who burned records were not ignorant of the facts of what had occurred, but their actions contributed towards the subsequent ignorance of later generations. What role does ideology play here? The destruction of records could be viewed as a type of ideologically shaped practice, but this interpretation would obscure the active role of individuals in this wrongdoing,

³⁸ It could be argued that this is a failure of 'collective memory' which occurred across generations, but this would also fail to capture how information was actively destroyed.

and this seems like a one-off case rather than a regularity in behaviour. Instead, this case can best be understood as one where people are directly motivated to uphold an ideology because they stand to benefit from it, and from the oppressive conditions that it maintains. In this case, it is in the interest of those who committed atrocities to keep those atrocities hidden, as they benefit both from imperialist ideology itself, which affords a high social status to those engaged in imperialist projects, and provides ‘rationale’ for their activities, and they materially benefit from imperialist oppression; upholding the ideology upholds that system of oppression. Therefore, they acted in ways that upheld ideological ignorance.

People may engage in deliberate wrongdoing with the aim of upholding ignorance. In cases such as that of the destruction of records of colonial atrocities, it appears that those who committed this action intended to maintain the ignorance of the population through their actions, and they are clearly motivated by self interest in maintaining an ideology or the system of oppression which ideology upholds. However, people can also maintain ignorance through active wrongdoing even if they don’t intend for ignorance to be the result. These are cases where people believe that they are upholding truth or morality through sharing misinformation or obscuring access to information but are in fact engaged in active wrongdoing that upholds ignorance. These cases will look at first glance like cases of wilful ignorance, as they are typically cases where the person engaging in wrongdoing rejects information or hermeneutical resources because of some vested interest. However, these cases differ because the wrongdoer’s actions go beyond simply rejecting information or a hermeneutical resource by actively preventing others from having access to it, or by actively sharing misinformation. In these cases, people are motivated to act in false consciousness as their actions are governed by the ‘unconscious influence of non-cognitive motives’ (Shelby 2003, 172). Shelby describes how ‘[t]o hold a belief with a false consciousness is to hold it while being ignorant of, or self-deceived about, the real motives for why one holds it’ (2003, 170). In these cases, when people engage in active wrongdoing that upholds ignorance without intending to uphold ignorance, they may believe they are motivated to uphold truth, or what is morally good, or, in the example I describe below, to ‘protect children’. However, their actions are driven by unconscious motives to uphold ideology, or the system of oppression that ideology upholds, because they stand to gain from it.

The publication of the Cass report is an example of this kind of active wrongdoing that upholds ignorance, even though its authors presumably did not intend for it to do so. The Cass report is a report into NHS gender services for under 18s in England that was published in April 2024 and cautions against the use of puberty blockers for trans young people. The report has been widely

criticised by trans advocacy groups and global experts in the medical care of trans children for misrepresenting evidence about the effects of social transition and puberty blockers, and has maintained and increased widespread ignorance about trans children and their medical care, including providing support for false ideological claims that trans young people's identities are a result of 'social contagion' and that social transition is harmful (Pearce and Horton 2024).³⁹ The report dismissed large amounts of data about the benefits of medical and social transition for trans young people, whilst relying on limited evidence suggesting these are harmful from poorer quality studies (Pearce and Horton 2024). The publication of this report is active wrongdoing that upholds ignorance: the publication of the Cass report has spread ignorance about trans children and their healthcare.

Those who wrote and published the Cass report may well have been wilfully ignorant of data and studies that they did not include in the report or dismissed as part of it, but their actions went beyond simply rejecting this information – the publication of the report actively increased ignorance relating to trans children and young people. Ideology led to this wrongdoing that has spread ignorance because the people involved in the commissioning, writing, researching, and publishing of the Cass report had an interest in maintaining cissexist ideology and the transphobic practices it shapes, such as the denial of healthcare. These people benefit generally from cis privilege which is a result of the oppression of trans people, so are motivated to uphold cissexist ideology to uphold cissexist oppression. Some of the people involved in the commissioning and production of the report, in particular Conservative politicians, stand to gain from upholding cissexist ideology itself, as dominant anti-trans narratives allow trans people to be used as political scapegoats and as part of a 'culture war' tactic that upholds their personal and political interests. Anti-trans healthcare professionals who were included and platformed as part of the report (Pearce and Horton 2024) stood to gain professionally and in terms of their reputation from the publication of a report that confirms their views, and so were motivated to uphold cissexist ideology.

Ideology often leads to ignorance in these kinds of cases by maintaining social systems that some people benefit from and become invested in upholding, so they act to maintain ignorance to uphold an ideology. In some cases, people gain from upholding an ideology itself: for example, people may benefit directly from a certain worldview being dominant because they gain financially from this. For example, a journalist who makes a living from publishing transphobic think-pieces may be motivated to uphold cissexist ideology because they monetarily benefit from

³⁹ By far the most damaging effect of the Cass review has been that following its publication, young trans people in the UK can no longer access puberty blockers. I don't discuss this further here because this effect is not an example of ignorance.

the dominance of this way of viewing the world. However, in many cases, people are derivatively motivated to uphold an ideology because they are motivated to uphold oppression. They uphold ideology as a way of upholding oppression, and active wrongdoing that maintains or creates ignorance is a way of upholding an ideology. Sometimes, these cases emerge when people who are invested in ideologies know things that may challenge or have the potential to disrupt ideologies. Cases of this type are not cases of wilful ignorance because the wrongdoer possesses knowledge. Because they are invested in these ideological systems, they actively attempt to prevent this knowledge from becoming widespread. This type of active wrongdoing may also be committed by those who do not in fact benefit from an ideology but falsely believe that they do or stand to gain some marginal personal benefit. Some members of oppressed groups engage in active wrongdoing that upholds ignorance because they have some personal interest in maintaining it – as I discussed in cases of wilful ignorance, some members of oppressed groups can feel attached to a sense of stability provided by the ideologically shaped world or receive benefits from others for vocally rejecting anti-oppressive ideas. While some cases of active wrongdoing that upholds ignorance may be clearly deliberate, this category also includes cases where the person committing the action remains committed to ideological falsehoods so are not deliberately upholding ignorance, but where their actions are active, harmful, and serve to uphold or spread ignorance which upholds an ideology.

Cases of ideologically motivated active wrongdoing that uphold ignorance can involve concealing or distorting available information and providing misinformation, as occurred in the two previously mentioned examples of atrocities in the Belgian Congo and the Cass report. This can uphold ignorance knowingly or unknowingly, as a person may actively conceal information because they believe it to be false or provide misinformation that they believe to be true. Active wrongdoing that preserves ignorance can also include preventing oppressed groups from improving hermeneutical resources, and creating new, prejudiced hermeneutical resources that reflect an ideological worldview. These actions preserve ignorance by preventing the improvement of the available resources for understanding the world, so they preserve or worsen ignorance which is the result of deficient hermeneutical resources. However, these cases are distinct from ignorance purely caused by ideology's influence on hermeneutical resources. They involve active wrongdoing (such as distorting resistant hermeneutical resources or developing new, prejudiced hermeneutical resources) and are distinct from wilful ignorance because the actions of the perpetrators go beyond rejecting hermeneutical resources. While this can be a way that ideology upholds ignorance, this distortion of available hermeneutical resources is also a form of epistemic injustice in its own right. This phenomenon has not received attention in

existing literature and merits further discussion. I name this phenomenon ‘hermeneutical sabotage’ and characterise it in full in the next chapter.

Some people may be concerned that what I am talking about in these cases isn’t genuinely ideological. Perhaps what I am talking about is one of the repressive features of an oppressive system, rather than an ideological one.⁴⁰ However, I think ideology plays a role in the generation and maintenance of ignorance in these cases, and the ignorance produced plays a role in upholding an ideology. Ideology leads to this kind of ignorance through upholding oppression, so that people are derivatively invested in upholding the ideology because they are invested in upholding oppression. Moreover, there are some cases where people are invested in upholding the ideology itself, because they stand to gain from the dominance of a particular way of understanding the world, as previously described in the examples of transphobic journalists and anti-trans healthcare professionals.

Cases of active wrongdoing that upholds ignorance where people are derivatively invested in upholding an ideology in order to uphold oppression can be contrasted with cases where people engage in active wrongdoing that upholds oppression which does not play a role in upholding ideological ignorance, and where people are not acting to uphold an ideology. For example, in cases of transphobic violence, people act in ways that maintain oppression (as violence is a component of oppression (Young 1990)), but they do not act to uphold an ideology though upholding ignorance. Though they stand to gain from upholding oppression, they do not maintain this oppression by upholding an ideology, and their actions do not uphold ignorance.

Those who engage in active wrongdoing to uphold ignorance are not necessarily conspiratorial; their actions may be guided by related areas of ideological ignorance, such as faulty cognition, and undertaken in false consciousness so that they believe they are motivated to act because of a desire to uphold truth, even though the true underlying reason why they are acting is to uphold oppression through upholding ideology, or to uphold ideology itself. The ignorance that their actions uphold plays an ideological role because it protects ideological social systems, practices, and social meanings from critique, or obscures the sorts of things which could help to spark critique of ideologies. However, cases such as these do illustrate the clear link between repressive and ideological methods of oppression. Especially when ideology critique has been developed, those invested in upholding an ideology may employ repressive methods to uphold

⁴⁰ I draw the distinction between ideological and repressive features of an oppressive social system from Althusser’s discussion of ‘ideological state apparatus’ and ‘repressive state apparatus’ (2014, 243). The repressive state apparatus is that which ‘functions by violence’, and for Althusser includes state apparatus such as prisons, courts, police, and administration, which ‘function predominantly by repression’ and ‘secondarily by ideology’, as there is no purely repressive or ideological apparatus (2014, 243–44).

that ideology and the ideological ignorance of others. For example, state censorship is a repressive technology employed by governments to stem the spread of ideology critique, and can also uphold ignorance. Oppressive systems are often hybrid, employing both ideological and repressive methods (Haslanger 2019b, 6). Active wrongdoing which is sometimes repressive and upholds ideological ignorance is one way those methods of oppression interact to uphold oppression.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I've explored the ways that ideology leads to ignorance: through incentivising and enabling wilful ignorance, shaping cognitive capacities, shaping social practices that enable ignorance or obscure information, providing hermeneutical resources and interpretive tools in ways that lead to ignorance, and incentivising (either directly or through the way it upholds oppression) active wrongdoing that upholds ignorance. I've also noted how ideology can lead to ignorance through multiple mechanisms at the same time. I've named the kind of ignorance ideology leads to, which itself plays a role in upholding a broader ideological system, 'ideological ignorance', to differentiate it from simple propositional ignorance. Ignorance and ideology are therefore closely connected: we can expect to find widespread ignorance when an ideology is dominant.

Having given an account of the relationship between ideology and ignorance, I am now in a position to summarise the role ignorance plays in the trans panic. I have pointed to examples of how cissexist ideology is leading to ignorance, and examples of ways that ideology has led to ignorance that is playing a role in the trans panic. These include wilful ignorance of resistant hermeneutical resources, ideologically shaped lapses in memory about the history of drag performance in the UK, shaping practices about what information is included in identity documents so that people find it difficult to imagine alternative possibilities, shaping the available hermeneutical resources in ways that leads to ignorance about trans people, and incentivising active wrongdoing that upholds ignorance, such as the publication of the Cass Review. However, ignorance alone, even ignorance which is caused by a lack of hermeneutical resources, cannot account for the dynamics and features of the trans panic that I outlined in chapter two.⁴¹ Ignorance can't explain why these dynamics emerged, and nor can it explain all of what is occurring within the trans panic. Whilst ignorance caused by a lack of hermeneutical resources could explain why a 'debate' framing of the trans panic is not conducive to and can

⁴¹ These were that the trans panic has a wide scope, is persistent, is resistant to efforts to tackle it, and that it has taken the form of the debate which is based on misinformation, in which frequent appeals to 'objectivity' and 'common sense' are made.

actively hinder attempts to progress the cause of trans liberation (because the audience will display this ignorance in the context of a ‘debate’ which will disadvantage the ‘pro-trans’ side) it does not fully explain how trans people are harmed in the context of a debate. It is epistemic injustice which accounts for the harm done to trans people in the context of a ‘debate’ because epistemic injustice accounts for the specific harm that occurs to people when they are denied credibility, and when they are unable to properly communicate their experiences. Wilful ignorance has a role to play in explaining why the ‘debate’ framing of the trans panic is harmful to trans people, but this is because it leads to a specific kind of epistemic injustice, as described by Pohlhaus (2012), that occurs when dominantly situated knowers reject the resistant hermeneutical resources developed by trans people.

The debate framing of the trans panic emerged because of widespread misunderstanding of the effects of changes to the Gender Recognition Act. On the simple propositional ignorance explanation for the trans panic, this could be interpreted as simply a lack of knowledge about the facts of the law, perhaps one related to a more widespread lack of knowledge about matters concerning trans people. However, a simple lack of knowledge account cannot explain why this misinformation and subsequent framing has been shared so widely, including by those who typically engage in media ‘fact checking’ – such organisations typically take care not to make factual errors, and correct the ones they do make. Nor does simple propositional ignorance account for why this misinformation is difficult to tackle. I provided a full account of why this misinformation is difficult to tackle in chapter two, based on the influence of dominant ideological social meanings and controlling images that portray trans women as predatory, and the role of both testimonial and content based hermeneutical injustice in preventing correction of this misinformation. The account I have developed of ideological ignorance supplements this account, as it can help to explain why individuals may continue to cling to this framing. Those who are invested in the ‘rights clash’ model may be wilfully ignorant of the fact that proposed changes to the GRA won’t affect access to all female spaces because they stand to gain from the continued publicity they get from the media presentation of the issue as a ‘debate’ about this topic, as well as because they gain from the sense of security they feel from the position which they incorrectly perceive to be the status quo, namely that women’s spaces are ‘protected’ from trans women who they think pose a threat. Ignorance does have a role to play in explaining some of the phenomena that exist in the trans panic. The ignorance that plays this role is not simple propositional ignorance, but ‘ideological ignorance’ which is itself a consequence of ideology, and functions to uphold ideology. This understanding of ideological ignorance supplements my account of the interplay between ideology and epistemic injustice in the trans panic, as this

ignorance plays a role in some cases of epistemic injustice, and in the maintenance of cissexist ideology.

Chapter 4: Hermeneutical Sabotage⁴²

1. Introduction

UK Newspaper *The Guardian's* 'Dining across the divide' series of articles reports the comments from a conversation between two people with differing political opinions. In one article, Alison, who describes herself as a 'women's rights activist', offers the following comment about trans people:

'Of course trans people can exist. But I'm not willing to say trans women; I will say trans-identified men.' (Wollaston 2021)

Within LGBTQ+ communities, the development of new terms is a frequent occurrence because commonly used language fails to reflect the diversity of people's identities and experiences of sexuality and gender. This can also occur when there are widely used terms to describe sexuality and gender, but they are not accurate or have derogatory implications.

'Trans woman' is a term a marginalised group have developed to better describe their identity. Alison, however, has rejected this term. Rather than using other, older, and more widely known terms such as 'transsexual', she offers a newer term to describe trans women: 'trans-identified men'. This term refers to trans women as 'men', contradicting the way they describe themselves. It also describes trans women as 'trans-identified', which functions to delegitimise the significance of being trans by implying that a man is what a trans woman 'is', contrasted with trans 'identity' as a state of mind rather than a state of being. The term 'trans-identified man' is a reactionary rejection of trans people's understanding of themselves.

I will use this case and others like it to highlight the existence of a distinctive and hitherto unrecognised type of epistemic injustice and oppression which I term 'hermeneutical sabotage'. 'Hermeneutical sabotage' is related to an existing form of epistemic injustice, hermeneutical injustice, but is importantly distinct from it, and names and explicates an as-yet undiscussed phenomenon in the epistemic injustice and oppression literature. After explaining the concept of 'hermeneutical injustice' in section 1, in section 2 I define 'hermeneutical sabotage', and in section 3 develop a taxonomy of the four forms it can take. In section 4, I distinguish 'hermeneutical sabotage' from other forms of epistemic injustice and oppression, and in section 5 I explain the importance of recognising the previously discussed examples as instances of 'hermeneutical sabotage' in order to address them, demonstrating the value of the concept of 'hermeneutical sabotage'. 'Hermeneutical sabotage' is a form of epistemic injustice that is

⁴² This chapter is slightly adapted from a paper I have published in the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (Edgoose 2024).

occurring to trans people within the context of the trans panic ‘debate’: some of my examples, such as the one I began this introduction with, are illustrations of hermeneutical sabotage occurring within the trans panic. As it is a form of epistemic injustice, ‘hermeneutical sabotage’ plays a role in the epistemic injustice/ideology feedback loop that I described in chapter two. ‘Hermeneutical sabotage’ is another form of epistemic injustice which makes the framing of ‘debate’ particularly bad for furthering the aims of trans liberation. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, people engage in hermeneutical sabotage to uphold an ideology, and hermeneutical sabotage is a way of spreading and sustaining ignorance.

2. Hermeneutical Injustice

Epistemic injustice occurs when someone is wronged ‘in their capacity as a knower’ (Fricker 2007, 1). As I explained in chapter one, hermeneutical injustice, a type of epistemic injustice, occurs when a significant aspect of a person’s experience cannot be properly understood due to gaps in the collective tools for social understanding. In systemic cases of hermeneutical injustice, a person has ‘some significant area of one’s social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource’ (Fricker 2007, 155). Hermeneutical resources are a subset of epistemic resources including ‘stories, concepts, meanings, and interpretive tropes’ (Davis 2018, 705). Oppressed people can struggle to communicate their experiences or identities because the concepts available for understanding the world fail to reflect those experiences. According to Fricker, gaps in shared understanding are a consequence of hermeneutical marginalisation; hermeneutically marginalised groups are excluded from contributing to widely shared language to improve social understanding of their experiences (2007, 153).⁴³ Dotson refers to persistent exclusion from epistemic contribution, such as revising epistemic resources, as ‘epistemic oppression’, a term also used by Fricker to describe systematic epistemic injustice (Fricker 1999, 208; Dotson 2014). I take systematic hermeneutical marginalisation to be a form of epistemic oppression.

The central case of hermeneutical injustice Fricker describes concerns Carmita Wood, a woman who, in the telling Fricker draws on, struggled to understand her own experience of sexual harassment and was unable to communicate this experience effectively to others because the concept ‘sexual harassment’ did not yet exist (2007, 150). The collective hermeneutical resources did not reflect a significant area of her experience owing to a structural identity prejudice. Though experiences like hers were a common occurrence among women, there was no term for this because women lacked the required social power and access to influential professions to

⁴³ As I argued in chapter one, gaps in the widely available hermeneutical resources can also occur because of the influence of ideology on hermeneutical resources. Ideology upholds oppression, which produces systematic hermeneutical marginalisation.

contribute to widely shared social meanings, and because they lacked spaces where experiences such as these could be shared (Fricker 2007, 152).

Fricker uses ‘collective hermeneutical resource’ to describe the location of the lacuna where there should be a term, but this is more accurately described as the ‘dominant hermeneutical resources’, as marginalised communities may have their own hermeneutical resources to explain their experiences (Mason 2011). Cases of hermeneutical injustice Fricker considers ‘non-standard’, where marginalised people possess a concept to describe their experience that is not shared by members of a dominant group, are the norm when marginalised groups can form their own epistemic communities (Mason 2011; Fricker 2016, 174)). This is a key theme in Black feminist thought that predates epistemic injustice literature but engages with similar ideas (Ivy 2016, 438). For example, Collins discusses the development of Black feminist thought within safe spaces in Black women’s communities where the marginalisation of Black women’s experiences is resisted (Collins 2009).

In these cases, a hermeneutically marginalised person possesses concepts that enable them to understand their experiences, so they do not experience what Goetze terms the ‘cognitive harm’ faced by Carmita Wood, of being unable or restricted in their ability to understand their own experience (2018, 78). Hermeneutically marginalised knowers face ‘communicative harm’ when they possess a concept to describe their experiences, but this concept is not shared by a relevant group they need to explain their experience to (Goetze 2018, 78). Prejudices in the dominant hermeneutical resources render their experiences unintelligible to a socially significant person or group, even when adequate concepts exist to explain those experience within other epistemic communities. I will use the term ‘dominant hermeneutical resources’ to describe the widely shared set of social meanings understood by those outside of the relevant hermeneutically marginalised community, to emphasise the existence of resistant hermeneutical resources within the epistemic communities of oppressed groups. When ideologies are dominant, the dominant hermeneutical resources will reflect an ideology, but ideology is not a necessary component of my account of ‘hermeneutical sabotage’, and ‘hermeneutical sabotage’ can occur in contexts where there is hermeneutical marginalisation and subsequent deficiencies in hermeneutical resources which is not upheld by an ideology.

2.1 Individual Perpetrators and Hermeneutical Injustice

Fricker describes hermeneutical injustice as ‘purely structural’ and without perpetrators because gaps in hermeneutical resources are a consequence of hermeneutical marginalisation so hermeneutical injustice cannot be committed by an individual (2007, 159). However, as noted by Mason (2011, 301) and Medina (2012), individuals can perpetrate hermeneutical injustice when

their failure to use or recognise resistant hermeneutical resources is due to culpable or active ignorance. Medina argues that when individuals are embedded within communicative dynamics that prevent the development and uptake of new ways of understanding the world, they co-perpetrate hermeneutical injustice (2012, 217). Pohlhaus accepts Fricker's designation of hermeneutical injustice as occurring on an exclusively structural level (2012, 734) but argues a similar type of epistemic injustice occurs on an interpersonal level when dominantly situated knowers refuse to acknowledge epistemic tools developed by the marginally situated. As I discussed in the previous chapter, she refers to this as 'wilful hermeneutical ignorance' (Pohlhaus 2012). Similarly, Kristie Dotson describes 'contributory injustice' as occurring when an agent's wilful hermeneutical ignorance inhibits another person's ability to contribute to shared epistemic resources within an epistemic community (Dotson 2012, 31). Mason, Medina, Pohlhaus, and Dotson, all give accounts of how individuals perpetrate hermeneutical injustice, or related forms of epistemic injustice, that emphasise the role of ignorance on the behalf of the perpetrator.

3. Hermeneutical Sabotage

It is commonly accepted within the literature on hermeneutical injustice that hermeneutical injustice can take place within societies where there are non-dominant hermeneutical resources that better explain the experiences of the marginalised, but these resources are not part of the dominant hermeneutical resources owing to hermeneutical marginalisation and epistemic oppression. Individuals can perpetrate hermeneutical injustice, and other, similar types of epistemic injustice and epistemic oppression through rejecting non-dominant hermeneutical resources owing to their active or wilful ignorance. However, I will now show that there are cases where the role of individuals in perpetrating epistemic injustice similar to hermeneutical injustice goes beyond rejection of new resources and are instances of active wrongdoing. These cases may involve some level of active or wilful ignorance, but wilful ignorance alone is insufficient to describe their actions. Knowers can perpetuate hermeneutical marginalisation through actively obstructing marginalised groups' ability to share and use resistant hermeneutical resources, and by creating new, prejudiced, and reactionary hermeneutical resources.⁴⁴ These cases are not examples of hermeneutical injustice, as hermeneutical injustice occurs in the moment of unintelligibility when a person is unable to communicate their experience due to insufficient hermeneutical resources. Hermeneutical injustice occurs when the consequences of hermeneutical marginalisation are actualised, but a person can also be wronged in their capacity as a knower when their hermeneutical marginalisation is perpetuated. These are cases of what I

⁴⁴ Contrary to Fricker (2015, 80), I consider hermeneutical marginalisation intrinsically disadvantageous. Hermeneutical marginalisation can be a component of epistemic oppression, and will always be actualised as a hermeneutical injustice as it is not possible to entirely avoid communication with others (Ruiz 2020, 702–3).

have termed ‘hermeneutical sabotage’, a type of epistemic injustice and oppression. More formally:

Hermeneutical sabotage is committed by a dominantly situated knower or group of knowers A, when A perpetuates the hermeneutical marginalisation of a group B through actively maintaining or worsening structural prejudices in the dominant hermeneutical resources.

In the example in the introduction, Alison, a cisgender woman, is a dominantly situated knower. Trans people are a hermeneutically marginalised group, and through refusing to use the term ‘trans woman’ she perpetuates their hermeneutical marginalisation by rejecting their contribution to dominant hermeneutical resources.⁴⁵ By sharing the term ‘trans-identified man’, Alison worsens prejudices towards trans people in the dominant hermeneutical resources. I will return to this example in greater detail in section 3.3, but its general outline exemplifies the phenomenon I am terming ‘hermeneutical sabotage’.

This usage of the word ‘sabotage’ is slightly different to the ordinary usage of the word. Firstly, it does not imply *intention* to harm or disrupt, as is normally implied by sabotage. While hermeneutical sabotage must involve a deliberate act, and that act must be harmful or disruptive, the perpetrator need not *intend* to harm or disrupt. Secondly, sabotage often involves those who have less power (e.g., workers) preventing the working of a larger group or organisation, such as a business. In ‘hermeneutical sabotage’ the power dynamic is reversed.

The perpetrator of hermeneutical sabotage must be a dominantly situated knower. In this context, ‘dominantly situated’ refers to their relative ability to contribute to dominant hermeneutical resources on the relevant subject or subjects compared with the victims of hermeneutical sabotage. They are epistemically powerful: they occupy a position of privilege afforded by the features of dominant hermeneutical resources, which is often related to social, economic, and political power (Dotson 2014, 125). Dominantly situated knowers possess greater ability to contribute to shared hermeneutical resources, therefore their contributions can override those made by marginally situated knowers. Individuals may be dominantly situated in some areas (e.g. gender) but marginally situated in others (e.g. race) and therefore be able to contribute to dominant hermeneutical resources in some areas and not others (Fricker 2007, 153–54).

⁴⁵ Trans people are also an oppressed group. I take it that all members of oppressed groups are marginally situated knowers (relative to a particular domain) but that not all marginally situated knowers are oppressed. As such, all groups that experience ideological oppression can be victims of hermeneutical sabotage, but not all victims of hermeneutical sabotage experience ideological oppression.

Consequently, a person may perpetrate hermeneutical sabotage while also being a victim of hermeneutical sabotage; the position of ‘dominantly situated knower’ is not an absolute one.

The victims of hermeneutical sabotage must be members of a group that experiences hermeneutical marginalisation for hermeneutical sabotage to be possible; hermeneutical sabotage capitalises on the pre-existing hermeneutical marginalisation of a group to make that marginalisation worse. The hermeneutical marginalisation of the victims makes sabotage possible as their ability to resist the imposition of prejudiced hermeneutical resources is restricted. When new prejudiced resources are introduced, or their resistant resources are appropriated or distorted by dominantly situated knowers, hermeneutically marginalised people are less able to prevent the uptake of prejudiced resources.

It is possible for a marginalised person to commit hermeneutical sabotage against the group they are a part of by attempting to worsen existing prejudices in the dominant hermeneutical resources against their own group. As a hypothetical case, we can imagine the example from the introduction, except ‘Alison’ is a trans woman. While this person is not a member of a dominant group, their contributions are more likely to gain uptake than resistant hermeneutical resources because they reinforce existing prejudices in the dominant hermeneutical resources; epistemic power can be a product of epistemological systems as well as social position (Dotson 2014, 125). It is also unlikely that such a person would be able to engage in hermeneutical sabotage when acting alone; their ability to engage in sabotage is contingent on the existence of a wider oppressive social movement made up of members of a dominant group. Their ability to make contributions in this case relies on the alignment of their views with structural prejudices towards their own group. Such a person is contingently dominantly situated because of their relative ability to contribute to dominant hermeneutical resources compared with the victim of sabotage.⁴⁶

A similar situation may arise if a member of a marginalised group engages in hermeneutical sabotage against their own group, but their group membership is not known by others. For example, homophobic hermeneutical sabotage may be committed by a man who is gay but has not told anyone. In these cases, hermeneutical sabotage is possible because the perpetrator will not experience hermeneutical marginalisation in the same way as others who are known to be members of a marginalised group and is therefore comparably dominantly situated. If a person’s membership of a marginalised group is a secret, they still face some forms of hermeneutical

⁴⁶ While the perpetrator of hermeneutical sabotage in this case will disadvantage themselves by worsening prejudices in the dominant hermeneutical resources that apply to them, they should not be considered one of the primary victims of their own hermeneutical sabotage because they do not worsen their own hermeneutical marginalisation.

marginalisation and hermeneutical injustice. However, they are comparably more able to contribute to dominant hermeneutical resources than other members of their group, as well as because their hermeneutical contributions reflect existing prejudices in dominant hermeneutical resources.

The victims of hermeneutical sabotage will always be a group, as marginalisation and oppression are group-based, and hermeneutical resources to describe marginalised experiences will apply to all members of the group. Hermeneutical sabotage can be targeted towards individuals, but they will be a victim of sabotage based on their group membership. The perpetrator, however, may be an individual or a group.

The perpetrator of hermeneutical sabotage ‘perpetuates’ hermeneutical marginalisation as the hermeneutical marginalisation of group B is pre-existing. ‘Perpetuates’ does not imply ‘intends’, though the definition of hermeneutical sabotage includes cases where a dominantly situated knower does intend to worsen structural prejudices in the dominant hermeneutical resources. The dominantly situated knower A may sincerely believe that B is not hermeneutically marginalised, or that the new hermeneutic resources they are introducing more accurately reflect the truth. By ‘perpetuate’ I mean ‘functions that way’; the worsening of prejudices in the dominant hermeneutical resources is a direct consequence of their actions, regardless of intention.

Similarly, ‘actively maintaining’ does not imply intention to worsen structural prejudices. ‘Active’ implies intentional action but not intentional marginalisation. ‘Actively maintaining or worsening’ distinguishes hermeneutical sabotage from cases where resources developed by the marginalised are not taken up by dominant knowers due to wilful ignorance. In cases of hermeneutical sabotage, resistant hermeneutical resources are knowingly rejected; the saboteur is knowingly not using the hermeneutical resources the marginalised group prefer. The way the prejudices in the dominant hermeneutical resources are worsened involves actions beyond rejection of resistant hermeneutical resources. ‘Actively maintaining or worsening’ covers the manipulation and appropriation of resistant hermeneutical resources, and the development of new, prejudiced hermeneutical resources. The worsening of prejudices in dominant hermeneutical resources does not necessarily involve the worsening of the prejudices themselves; the new or manipulated hermeneutical resources may reflect pre-existing prejudices towards hermeneutically marginalised groups. What is worsened is how those prejudices are reflected in the dominant hermeneutical resources.

By identifying perpetrators of hermeneutical sabotage, I am not offering an individualised explanation for hermeneutical marginalisation. In systematic cases, this marginalisation is a consequence of political, social, and economic oppression, and in some cases, epistemic

oppression which is not reducible to other forms of social oppression (Fricker 2007, 155; Dotson 2014). Structural inequality enables hermeneutical sabotage, which is why it can only be perpetrated by dominantly situated knowers. Perpetrating hermeneutical sabotage requires that knowers have greater ability to influence the dominant tools for social understanding than the victims. Some ways a person may be able to gain this influence are through access to positions such as in journalism, politics, and academia where people can influence social understanding, or social markers of prestige and respect, though there are other ways for a person to be in a position to commit sabotage. Lack of influence because of economic, political, and social factors leads to hermeneutical marginalisation, and makes it possible for a group to be victims of sabotage (Fricker 2007, 155–56). Hermeneutical sabotage explains how individuals may contribute to hermeneutical marginalisation; it does not explain this marginalisation entirely.

The set of hermeneutical resources affected by hermeneutical sabotage are the dominant hermeneutical resources. Hermeneutical sabotage affects how marginalised groups are understood by others outside their group; they may have their own resources that make their experiences intelligible to others within that group which are not affected by hermeneutical sabotage. Prejudiced hermeneutical resources may be developed within communities of dominantly situated knowers, and this constitutes hermeneutical sabotage when those resources are shared outside of the smaller epistemic community. As dominantly situated knowers have greater ability to contribute to the dominant resources for social understanding, widespread uptake of prejudiced hermeneutical resources they develop is more likely to occur than uptake of the resistant hermeneutical resources developed by hermeneutically marginalised groups.

4. Hermeneutical Sabotage: A Taxonomy

There are two axes of division for the forms hermeneutical sabotage can take, each with two subcategories. The first axis concerns the way that dominant hermeneutical resources are worsened. This can be enacted through the manipulation and obscuring of hermeneutical resources developed by marginalised groups, or the introduction of new, prejudiced hermeneutical resources. The second axis concerns the terms used in hermeneutical sabotage which can be new or not new. These two axes with two subcategories produce four types of hermeneutical sabotage: the distortion of resistant hermeneutical resources, the appropriation of resistant hermeneutical resources, the introduction of new prejudiced terms, and the introduction of prejudiced concepts without new terms. These are illustrated by table 1:

	Manipulation of resistant hermeneutical resources	Introduction of new prejudiced hermeneutical resources
New Terms	4.1 Distortion of resistant hermeneutical resources	4.3 New prejudiced terms
No New Terms	4.2 Appropriation of resistant hermeneutical resources	4.4 Prejudiced concepts without new terms

Table 1: *A table illustrating the two axes and four subcategories of hermeneutical sabotage which produce four types of hermeneutical sabotage.*

4.1 Distortion of Resistant Hermeneutical Resources

The first type of hermeneutical sabotage occurs when dominantly situated knowers actively distort the meaning of resistant hermeneutical resources through literally distorting the words. This prevents marginalised groups from improving dominant hermeneutical resources to better explain their experiences.

Trans people are an epistemically oppressed group who are subject to hermeneutical sabotage. Trans people are hermeneutically marginalised: particularly through misgendering, they are prevented from contributing to the development of language to describe their experiences of gender (Kapusta 2016, 504). As I described in chapter two, dominant cissexist ideology shapes the dominant hermeneutical resources for understanding trans experiences in ways that fail to reflect those experiences accurately, and shapes interpretations of trans people's experiences in ways that are unjust. Terms to describe trans experiences are often insufficient, rendering those experiences insufficiently intelligible, an issue that is particularly acute in trans people's experiences of healthcare (Fricker and Jenkins 2017, 274). Cissexist ideology also functions to uphold the oppression of trans people, and this oppression contributes to their hermeneutical marginalisation. Cissexist ideology's influence on hermeneutical resources, and trans people's hermeneutical marginalisation, lead them to experience hermeneutical injustice.

Trans people have attempted to combat their hermeneutical marginalisation through the development of new hermeneutical resources that better reflect their experiences and identities. For example, 'trans woman' is the term that has been developed within trans communities to describe a woman who is transgender. No term is accepted by all trans people, but 'trans woman' is widely preferred. This term is sometimes distorted as 'transwoman' by those who are opposed

to the goals of trans liberation movements, particularly the goal that trans people should be recognised as the gender they say they are. This change in the term functions to communicate the belief that trans women are not ‘real women’. This is reflected in the writing of Lawford-Smith, who uses the term ‘transwomen’ to refer to trans women, who she does not believe are women, but ‘trans men’ to refer to men who are transgender, who she argues are men (Lawford-Smith 2021). By removing the space between the words, ‘trans’ is no longer an adjective to describe a type of woman; rather, ‘transwomen’ are categorised as a separate group.⁴⁷ This is not to say that every instance where a person uses the term ‘transwoman’ is hermeneutical sabotage: it may be a spelling mistake or used by those who are not aware of which terms are widely preferred. The term ‘transwoman’ was also historically used by trans people themselves in ways that respected trans people’s identities, and some people may still use the term in this way.⁴⁸ However, the point is that ‘transwomen’ is used by those opposed to the goals of trans liberation movements who reject the hermeneutical resources developed by trans people. Hermeneutical sabotage is committed by those who use the term ‘transwoman’ despite knowing that the preferred term is ‘trans woman’ and do so to reject the term ‘trans woman’; hermeneutical sabotage requires active, intentional action, which is present in these cases.

Hermeneutical sabotage preserves structural prejudices in the dominant hermeneutical resources by rejecting the uptake of the resistant hermeneutical resource ‘trans woman’ and worsens prejudices by distorting that term as ‘transwoman’, enabling more ways for trans women to be misdescribed and misunderstood.⁴⁹ It also perpetuates epistemic oppression: by distorting a term that a hermeneutically marginalised group have attempted to introduce it actively inhibits them from making this contribution to dominant hermeneutical resources.

4.2 Appropriation of Resistant Hermeneutical Resources

An example of hermeneutical sabotage where a resistant hermeneutical resource has been appropriated and the meaning changed but the words themselves have not been altered is ‘critical

⁴⁷ A similar argument, that ‘transwoman’ and ‘transman’ position trans people in a third sex category, is made by Serano (2016, 29–30).

⁴⁸ The words used to refer to trans people are frequently contested within trans communities, and over time terms rise and fall in popularity. These changes can reflect minor linguistic preferences or can convey changes in the understanding of trans identities or shifts in emphasis that are important for contemporary political projects (see Serano 2014 for a more detailed discussion of this). I am not suggesting that ‘trans woman’ is the only appropriate term, or that those who use or used ‘transwoman’ in a trans-inclusive way are wrong to do so. However, uses of ‘transwoman’ by those opposed to the goals of trans liberation movements are not part of the productive contestation of terms that occurs within trans communities.

⁴⁹ While trans women may be the primary targets of hermeneutical sabotage in this case and experience the greatest harm because of that sabotage, they are unlikely to be the only group that experience harm. For example, a cisgender lesbian in a relationship with a trans woman may also find that epistemic resources necessary for understanding her lived experiences, such as the word ‘lesbian’, are undermined by the propagation of hermeneutical resources that exclude trans women from the category of women. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

race theory'. The term originated within academic scholarship to describe an approach to analysing racism as a structural phenomenon, not a product of individual prejudices. 'Critical race theory' as a term has been appropriated by conservatives, the right-wing media, and politicians to describe almost any idea relating to racism and racial privilege. On March 15th 2021, the American conservative activist Christopher Rufo, who is credited with igniting the current conflict over 'critical race theory' (Wallace-Wells 2021), reflected on his tactics in a series of tweets:

We have successfully frozen their brand—"critical race theory"—into the public conversation and are steadily driving up negative perceptions. (Rufo 2021b)

He continued:

The goal is to have the public read something crazy in the newspaper and immediately think "critical race theory." We have decodified the term and will recodify it to annex the entire range of cultural constructions that are unpopular with Americans. (Rufo 2021a)

Rufo has openly admitted to changing the meaning of the term 'critical race theory' to prevent its original meaning from being understood and fulfil his political agenda. I will explore the role of hermeneutical sabotage as a political tactic in section 5.

The dominant social tools for understanding fail to explain structural racism; the development of critical race theory is a form of epistemic resistance that attempts to correct this deficiency. 'Critical race theory', though in use within academia for decades by predominantly black academics working on racial justice, was not widely known outside of academic and activist circles until the anti-critical race theory backlash began following demands for racial justice after the murder of George Floyd in 2020. There is now widespread awareness of the term 'critical race theory', but, thanks to the work of Rufo and others, it is pejoratively associated with Marxism, or ideas such as that children are being taught that they should feel guilty about being white (Murray 2020).

The harms of this hermeneutical sabotage are two-fold. Firstly, the prejudices in the dominant hermeneutical resources have been maintained: the deficiencies with dominant understandings of race and racism that a critical race theory-based analysis aimed to fix have been upheld by preventing widespread uptake of 'critical race theory' in its original meaning. The dominant hermeneutical resources have been worsened as the introduction of new meanings to the term 'critical race theory' has misled people about the nature of anti-racist activism. Secondly, hermeneutical sabotage has upheld hermeneutical marginalisation and epistemic oppression: it

has prevented a marginalised group from contributing to the dominant tools of social understanding by undermining their ability to share a resistant hermeneutical resource.

This act of hermeneutical sabotage was possible due to pre-existing hermeneutical marginalisation. The fact that the dominant hermeneutical resources obscured aspects of racism and the hermeneutical marginalisation faced by Black anti-racist activists meant the resistant hermeneutic resources they introduced were vulnerable to dismissal and misunderstanding, as well as the type of manipulation enacted by Rufo. This sabotage was made possible by Rufo's position as a dominantly situated knower. Rufo was able to spread his manipulation of 'critical race theory' through his appearances on Fox News, from which the 'critical race theory' controversy was picked up by US President Donald Trump (Meckler and Dawsey 2021). The term has similarly become a tool for the right-wing press and politicians in the UK engaging in 'culture war' political tactics (Murray 2020; Wallace-Wells 2021). Rufo has actively worsened prejudices in the dominant hermeneutical resources for understanding race and racism; this constitutes an act of hermeneutical sabotage.

4.3 Introduction of New Prejudiced Hermeneutical Resources

The third type of hermeneutical sabotage occurs when dominantly situated knowers develop new hermeneutical resources that obscure the experiences of the marginalised. An example of this is the term 'trans-identified male', used to refer to trans women, as exemplified by the case in the introduction. The group 'Transgender Trend' which campaigns against trans-inclusive education in schools and against children receiving gender affirming healthcare, gives a list of terminology on their website including 'trans-identified male' which they claim 'prioritise[s] the sex of the person to avoid confusion' (Transgender Trend 2025). Transgender Trend explicitly state their goal of preventing the uptake of trans-inclusive terminology, claiming their own terminology is 'correct' and that using what they term 'transgender terminology' (such as the pronoun 'he' to refer to a trans man) supports 'transgender ideology' (Transgender Trend 2025). This is clearly a case of intentional action and not an accidental usage or honest mistake as it involves writing a list of terminology. The person committing the sabotage is aware that the terms being used are not those preferred by trans people, which is shown by the description of preferred terms as 'transgender ideology'. The new prejudiced hermeneutical resource is a new term that counters the hermeneutical resources developed by trans people to describe their experiences. In the case of 'trans-identified male', the term functions to reject trans women's identities and experiences as women and to dismiss the relevance of being trans. This is sufficient to make this a case of hermeneutical sabotage.

Those who commit this type of sabotage may frame the introduction of new terms as a mere difference of opinion about the right way to understand people's identities and experiences, such as the identities of trans women. However, within a context of hermeneutical marginalisation, this functions to counter the epistemic resistance of the oppressed. It replaces the terms developed by trans people to describe their experiences with others, perpetuating the hermeneutical marginalisation of trans people by obstructing their ability to contribute to dominant hermeneutical resources. The perpetuation of hermeneutical marginalisation makes this a case of hermeneutical sabotage, not just a competing explanation.

The hermeneutical sabotage in this case has been less effective than the case of 'critical race theory'. 'Trans woman' is now a widely recognised term, whereas 'trans-identified male' is less so. Nonetheless, trans people remain a hermeneutically marginalised group, so their identities and experiences are vulnerable to mis- or re-interpretation, as has occurred in this case. Whilst the exact term 'trans-identified male' is less widely used, in recent years referring to trans women as 'males who identify as female' (e.g. Sodha 2025) has become more widespread, which is also an instance of hermeneutical sabotage through the introduction of new, prejudiced terminology.

4.4 Introduction of Prejudiced Concepts Without New Terms

The fourth type of hermeneutical sabotage occurs when a prejudiced concept is introduced without the introduction of new terms. Hermeneutical sabotage of this type involves changing the dominant meaning of an existing term. This type of hermeneutical sabotage is harder to achieve, as unlike in cases where new terms are introduced, or where the meaning of a term introduced by a hermeneutically marginalised community is changed, this involves changing the usage of an established term. This is only doable by those in a position of considerable power to influence what it is people know and how they understand the world.

One area where this can take place is the media, where editors can influence dominant cultural narratives, and can introduce prejudiced hermeneutical resources by changing how people use terms that are already established. The usage of the term 'asylum seeker' is an example of how this type of hermeneutical sabotage occurs. 'Asylum seeker' refers to a person who has arrived in a new country with the intention to claim asylum, or who has claimed asylum and is waiting for the outcome of the decision. 'Asylum seeker' is a term that exists because of border and immigration policies; while it refers to a marginalised group of people, it is not a term that has arisen from the hermeneutical resistance of a marginalised community. It is a term that describes

a group's experiences within the context of immigration and asylum law.⁵⁰ However, the ability of asylum seekers to use this term to communicate their experiences to others has been inhibited by newspapers in the UK, who have added meanings to the term 'asylum seeker'. The term has now become synonymous, in some uses, with 'illegal immigration'. For example, Wright (2021) discusses 'illegal immigrants' making asylum claims. This connects asylum seekers to crime, even though entering a country to seek asylum is an internationally recognised human right, regardless of whether the country is entered via legal means. The specific experiences of asylum seekers are also obscured when the term is used synonymously with 'migrant' or 'economic migrant', which implies that the decision to flee a country is voluntary (see Sales 2021 for an example).

Consequently, the prejudices in the dominant hermeneutical resources have been worsened: the hermeneutical sabotage of 'asylum seeker' has distorted hermeneutic resources used for understanding the experiences of a marginalised group. The hermeneutical marginalisation of asylum seekers has been perpetuated, as the association of asylum seeking with criminality limits their ability to contribute to the dominant hermeneutical resources for understanding their experiences.

Transphobic attempts to alter public understanding of 'conversion therapy' are also an example of this kind of hermeneutical sabotage. 'Conversion therapy' is a term that is widely used to describe practices that aim to change a person's sexuality or gender identity. However, anti-trans activists have attempted to shift public understanding of this term to exclude so-called 'therapy' that discourages people, particularly children, from developing or exploring a trans identity, or claim that healthcare for trans children is itself a form of conversion therapy (Turner 2021; Adu 2023). The distortion of this term is related to clear political goals (to ensure that trans antagonistic 'therapy' is not banned under any proposed legislation to ban conversion therapy, and to further restrict trans children's access to gender-affirming care), but it is also a form of epistemic injustice because distorting this term inhibits the ability of trans people who have experienced transphobic conversion therapy to use this term to explain their experiences.

5. Differences from Other Forms of Epistemic Injustice and Oppression

On the account I have developed, hermeneutical sabotage is a type of epistemic injustice and oppression distinct from hermeneutical injustice. The taxonomy I have put forward includes four types of 'hermeneutical sabotage' for which I have offered examples. I will now compare

⁵⁰ I do not claim that the categorisation of people as 'asylum seekers' is how border and immigration law should work, only that because people are categorised as 'asylum seekers', having the original concept associated with the term enables people to communicate aspects of their experiences which are lost when the prejudices in the dominant hermeneutical resources are worsened through the association of a prejudiced concept with this term.

hermeneutical sabotage with other forms of epistemic injustice and oppression and demonstrate how my taxonomy of hermeneutical sabotage provides a better way of understanding the set of cases I have described, as well as the differences between hermeneutical sabotage and other related injustices.

5.1 Resource Obscuring Epistemic Appropriation

Epistemic appropriation, as described by Davis, occurs when epistemic resources developed by a marginalised group are taken up by a dominant group in ways that benefit the powerful and are detached from the marginalised knowers and communities where those resources originated (2018, 705). In Davis's telling, the epistemic resources themselves are preserved, but the development of the resource is attributed to members of a dominant group, so the marginalised do not receive credit for their epistemic contributions.

Podosky extends the concept of epistemic appropriation to cases where the epistemic resource is taken up by people outside of the marginalised group where it originated and the meaning of the resource is altered, making it less useful for the marginalised to explain their experiences. He terms this 'resource obscuring epistemic appropriation' (Podosky 2023, 149). Podosky gives the example of the word 'woke', which originated within African American communities to describe an awareness of social justice issues, particularly those relating to race (Podosky 2023, 150). The term has been taken up in majority white online communities, but is used to describe more trivial concerns, or used disparagingly by those opposed to social justice movements (Podosky 2023, 151). This shares features of the 'appropriating' type of hermeneutical sabotage involving distorting epistemic resources developed by the marginalised. However, content obscuring appropriation occurs when the resources developed by the marginalised are misinterpreted by the dominantly situated knowers. In cases of hermeneutical sabotage, the resources developed by the marginalised are rejected, rather than misinterpreted.

Resource obscuring epistemic appropriation occurs when a concept is misunderstood owing to active ignorance (Podosky 2023, 155). By contrast, hermeneutical sabotage where resources developed by marginalised groups are appropriated does not involve misunderstanding the terms. The hermeneutical saboteur is aware of what the resources developed by marginalised groups mean, but they do not agree that those meanings provide a better way of understanding the world. In the example of critical race theory, Rufo has made clear that he understands that the way he is using 'critical race theory' is not in line with its use among academics who work on critical race theory. While Rufo may be ignorant of the realities of racism, describing his appropriation of critical race theory as due to active ignorance gives an inadequate explanation for this case where he is knowingly using the term in a way that differs from the meaning

developed by anti-racism campaigners. Content obscuring epistemic appropriation is insufficient to describe cases where the wrongdoing of the perpetrator cannot be fully attributed to active ignorance; for these cases we need the concept of hermeneutical sabotage.

5.2 Wilful Hermeneutical Ignorance and Contributory Injustice

In cases of wilful hermeneutical ignorance, dominantly situated knowers refuse to acknowledge the tools developed by the marginalised to better understand the world, causing them to continue to misinterpret it (Pohlhaus 2012). Wilful hermeneutical ignorance explains how dominantly situated knowers fail to accept resources that would help them to understand the experiences of people who are hermeneutically marginalised. However, wilful hermeneutical ignorance is insufficient to describe cases where the perpetrator actively perpetuates hermeneutical marginalisation beyond refusing to accept new hermeneutical resources. Taking the comments made by Alison (as discussed in the introduction) as an example, wilful hermeneutical ignorance could explain why she is ‘not willing to say trans woman’, but not why she uses ‘trans-identified men’ (Wollaston 2021). Interpreting this case as wilful hermeneutical ignorance would fail to capture the worsening of dominant hermeneutical resources enacted by introducing new prejudicial terms.

Contributory injustice is the maintenance of structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources that results in epistemic harm to a knower caused by an agent wilfully refusing to use hermeneutical resources developed by the marginalised (Dotson 2012, 31). Like hermeneutical sabotage, contributory injustice is a form of epistemic oppression; knowers are prevented from contributing equally to the shared hermeneutical resources. However, ‘hermeneutical sabotage’ is needed to explain cases where the actions of the perpetrator go further than wilful refusal of hermeneutical resources. Like wilful hermeneutical ignorance, contributory injustice cannot account for the epistemic injustice that occurs because new prejudicial concepts are introduced, or when resistant hermeneutical resources are manipulated. Hermeneutical sabotage is needed to describe how the structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources are not just maintained but actively worsened in these cases.

5.3 Deception-Based Hermeneutical Injustice

Luzzi (2024) develops an account of what he terms deception-based hermeneutical injustice through considering the experiences of intersex people who have undergone genital mutilation as babies and are lied to about their bodies: they are not informed about the true nature of their intersex condition and therefore are unable to apply concepts that would enable them to

understand their experiences.⁵¹ Deception-based hermeneutical injustice is similar to hermeneutical sabotage in that it describes cases where individuals cause a hermeneutical type of injustice which is not fully explained by ignorance on behalf of the perpetrator; it shares the ‘active’ feature of hermeneutical sabotage. The cases of hermeneutical sabotage I have described are clearly not examples of deception-based hermeneutical injustice as they do not involve deception, but deception-based hermeneutical injustice is also not a type of hermeneutical sabotage due to some crucial differences.

In cases of deception-based hermeneutical injustice, the victim is lied to about the facts of the case so is unable to apply relevant hermeneutical resources to their own experience, even if they possess those resources (Luzzi 2024, 161). Like the case of Carmita Wood (who, Fricker argues, was unable to fully understand her experience of sexual harassment), there is a cognitive harm as the victim is unable to sufficiently understand their own experience. However, in cases of hermeneutical sabotage, the harm is communicative as victims possess relevant concepts and the ability to apply them to their own experiences (Goetze 2018, 78). In cases of hermeneutical sabotage, the hermeneutically marginalised knower is prevented from having their experience understood by others but can understand their own experience, which is not the case for victims of deception-based hermeneutical injustice.

5.4 Positive Hermeneutical Injustice

Falbo distinguishes between positive and negative hermeneutical injustice, where negative hermeneutical injustice occurs because of a lacuna in the available hermeneutical resources and positive hermeneutical injustice because of ‘oppressive and distorting concepts that crowd out, defeat, or preempt the application of an available and more accurate concept’ (2022, 354). Hermeneutical sabotage, while not a type of hermeneutical injustice, fits broadly into Falbo’s category of positive hermeneutical injustice, as it occurs because of the presence of distorting concepts rather than because of a lack of appropriate concepts. However, the concept of ‘hermeneutical sabotage’ explicates a phenomenon not described by Falbo, who is concerned with the use of distorting concepts, such as in situations where this results in a conceptual clash. Hermeneutical sabotage involves intentional action where prejudiced hermeneutical resources are developed and shared, whereas the cases Falbo describes concern prejudiced concepts that are already part of the dominant hermeneutical resources.

⁵¹ I remain neutral as to whether the case Luzzi describes is a form of hermeneutical injustice as he claims, but this issue is orthogonal to my point.

6. Hermeneutical Sabotage as a Political Tool

By comparing hermeneutical sabotage with other forms of epistemic injustice and oppression, I have highlighted features of hermeneutical sabotage that are crucially different from these other concepts. The concept of ‘hermeneutical sabotage’ reveals aspects of the four cases I have described that would be misdescribed if they were interpreted as resource obscuring epistemic appropriation, wilful hermeneutical ignorance, contributory injustice, or positive hermeneutical injustice. The taxonomy I have developed facilitates the recognition of these cases as hermeneutical sabotage, which is crucial for addressing them.

One key feature of these cases highlighted by hermeneutical sabotage is the ‘active’ component, which is different from the active or wilful ignorance which explains some other forms of epistemic injustice and oppression. Wilful and active ignorance are forms of motivated ignorance for which individuals are accountable. Individuals can perpetrate hermeneutical injustice and similar epistemic injustices due to wilful and active ignorance; explaining my four cases as examples of hermeneutical sabotage does not change how perpetrators of the injustices are identified. The perpetrators of hermeneutical sabotage may be actively ignorant, but this ignorance is insufficient to explain how perpetrators actively worsen prejudices in the dominant hermeneutical resources through distorting resistant hermeneutical resources and introducing new, prejudiced hermeneutical resources.

One way that hermeneutical sabotage is connected to ignorance is that it leads to further ignorance. When the resources developed by marginalised groups are distorted, or new prejudiced resources are introduced, this contributes towards widespread misunderstanding of the experiences of marginalised groups. Sometimes the perpetuation of ignorance is a deliberate stated goal of the person who engages in hermeneutical sabotage. However, even if the perpetuation of ignorance isn’t the goal of the perpetrator, hermeneutical sabotage functions to further political agendas that perpetuate the oppression of hermeneutically marginalised groups. Hermeneutical sabotage is sometimes a political tool, and this feature of it cannot be fully understood through the framing of the active ignorance of the perpetrator, because its usage as a political tool involves active, intentional action.

In the example of critical race theory, Rufo has been explicit that his appropriation of the term is a political tactic, one that has been largely successful in fulfilling his political agenda. Referring to his tweets explaining how he aimed to ‘recodify’ critical race theory, he described his approach as ‘obvious’ and part of a ‘public persuasion campaign’ (Meckler and Dawsey 2021). Anti-critical race theory bills have been proposed in states across the US, and British MP and former equalities minister Kemi Badenoch has spoken against critical race theory in the House of

Commons (Murray 2020; Wallace-Wells 2021). Hermeneutical sabotage involves active, intentional action, features which can make it part of a political strategy.

Similarly, the development of new prejudiced terms to describe trans women such as ‘trans-identified men’ and the refusal to refer to them as ‘trans women’ and instead use ‘transwomen’ are part of a political movement opposed to the goals of trans liberation movements, as shown by the explicit aims of the group ‘Transgender Trend’ (2025). Unlike Christopher Rufo’s manipulation of ‘critical race theory’, these terms often reflect sincerely held beliefs about how gender should be understood. The usage of these terms is not always a deliberate tactic, but the effects are politically advantageous to those opposed to the goals of trans liberation movements. As discussed in chapter two, those opposed to the goals of trans liberation movements aim to exclude at least some trans women from the legal category of women and from women-only spaces; the terms ‘transwoman’ and ‘trans-identified man’ function to position trans women outside the category of women in language, a rhetorical tool that makes these political aims appear as ‘common sense’.⁵² As well as helping to achieve these political goals, by positioning trans women outside of the category of ‘women’ in language, this form of hermeneutical sabotage is also a way to reinforce cissexist ideology.

In the final example, the distorted meaning of ‘asylum seeker’ functions to support a broader anti-immigration political agenda. For those who are opposed to people moving to their country from abroad, redefining asylum seekers as ‘migrants’ who are presented as a problem to be dealt with and a burden on resources makes them a more legitimate target (Sales 2021).

‘Hermeneutical sabotage’ reveals how distortions of resistant epistemic resources, and the development of new prejudiced hermeneutical resources, can function as political tools. This is crucial for developing strategies to counter them.

7. Conclusion

I have identified a hitherto unidentified form of epistemic injustice and oppression that I have termed ‘hermeneutical sabotage’, and I have defined and developed a taxonomy of it.

Hermeneutical sabotage is a type of epistemic injustice related to hermeneutical injustice. It occurs when the hermeneutical marginalisation of a group is perpetuated by an individual or group who actively maintains or worsens prejudices in dominant hermeneutical resources. The taxonomy I have developed distinguishes four ways in which hermeneutical sabotage can be enacted: distorting resistant hermeneutical resources; appropriating resistant hermeneutical

⁵² Examples of how the terms used to describe trans women reflect positions on trans rights issues include uses of ‘transwoman’ and misgendering (Hinsliff 2019; Lawford-Smith 2021) by those opposed to self-ID based reform of the Gender Recognition Act and trans women’s access to gender segregated spaces for women.

resources; introducing new, prejudiced terms; and assigning prejudicial concepts to existing terms. I have distinguished hermeneutical sabotage from other forms of epistemic injustice and oppression. The account of hermeneutical sabotage I have developed enables the identification of instances of this phenomenon as what they are and illustrates how hermeneutical sabotage may be used to further non-epistemic marginalisation and oppression. Having the concept of ‘hermeneutical sabotage’ better equips us to address this feature of it. Hermeneutical sabotage is another form of epistemic injustice that forms part of the cissexist ideology/epistemic injustice feedback loop that I outlined in chapter two: hermeneutical sabotage in the trans panic takes place in the context of a ‘debate’ where it makes trans inclusive arguments harder to make and less likely to be taken seriously. As well as being used by anti-trans activists to achieve their political goals, hermeneutical sabotage helps to uphold widespread ignorance of trans people’s experiences by maintaining or worsening deficiencies in the dominant hermeneutical resources. The maintenance of this ignorance also helps to uphold cissexist ideology.

Chapter 5: Ideological True Beliefs

1. Introduction

As I discussed in chapter two, one prominent feature of the UK trans panic has been claims that trans women are a threat to cisgender women in all-women spaces; the prospect of this threat was heightened by proposed changes to the Gender Recognition Act (GRA). In that chapter I explained how this claim reflects transphobic prejudices against trans women and misrepresents the effect of proposed changes to the GRA, which do not affect trans women's ability to access women's changing rooms and toilets. There is also no evidence that self-declaration-based access policies harm cisgender women in all-women spaces such as toilets (Sharpe 2020).

One feature of the trans panic I did not discuss was the affective component for those who are opposed to the inclusion of trans women in all female spaces. Even though there is no evidence that trans women pose a risk to the physical safety of cis women in women's spaces, there are cis women who feel that the presence of a trans or gender non-conforming person is a threat or an invasion of their privacy. One Cambridge city councillor who is opposed to allowing trans people to use single-sex toilets in accordance with their gender identity argued that trans women in toilets risk cisgender women's 'privacy and dignity' and claimed: 'if you are a female in public loos at night and there is a person who is clearly male, how does she know they are not a threat?' (Thomas 2018). Claims that trans women pose a risk to cisgender women are false but claims that cisgender women sometimes *feel* threatened by the presence or prospect of trans women in those spaces are true. There is nothing 'innately' threatening about the presence of trans women in women's spaces; rather, ideological practices and social meanings, and the concerted political effort made by anti-trans activists to drive up fear of trans people, have made it the case that some cis women do genuinely feel threatened by the presence of trans women or feel that their presence is or would be an invasion of their privacy. Anti-trans activists then utilise claims about the existence of these feelings to argue against trans inclusive policies, as was done by the Cambridge city councillor.

In this chapter, I argue that one of the things that makes some claims made by anti-trans activists so difficult to tackle is that they are true, and that it is not in the interests of activists to deny them. Ideology can shape the world, and consequently, render such beliefs true (Haslanger 2017a, 150; 2012a). These true beliefs are then expressed as true claims by anti-trans campaigners. This is occurring in the trans panic, but as one instance of a broader phenomenon.

As I outlined in chapter one, I use the term 'ideology' pejoratively to refer to epistemically deficient networks of social meanings which obscure injustice and uphold systems of oppression.

Through the shaping of social practices, relations between people, perceptions, and attributions of value, ideologies can shape what is true through social construction. I argue here that beliefs and claims that reflect these ideological truths can play a particularly pernicious role in upholding an ideology because, when they are expressed, they make it harder to argue against other ideological claims. I term these beliefs ‘ideological true beliefs’ (ITBs). For example, a person can truthfully believe that some cisgender women *feel threatened by* the presence of trans women in toilets. This true claim is then used by anti-trans activists to provide support for the false ideological claim that trans women *are a risk* to cis women’s safety, and to justify unjust trans-exclusionary practices. Revealing how certain claims are made true by, and reinforce, ideology, helps to explain why they are so hard to tackle. Because ITBs often reflect something true about the unjust nature of reality, it is not in the interests of activists to deny these claims. This makes engaging with those who espouse ideology more difficult and pushes activists who are engaged in ‘debate’ or simply one-to-one conversations with anti-trans campaigners onto trickier conversational terrain.

In section 2, I discuss social construction and explain how I am using the term ‘ideology’ in greater detail. Roughly speaking, something is socially constructed if its existence depends on social relations. Ideologies play an important role in social construction because they shape practices, the distribution of resources, the physical arrangement of space, and beliefs about the world; in other words, ideologies shape social relations. It is through ideological social construction that ideology shapes what is true. In section 3, I focus on the types of true beliefs ideology shapes. Ideology shapes true beliefs both by shaping what is true, and by shaping which parts of the world people pay attention to and form beliefs about through its influence on patterns of perception and attention, and on attributions of value (Haslanger 2017a).

I discuss some of the epistemic flaws of ITBs in section 4, as identifying epistemic issues provides avenues through which these beliefs can be challenged. ITBs are often epistemically flawed because they are based on motivated reasoning and biases and not based on evidence, and are subsequently resistant to counterevidence. Ideological true beliefs are often expressed as statistical claims, both general and specific ones. Following Munton (2019), I argue these claims are often epistemically flawed because of a general flaw with statistical claims that is not specific to ideological statistical claims. Identifying these epistemic flaws can help us to identify some potential tactics for responding to ITBs. However, I also identify a category of ITBs that may not be epistemically flawed and can be cases of ideological knowledge, which may prove more difficult to tackle.

In section 5, I argue that ITBs play a particularly pernicious role in upholding an ideology, and that this is occurring in the trans panic. ITBs are appealed to by defenders of ideology to support false ideological claims and unjust practices. By appearing to provide evidence for false ideological claims, ITBs can make the false claims, and the wider ideology, harder to tackle.

2. Ideology and Social Construction

For the purposes of this chapter, I distinguish between two types of social construction: constitutive social construction and causal social construction.⁵³ Things in the world are constitutively socially constructed when what they are is constituted by social relations, so that if those social relations were taken away they would cease to exist (Haslanger 2012c, 86–88). Money is constitutively socially constructed and is an intuitive example of how things created by social construction are a part of reality – it is difficult to deny both the existence of money, and the fact that it is socially constructed. There is a fact about the amount of money in my bank account, even though the existence of money depends on social relations. Social relations include agreements and understandings between people and institutions, and the way that they are formally encoded in practices. Social construction can also causally shape the world; something is causally socially constructed if social factors and relations are involved in bringing it into existence, but an account of what it is can be made without reference to social factors (Haslanger 2012c, 86–88). The amount of money in a person's bank account is likely to impact the quality and condition of the housing in which they live. Though social factors are part of the story of how a house ended up in a particular condition, its condition could be described without reference to social factors by describing the level of deterioration of the structure of the building, the presence or absence of mould, and infestation by rodents.

2.1 Social Construction and Truth

My thinking on the way that social construction, and specifically ideological social construction, shapes reality and truth has been influenced by the work of Catharine MacKinnon. She writes:

Where liberal feminism sees sexism primarily as an illusion or a myth to be dispelled, an inaccuracy to be corrected, feminism sees the male point of view as fundamental to the male power to create the world in its own image...Feminism distinctively as such comprehends that what counts as truth is produced in the interest of those with power to

⁵³ Haslanger (2012c, 86–94) discusses further types and subtypes of social construction, but as social construction is not my main focus here, I mention only these two main types, as this is sufficient to motivate the claim that the truths I discuss concern things that are socially constructed.

shape reality, and that this process is as pervasive as it is necessary as it is changeable.
(1989, 117–18)

She adds:

[M]en create the world from their own point of view, which then becomes the truth to be described. (MacKinnon 1989, 121)

And goes on to say:

What is objectively known corresponds to the world and can be verified by being pointed to (as science does) because the world itself is controlled from the same point of view.

Combining, like any form of power, legitimation with force, male power extends beneath the representation of reality to its construction: it makes women (as it were) and so verifies (makes true) who women “are” in its view, simultaneously confirming its way of being and its vision of truth, as it creates the social reality that supports both.

(MacKinnon 1989, 122)⁵⁴

Roughly, things are socially constructed when their existence, either causally or constitutively, depends on social relations. Sexism is fundamental to social relations and social power, so sexist social relations shape reality. MacKinnon argues that women are constructed as sexually servile. Rather than this being a lie about the way that women are, MacKinnon argues that women *are* sexually servile because they are constructed that way, and that the social construction of women *as* sexually servile serves men’s sexual interests. Generally, men benefit from the hierarchical gender system that grants them positions of power and oppresses women. Though MacKinnon is discussing men’s sexual desire, her focus is on the way that this is enacted through social power, and the desires of men as a gender rather than the beliefs or desires of individuals.

MacKinnon’s focus is on the social construction of women, but her argument that social construction is implicated in a system of injustice and can shape reality and truth can be applied beyond the case of social categories. The important point that I take MacKinnon to highlight here is that what is true is often unjust because reality is shaped by unjust social relations. In the trans panic, the relevant socially constructed features are people’s perceptions of threat and privacy. I explain how these are constructed in section 3.

⁵⁴ MacKinnon talks of sexism and sexist social arrangements as the ‘male point of view’. This claim should not be interpreted conspiratorially as an agreement among men as a group, or as reflecting the point of view of men as individuals. An alternative and non-conspiratorial reading of MacKinnon’s claim that women are constructed in men’s interests is that the way that women are socially constructed non-coincidentally serves men’s interests (1989, 131).

2.2 Ideology

As I outlined in chapter one, I am using the term ‘ideology’, following Haslanger, in a way that is pejorative and non-cognitive. Ideologies, on this account, are not comprised of beliefs but by networks of social meanings that are ‘out there’ in the world. These social meanings shape practices and organise people in unjust ways (Haslanger 2017a, 159). Ideologies shape beliefs about the world, but ideologies are not themselves comprised of beliefs. Ideologies provide tools (for interpreting, engaging with, and understanding the world), and shape the distribution of resources and attributions of value (Haslanger 2017a, 155–57). Ideologies function to uphold unjust systems of social relations and they obscure injustice. Ideologies are epistemically deficient; they may not always consist of outright falsities (though sometimes they do), but the social meanings they consist of can be misleading, and the way that they shape patterns of perception and attention can lead us to overlook parts of the world, leading people to have only a partial picture of it.

Dominant ideological social meanings (at least in part) ‘constitute the social world’ meaning they can be true (Haslanger 2012a, 426); this is the general phenomenon that MacKinnon describes happening in the case of social meanings about women’s sexual servility. Ideology can make itself true by entrenching problematic ideological social meanings into practices, so the world is organised in ways that reflects ideologies (Haslanger 2019a, 119). For example, ideological social meanings about women include that they are better at childcare. This social meaning is embedded in practices (such as policies around maternity leave), so women do more childcare than men, who are not given opportunities to care for children, and often are not expected to do so. Because women do more childcaring, they learn how to do it well. There are, of course, people who are exceptions to this, but a person with the belief ‘women are, on average, better at childcare than men’ likely has a true belief because this ideological social meaning has become embedded in practices that have made it true.

When I claim that ideology shapes reality and truth, I am appealing to truth in a mundane sense, just as MacKinnon does, as something that ‘can be verified by being pointed to’ (1989, 122). It is true, for example, that I am currently sitting at a desk as I write this; claiming that something is true does not require that it is ‘natural, or inevitable, or necessary’ (Haslanger 2012c, 97). I am not claiming that all truth or all reality is socially constructed, nor that all of what is socially constructed is ideological. My claim is, more moderately, that some of what is real exists because of social construction, and some social construction is ideological.

MacKinnon also helps to explain what we are doing when we engage in ideology critique in a situation where reality itself is shaped by ideology. She writes:

[T]o be realistic about sexuality socially is to see it from the male point of view, and to be a feminist is to do so with a critical awareness that that is what one is doing. Because male power creates the reality of the world to which feminist insights, when accurate, will refer, feminist theory will simply capture that reality but expose it as specifically male for the first time. (MacKinnon 1989, 124–25)

A person has true beliefs about the world when their beliefs accurately reflect the way the world is, even when those beliefs are true because the world has been shaped by an ideology. People engaged in ideology critique know that the world those true beliefs reflect is the way it is due to social construction, rather than being necessary, natural, or unchangeable, and that ideology plays a role in that construction.

3. What Sort of Beliefs Does Ideology Make True?

When I say we can have beliefs that are made true by ideology, I am talking about a subset of beliefs that reflect or are related to ideological social meanings, as not all beliefs that reflect ideology are true. Ideologies often consist of naturalising social meanings, which are claims that certain features of the world are biological and unchangeable. Naturalising social meanings cannot be made true by social construction because something which is socially constructed is not ‘natural’ in the sense claimed by ideologies as innate or unchangeable. However, ideological practices can make true related non-naturalising social meanings. For example, ideological social practices cannot make true the claim: ‘women are naturally better caregivers than men’, where ‘naturally’ is assumed to refer to an innate sex difference. However, in a world where sexist ideology shapes practices relating to the distribution of caregiving responsibilities, it may be true that ‘on average, women are better caregivers than men’, because women opportunities – or are forced – to develop this ability by social pressures, whilst men are not.⁵⁵ I define ITBs as follows:

⁵⁵ Ideological social meanings often take the form of generics, and ideological beliefs and claims often embed generics (e.g. ‘women are good care givers’). Generics are statements that express generalisations about features of a group or category, but don’t tell you how many of the group have this feature (Leslie 2014, 208). However, the truth conditions of generics are highly debated, and a discussion of the truth conditions of generics would be orthogonal to my aim of explaining the role played by true beliefs that reflect ideology. There is extensive literature on the truth conditions of generics, for a selection of views see Leslie (2007), Asher and Pelletier (2013), and Carlson (2008). I take it that some ideological true beliefs will embed generics, but I leave the role that generics play in upholding an ideology to one side, except to note that activists have different options available to them when they respond to generics, even if those generics are true. Activists can respond to even potentially true generics by denying them to deny what they falsely imply (Haslanger 2012b), which, as I will argue, isn’t an option for responding to other ITBs.

Ideological true beliefs: true beliefs that have been made true by ideological social construction, and function to uphold ideology and a broader system of oppression and unjust practices.

To illustrate the sort of pernicious true beliefs I am discussing, and how they are difficult for activists to respond to, take the following fictionalised conversation:

Sarah: All disabled people are lazy.

Andrew: No they aren't! My brother is disabled, and he is involved in local community projects.

Sarah: Well, disabled people are much less likely to have a job than able-bodied people.

Sarah's first statement reflects an ideological stereotype about disabled people. The statement is false and reflects her prejudiced attitude towards disabled people. As this is a false claim, Andrew has an easy tactic available for responding to this claim which he employs: he denies the claim. He also offers a counter example to the claim.

Sarah responds to Andrew with a true claim: in the UK, disabled people are more likely to be unemployed or non-economically active than non-disabled people.⁵⁶ This claim is an example of an ITB. While negating Sarah's first claim is a good option for Andrew to respond with, it isn't a good option for responding to her second, factually correct, claim even though Sarah appears to be using this true claim to provide evidence for a false claim. In this context, it appears that Sarah is utilising the true claim that disabled people are less likely to be employed as evidence for the false claim that disabled people are lazy. This claim is more difficult for Andrew to respond to. Sometimes, denying the truth will be rhetorically disadvantageous; I expand on this in section 5. More importantly, it is not in Andrew's emancipatory interests to deny Sarah's true statistical claim. The statistic reflects the exclusion of disabled people from the workforce and the realities of disabled people's experiences. To deny this claim would deny an important aspect of the experiences of disabled people.

The issue is not unique to this example. Because ideology functions to uphold oppression, ideology shapes the world in ways that are oppressive, and the true beliefs we can form about the ideologically shaped world reflect the realities of oppression. This means denying ITBs would be

⁵⁶ In July-September 2022, the employment rate for disabled people was 52.6%, compared with 82.5% for non-disabled people. These statistics can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2022/employment-of-disabled-people-2022>.

counterproductive because activists cannot deny the existence of the oppression they are seeking to alleviate.

To challenge the way that Sarah's factually correct statement is used to provide evidence for her false claim, Andrew needs to respond with something like: 'not having a job doesn't make a person 'lazy', having a job isn't the only thing that makes a person a valuable member of society, and the value placed on 'productivity' is shaped by an unjust capitalist ideology!'. When responding to those who use true claims which are made true by an ideology to provide evidence for other (often false) ideological claims, the only available option to challenge this usage is ideology critique that challenges the legitimacy of ideological claims about how the world should be organised, and the distribution of value under an ideology. This will almost always involve a value judgement which can be contested. Because the easier response (denying the claim) is ruled out, the activist who wishes to challenge the way the ideological true belief is being used as evidence is pushed onto more difficult conversational terrain and must have a more substantial conversation. This makes challenging the way that the ITB functions to uphold the broader ideology, harder.

3.1 Type 1 ITBs

I divide ITBs into two rough categories: 'type 1' and 'type 2' ITBs. 'Women are, on average, better at childcare than men' is an example of a 'type 1' ideological true belief because it reflects an ideological social meaning which has been made true by ideological social construction.⁵⁷ Type 2 ITBs are beliefs made true by an ideology that do not directly reflect an ideological social meaning but nonetheless function to uphold an ideology, typically because of the way they are employed as 'evidence' by defenders of ideologies and injustice. The example of a type 2 ITB that I expand on further in section 3.2 is '21% of the students enrolled in computing degrees at UK universities are female'. There are no ideological social meanings about what percentage of computer science students are female, but statistics such as this are often used by defenders of claims that men and women have different 'innate preferences' or that some subjects are not suitable for 'female brains'. Not all ITBs fit neatly into one category as identifying the exact content of a belief or an ideological social meaning can be difficult; these are not intended to function as mutually exclusive categories. I distinguish between type 1 and type 2 ITBs to make it clear that not all the beliefs that ideological social construction makes true are themselves ideological social meanings.

⁵⁷ By 'reflects' I mean that the content of the belief roughly matches the content of the ideological social meaning.

An example of a potential type 1 ITB is ‘all transgender people have a diagnosable mental disorder’. The designation of what is and is not a diagnosable mental disorder is socially constructed and codified into diagnostic manuals – what it means to have a mental illness is to be diagnosable according to criteria decided on by a medical authority. The psychiatric diagnosis of ‘gender identity disorder’ was included in the *Diagnostics and Statistics Manual of mental disorders* (DSM) used for diagnosing patients in the US and some international contexts from 1980. This term applied to people whose gender identity didn’t match their sex assigned at birth, so, transgender people. From 2013 the term ‘gender dysphoria’ was used to diagnose trans people instead; this was also categorised as a psychiatric disorder. The *International Categorisation of Diseases* (ICD), upon which UK diagnostic manuals are based, included ‘transsexualism’ and ‘gender identity disorder of childhood’ as mental health disorders in the 10th edition, published in 1990. The 2019 ICD replaced these diagnoses with ‘gender incongruence’ which is not classified as a mental disorder, but uptake of the new diagnosis has not been universal. Therefore, until relatively recently, a person with the belief ‘all transgender people have a diagnosable mental illness’ would have had a true belief because being trans was categorised as a mental illness. Ideology shaped the world, in this case it shapes the diagnostic criteria for a mental illness, and this is what made the belief true. This is an example of a type 1 ideological true belief because, as discussed in chapter two, there are transphobic ideological social meanings that trans people are, in virtue of their trans identity, mentally ill. Ideological social construction made it true that all trans people had a diagnosable mental health disorder, and this belief functioned to uphold an ideology and oppression – anti-trans campaigners have appealed to the fact that being trans was considered a mental illness to attempt to deny trans people rights, services, and accommodations (e.g., Rawlinson 2017).

3.2 Type 2 ITBs

Ideology also shapes the world in ways that mean people have beliefs that are made true by ideology that function to uphold it, but those beliefs don’t directly reflect ideological social meanings. I refer to these as type 2 ideological true beliefs. These are cases where ideology doesn’t make itself true, but it shapes the world in ways that are often used by those invested in ideologies to provide evidence of ideological social meanings because the way things are in the world is often taken to reflect some underlying property. The example that disabled people are less likely to have jobs illustrates this; there is no ideological social meaning that ‘disabled people are less likely to be employed’, but ableist and capitalist ideology shapes practices such as who is considered worth hiring, and what is considered work, so shapes the employment level of disabled people. Disabled people’s lower levels of employment are then cited to justify

ideology and practices which devalue disabled people's lives and societal contributions, as well as their social exclusion.

Type 2 ITBs often take the form of general statistical claims, but can include more specific statistical claims, as these beliefs may reflect measurements and data. For example, ideological social meanings about gender include naturalising social meanings about 'male brains' being more suited to subjects such as computing.⁵⁸ Ideology shapes practices and social expectations, including shaping the culture of academia and choices of people going to university. In the 2020/21 academic year, only 21% of the students enrolled in computing degrees at UK universities were female.⁵⁹ This is a type 2 ITB, and it is the sort of fact that is appealed to by defenders of sexist ideologies who claim that there is women do not have a 'natural preference' for maths or maths related subjects such as computing. There is no specific ideological social meaning that girls only make up 21% of computing students, but ideology has shaped the world to make this fact and beliefs that reflect it true, and this fact about the world is the sort of purported evidence often employed by defenders of ideologies. I explore the way these claims are used as 'evidence' for ideologies in section 5.

3.3 ITBs in the Trans Panic

In the case of the trans panic, the relevant ideological true beliefs are mostly type 2. One example of an ITB relevant to the trans panic is 'the majority of people in the UK do not think that trans women should be allowed to use women's toilets or changing rooms'; we know this belief is true because of a 2024 survey of public attitudes towards transgender people (Smith 2025).⁶⁰ This true claim about public opinion is made true by the concerted effort of those who defend cissexist ideology to shape public opinion, as well as other ideological practices that reflect the false ideological social meaning that trans women are predatory, and the enforcement of sex-segregated spaces. Anti-trans activists have routinely portrayed trans women as a threat to cisgender women, such as in an advertisement by the organisation Fair Play for Women which leadingly asked readers 'do you think adult males [referring to trans women] should be able to enter female-only sleeping and changing areas or domestic violence refuges?' (Duffy 2018). The true claim *that most people do not think* that trans women should have access to women's toilets

⁵⁸ For a lengthy discussion and debunking of the myth that men and women have different innate preferences for mathematics see Fine (2011).

⁵⁹ Taken from HESA open statistics, available at <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/25-01-2022/sb262-higher-education-student-statistics/subjects>

⁶⁰ This figure rises when it is specified that the trans women has not had 'gender reassignment surgery' (Smith 2025). For simplicity's sake, I'm assuming that the results of this study are accurate, but my point here only depends on the general trends in these statistics.

and changing rooms is then used to justify arguments that trans women *shouldn't have* access to those spaces.

Relevant ITBs in the trans panic also concern privacy, such as 'some cisgender women feel their privacy is invaded by the presence of trans women in single-sex spaces'. This is true; the women-led organisation Sex Matters, which campaigns against trans inclusive policies in the UK, argues that patients' privacy and dignity 'cannot be maintained' if trans patients are placed on wards that correspond with their gender identity. They also claim that a trans person using single-sex washing and toilet facilities in a hospital would undermine the privacy of others (Sex Matters 2021, 8–9).

The concept of 'privacy' is socially constructed and culturally specific – whilst in the UK a requirement to shower naked at a swimming pool would be considered a breach of someone's privacy, the same is not true in many other countries, where this is a standard practice. 'Privacy' is socially constructed and dependent on social relations which can be shaped by ideology (Bettcher 2017, 162). While the claim that some women feel their privacy is undermined by the presence of trans women in female spaces is true, the political campaigning of anti-trans activists and ideological practices have not totally shaped the socially constructed categories of 'dignity' and 'privacy' to make it true that cis women's dignity and privacy *are* compromised by the presence of trans women. There is certainly a move towards this construction of privacy, which is shown by changing social attitudes that reflect this, but the social construction of 'dignity' and 'privacy' in this way is still something that can be and is disputed.

The movement towards portraying trans women's presence as an invasion of privacy often plays upon ideas that trans women are 'really men' (an ideological claim), and that as a man's presence in an all-female space such as a changing room is, with some exceptions, accepted as an invasion of privacy, then a trans woman's presence should be too. This conception of people being 'really' the sex they are assigned at birth (a claim implicit in the Fair Play for Women advert) is also supported by ideological practices that restrict access to legal gender recognition. However, ideas about trans people being 'really' members of their sex assigned at birth remain contested (though increasingly pervasive), so this strategy by anti-trans activists has not totally shaped the social construction of 'privacy'.

However, there are relevant privacy-related ITBs that some cis women *feel* that their dignity and privacy is invaded by the presence of trans women in all-women spaces, as demonstrated by the claims made by Sex Matters. Portraying trans women as a threat leads some people to believe they are a threat to safety or privacy and experience fear of the presence of a trans woman in an all-female space. Type 2 ITBs about people's perceptions of or responses to trans women are

used to justify false claims that trans women are a threat and used to justify unjust and discriminatory ideological practices. For example, at the Conservative Party's 2023 conference, the health secretary announced plans to ban trans women from women's hospital wards, claiming this would ensure the 'dignity, safety and privacy' of patients (BBC News 2023a). Whilst the claim about safety reflected a false belief (trans women in single-sex spaces don't make cis women unsafe), this policy plausibly reflected ideological true beliefs that some cis women *feel* their dignity, safety, and privacy are compromised by the presence of trans women.

In summary, ideological true beliefs come in two main forms. Type 1 ideological true beliefs consist of beliefs in ideological social meanings typically expressed as statistical generalisations or comparators, as well as beliefs about what exists in the world that reference ideologically influenced socially constructed categories. Type 2 ideological true beliefs include statistical or general beliefs about the world which are made true by ideology. Type 2 ITBs don't directly reflect ideological social meanings but they are often cited by defenders of ideology to support false ideological claims and unjust practices. Both types of belief, when expressed in claims by defenders of ideology within an ideological context, function to uphold the wider ideology.

4. Epistemic Problems with ITBs

Because ideology shapes the world, people can have true beliefs that are made true by ideology. Beliefs about features of the world that are made true by ideology can be held by both those who are in the grip of an ideology, and those who are engaged in ideology critique. Those engaged in ideology critique may know things about the world which are true because ideology has shaped the world, and these beliefs can form an important part of their understanding of the unjust world. In the case of the trans panic, a trans activist may know that 'some cis women are fearful of the presence of trans women in all-women spaces' and knowing this may form part of their understanding of how people's fears are shaped by ideology. A person who has not engaged in ideology critique may have the same true belief, that 'some cis women are fearful of the presence of trans women in all-women spaces', but their belief is likely to be epistemically flawed (for example, it may be incoherent with other beliefs) or may not be believed based on evidence. This person likely has an ITB because their belief functions to uphold a broader ideology. The purpose of this section is to motivate the claim that most ITBs are epistemically flawed. I focus on a small number of epistemic flaws that may help us to develop tactics to engage with those who hold ITBs, which may help to solve the problems activists face when engaging with these true claims. Identifying the epistemic flaws with ideological true beliefs is important because it helps to develop an epistemic critique of an ideology, even if the beliefs it shapes are true.

Pointing out these epistemic flaws can be an important part of inviting people to question why they hold their beliefs, even in cases where those beliefs are true.

4.1 Beliefs Not Based on Evidence and Resistance to Counterevidence

Ideological true beliefs are often epistemically flawed and do not count as knowledge because they are often not based on properly obtained evidence. Instead, these beliefs are often the result of motivated reasoning or biases which make them epistemically defective (Simion 2024, 21–22). Ideologies can shape prejudices as they are another way that ideological social meanings can be internalised. This means that those in the grip of ideologies who have ideological true beliefs are likely to also hold prejudices. Prejudices involve beliefs about what ‘qualities individuals have in virtue of being members of a kind’, for example, prejudices that trans women are predatory or mentally ill (Napolitano 2023, 11). Prejudices are characterised by ‘resistance to counter-evidence owing to some affective investment’ (Fricker 2007, 35). As ideologies serve to obscure injustice, these affective investments are likely to be ethically bad, and include negative identity prejudices against members of social groups (Fricker 2007, 35).

For example, a person may have the ideological true belief that ‘black people in the USA are more likely to be convicted of murder than white people’.⁶¹ This belief is made true by an unjust racist social system that is upheld, at least in part, by racist ideology. A person who is not in the grip of ideology may hold this belief and this may well be a case of knowledge because they believe it based on good evidence, such as available statistics. Those who are in the grip of ideology are also likely to hold this belief because ideology affects patterns of perception and attention, so affects which parts of the world people form beliefs about, such that higher rates of crimes perpetrated by Black people is the sort of thing they pay attention too (Haslanger 2019b, 12–13). This alone is not an epistemic flaw with the belief. However, the same racist ideology that makes it more likely that a person holds this belief also influences prejudices, so a person with this belief may also hold racist prejudices that black people have a propensity towards violence. If the belief that Black people are more likely to be convicted of murder is based on prejudice not evidence, then it does not count as knowledge.⁶² It is very difficult to test what people base their beliefs on, but one potential way is to test for this is to ask if the truth of the matter, and the available evidence, were to change, would the person change their belief?⁶³ A person with racist prejudices that Black people have higher propensities towards violent crime is

⁶¹ This is taken from statistics from the US Department of Justice covering 1980–2008 (Cooper and Smith 2011).

⁶² Of course, it is also possible that a person in the grip of ideology has based this belief on the available evidence such as the published statistics. In this case, the belief will not have the epistemic flaw of not being based on evidence, but it may have some other epistemic flaw, such as the one I discuss in section 4.2.

⁶³ This is the normal test for the causal basing relation; Bondy (2016) gives one account of a counterfactual test for the basing relation.

unlikely to change their belief that Black Americans are more likely to be convicted of murder if the truth changed. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that their belief is not based on evidence.

People who are in the grip of ideology are likely to make ethically bad affective investments in their ITBs because they in some way stand to gain from the worldview or state of the world ideology brings about, or because the ideology reflects a sense of social stability which they find reassuring. This then leads them to engage in motivated reasoning. These investments in their beliefs are also likely to make their beliefs resistant to counter evidence. Problematic investments in beliefs are often held in false consciousness; those who have them may cite their reasons for belief as truth or rationality and fail to recognise the real reasons why they are wedded to particular beliefs or attitudes.

In a hypothetical example, imagine 100 years ago a male physicist had the ideological true belief that there are very few women who are appointable to high level physics jobs. This belief would have been true because women were systematically denied access to higher education at this time, meaning very few women would have had the required knowledge and experience to be appointable to these jobs. He thought that his belief was based on good evidence as he was able to look around and see few women studying for physics degrees, and few good women job candidates. However, because of the prominent role sexist ideology played in shaping attitudes about women's intellectual capacities at the time, he held prejudices that women are less intellectually capable of doing physics. He also stood to gain from this ideology; the idea that physics is beyond the abilities of women elevated his sense of intellectual superiority and their exclusion from physics meant that he faced less competition from women in his field. As such, his belief was not based on the available evidence; he would have been unwilling to give up his belief that there are few women appointable to high-level physics jobs in the face of new evidence due to prejudices that women were incapable of or unsuited to this work and his investment in this belief. His belief did not count as knowledge because it was formed on the basis of motivated reasoning, and because of his biases, his belief was resistant to counter evidence. This is a further epistemic problem with his belief.

In the trans panic, some anti-trans activists have ITBs that are not based on evidence or are resistant to counter evidence. Resistance to counter evidence is an epistemic flaw of a belief when the belief is true, but this flaw is made particularly clear when the state of the world changes, so a once true belief is no longer true. This is also a way to test whether the belief was based on evidence in the first place. For example, one grassroots conservative spokesperson explaining her view that gender dysphoria is a mental illness claimed '[u]ntil very recently, that was the medical consensus and I don't see that anything has changed' (Rawlinson 2017). While

in the past she may have had an ideological true belief that gender dysphoria is a mental illness, this belief was epistemically flawed because it was resistant to counter evidence, as shown by the fact that despite knowing that the evidence had changed, her belief did not change, and she refused to accept the legitimacy of the new evidence.

It is more difficult to tell when a true belief is resistant to counter evidence,⁶⁴ but one potential case is that of Conservative politicians who hold the ideological true belief that some cisgender women feel their privacy would be invaded if trans women are placed with them on an all-female hospital ward. There are reasons to think that prejudices and affective investments would make some Conservative politicians unwilling to give up this belief if the facts were to change. Many Conservative politicians are likely to have made an affective investment in this belief because it underlies a Conservative policy to ban trans women from all-women hospital wards in the UK – in announcing the policy the former health secretary emphasised protecting the ‘dignity’ and ‘privacy’ of patients (BBC News 2023a).⁶⁵ Politicians are invested in their own re-election, and policies are developed by political parties and announced at party conferences to win votes. Giving up the belief that some cisgender women feel their privacy is invaded by the presence of trans women in all-female spaces may force a politician to question this policy, something they may be unwilling to do as this policy was proposed as part of an election strategy. Though it is true that some women feel the presence of a trans woman in a hospital ward would be an invasion of their privacy if it were to happen, there have been no recorded complaints about trans women in hospital wards; data reflecting this was published prior to the policy being announced (Richards 2022). This potential counterevidence was regularly brought up in news coverage of the policy, but was not addressed by those proposing it, suggesting they are resistant to potential counterevidence.

4.2 Statistical Beliefs

As Munton has argued, there are sometimes epistemic flaws with beliefs that reflect true statistical generalisations and precise statistical claims. Her arguments can apply to a wide range of statistical beliefs, but she focuses on beliefs which are accurate but can seem problematic such as ‘teenage girls perform less well at mathematics than boys’ and ‘gay men have far higher rates of sexually transmitted diseases than straight men’, explaining this epistemic flaw as the reason why we may hesitate to endorse these claims even when they are true (2019, 228). Munton

⁶⁴ It is beyond the scope of my project to describe the different ways that beliefs can be resistant to counter evidence, and how these can be tested for. For further accounts of this see Simion (2024) and Flores (Forthcoming).

⁶⁵ In this case, the affective investment in the belief, the reason it is resistant to evidence, may not be directly shaped by ideology as a desire to win an election is not ideological. However, this is still a case of an ITB, as the belief itself is made true by ideological social construction, and functions to uphold an ideology.

doesn't specifically discuss ideology, but the set of beliefs she discusses includes beliefs that reflect true ideological social meanings, as well as statistical claims made true by ideology (type 1 and type 2 ITBs). She argues that one epistemic problem with these beliefs is the projectability of the statistics, which is a general problem with some statistical beliefs rather than just those that are potentially ethically dubious. Though Munton discusses this phenomenon in terms of belief, the problem largely lies with the inferences people draw from these beliefs or claims.

The statistical beliefs she targets (including ideological statistical beliefs) depend on contingent features of the social world that limit how widely they can be projected; reasoning correctly with these statistics requires recognising that their truth is dependent on a particular set of social structures and practices (Munton 2019, 234). In a non-ideological and hypothetical example that she gives, a person with the true belief 'only 5% of dalmatians are fertile' may wrongly apply this belief to reason that it is not worth getting their new dalmatian puppy spayed, when in fact, the reason why only 5% of dalmatians are fertile is that 95% of them are spayed or neutered (Munton 2019, 231). The statistic's modal profile is mis-constructed due to missing information, and this leads to false inferences (Munton 2019, 235). Munton argues that statistics are accompanied by 'implicit representation[s] of their generality' which are required for a person to reason with that belief, and the statistical belief is 'part of a network of representations' which provide additional content about the belief, which must also be taken into account when considering the epistemic standing of the statistical belief, as they affect how a person will reason with it (2019, 232–33). Munton uses the example of statistics that connect Black Americans with higher rates of criminality (2019, 234). Without recognition that these statistics are only true due to the existence of an unjust social system, people may be led to hold essentialising beliefs about the relationship between race and crime, leading them to over-extend the projectability of the true statistics. This seems especially likely to occur when a racist ideology that Black people are 'innately' or 'naturally predisposed towards' criminality is widespread and dominant.

In the trans panic, this flaw is present in beliefs that reflect the statistic that 'the majority of British people believe that allowing transgender women to use women's single-sex spaces such as toilets and changing rooms poses a genuine risk of harm to [cis] women'.⁶⁶ This belief is true due to cissexist ideology that shapes prejudices towards trans women, and because of the campaigning of anti-trans activists who portray trans women as a potential threat. Without recognising that this belief is true due to an unjust social system, people are likely to reason incorrectly with this statistic. For example, they may think that it is something about trans

⁶⁶ This belief reflects statistics from a YouGov poll on public perceptions of trans people (Smith 2025).

women themselves that makes people believe that they are a threat, or falsely reason that the statistic occurs because many people have had negative or threatening experiences with trans women in toilets. This could lead to them avoiding trans women in toilets or forming the false belief that trans women in single-sex toilets pose a genuine risk of harm. These beliefs guide unjust practices, such as the exclusion of trans women from single-sex spaces. They can also lead to harassment and discrimination against trans people in single-sex spaces, which can cause trans people to self-exclude from public toilets, limiting their ability to access public spaces (Jones and Slater 2020, 843).

Epistemic flaws with statistical beliefs occur because of missing information. Without further information on why the statistic occurs, people can wrongly attribute the regularity to a natural or intrinsic feature of something mentioned in the statistical claim, rather than an external factor (Munton 2019, 232–35). Statistical claims about a feature of the world or a group of people can ‘import an explanation’ about the ‘nature or essence’ of the group that they are about; this is something that Haslanger argues occurs with generic claims about a group, but the problem is not unique to generics (Haslanger 2012b, 468). As Saul (2017, 6) argues, the false inferences people draw from generics are broader than inferences about ‘nature’ or ‘essence’: claims about a social group or factor, such as race, imply that race itself is relevant, and this occurs for all claims about race not just generic ones. It seems no less likely that a person will make a false inference about the relationship between race and crime from the claim that black people are more likely to be convicted of murder in the US than white people than the generic claim that black people are criminals. The tendency to infer that a true claim or statistic about a group occurs because of intrinsic features of that group is what causes people to over-extend the projectability of the true claim (Munton 2019, 235). This is what occurs in the trans panic, where it is falsely inferred from the belief that ‘the majority of British people believe that trans women using women’s toilets pose a threat to cis women’ that trans women are indeed a threat.

4.3 Ideological Knowledge

Having discussed the epistemic problems with ideological true beliefs, there are still some cases of ITBs that are not candidates for these types of problems. One potential example is a person’s beliefs about their own beliefs or mental states. Ideology can shape our mental states by influencing how we react to the world. Ideological social meanings and practices can shape, for example, what we are afraid of and disgusted by. We can then form true beliefs about these feelings that seem epistemically unproblematic because we have privileged (though not infallible) access to our own mental states, so are in a good position to know what we are

thinking. As a result, we can have ideological knowledge about our own mental states when they have been shaped by ideology.

An example of relevant ideological knowledge in the trans panic is a case of a cisgender woman who holds the belief ‘I am afraid of trans women in women’s toilets’. This belief is made true by the fact that this person really does feel this way, and she feels that way as a result of ideological social meanings and practices that portray trans women as threatening or predatory. Whilst prejudices may make someone more likely to be scared by trans women in toilets, or have other reactions towards members of a group, it seems unlikely that prejudice would make someone believe that they are scared when they are not; it seems like this belief is formed on the basis of evidence. The feeling may be the result of false beliefs (such as that trans women are predatory), but the belief about the feeling is true. These claims about our own mental states are not statistical claims, so they are not vulnerable to the kinds of epistemic flaws that Munton discusses. These cases of ideological knowledge can be especially pernicious because they are harder to challenge. Challenging these beliefs may leave activists vulnerable to criticism that they are trying to undermine people’s knowledge of their own minds. Cases of ideological knowledge can be thought of as a subset of cases of ideological true beliefs, where their problematic effects and the difficulties faced in challenging them are particularly pronounced, issues I return to in section 5.

5. The Role of ITBs in Upholding Ideology

Having discussed how ideology shapes the world and true beliefs, what those beliefs are, and how they may be epistemically deficient, I now focus on the role of ITBs in the maintenance of ideology. Though ideology isn’t exclusively maintained by people’s beliefs, people’s beliefs that reflect an ideology do play a role in upholding an ideology, especially when they are expressed. ITBs maintain an ideology by lending a sense of legitimacy to unjust social practices based on ideological social meanings by appearing to provide justification for them. ITBs make it more difficult to share an ideology critique, which also helps to maintain an ideology. Both factors make ITBs more difficult to respond to in a conversational exchange, and, as previously discussed, responding to ITBs pushes activists onto more difficult conversational terrain. Responding to ITBs is also made harder by the rhetorical power of appeals to truth, which defenders of ideology often make by citing ITBs. Because ITBs are difficult to respond to within a conversational exchange, appeals to ITBs can help those defending injustice to appear to ‘win’ public conversations or debates, and they play this role in the trans panic.

5.1 Providing Evidence for Ideological Claims and Practices

The first way ITBs can play a role in maintaining an ideology is by being used to provide (faulty) evidence for other, often false, ideological claims. This is used to justify continued or new practices that cause or perpetuate injustice. For example, defenders of sexist ideology may point to the lower rates at which women choose to take university courses in computer science as evidence that this reflects a ‘natural’ preference. This is not to say that this good evidence (it isn’t), but merely to note that this is the way that ITBs can be used by defenders of ideologies. For example, chess grandmaster Nigel Short has claimed that the lack of women playing at the highest levels of chess is evidence that women have different brains that are not suited to chess (Ellis-Petersen 2015).

ITBs are used to provide support for ideologies, even though they could also be interpreted as illustrating the reality of oppression because of the influence ideology has on the way that people interpret the world. Ideology shapes what is considered ‘common sense’, and patterns of perception and attention, so ideological true beliefs are interpreted as providing evidence for an ideology rather than challenging it due to the presence of confirmation bias and prejudice (Haslanger 2017a, 155–56). When ideology shapes these factors so that it is ‘common sense’ that women don’t like computer science, people pay attention to the world in ways that reflect this, such as noticing when girls claim not to like computer science at school or interpreting those who do like computer science as exceptions to the rule. Statistics that show that fewer women than men take computer science at university are then interpreted as evidence that supports the ideology. Providing some evidence for these ideological claims enables the continuation of unjust ideological practices based on them, for example, gender stereotyping and hostility towards women in computer science and employment practices that disadvantage women, and stifles efforts to tackle unjust practices (Cheryan, Master, and Meltzoff 2023). Because these features of the world are used as evidence for false ideological claims and are easily interpreted in this way due to the dominance of ideology, the onus is then placed on activists to explain why purported evidence does not in fact prove or provide good evidence for ideological social meanings. This also makes conversational engagement that challenges ideology more difficult for activists.

For example, as an undergraduate student, a lecturer of mine pointed to statistics from a study that suggested that women in wealthier countries that scored higher on metrics of gender equality chose to take STEM degrees at a lower rate than women in poorer countries with lower metrics of gender equality as evidence that differences in degree choices among men and women in

wealthy countries occurred due to ‘natural’ preference.⁶⁷ His belief in natural sex-based preferences (which directly reflected sexist ideology) was backed up by a potential ideological true belief that fewer women choose to take STEM subjects when other options are available to them. To him this was evidence that women didn’t want to take STEM degrees because of a ‘natural’ preference; he argued that in wealthier countries that scored better on metrics of gender equality, women were making ‘freer’ choices. This use of ITBs as evidence for ideological claims can make the ideology appear ‘reasonable’ and places the onus on those opposed to an ideology to explain the existence of the evidence for which ideological claims often provide easy-sounding solutions. True empirical claims can cause false ideological claims (such as ‘there are such things as innate gendered preferences’) to appear reasonable, especially when the information is easily interpreted in this way. This shifts the burden of proof to those who are campaigning against ideology and makes this kind of conversational engagement harder, since the interlocuter (and potentially, any audience to the exchange) believes that the available evidence supports the ideological claim.

The use of ITBs to provide purported evidence of false ideological claims occurs in the trans panic when the ITB that some cis women feel threatened by trans women using single-sex spaces is used to justify the false claim that trans women are a threat in single-sex spaces. For example, Sodha (2025) uses the fact that some cis women have complained about sharing changing rooms with trans women as evidence for the false claim that cis women have been put ‘at risk’ by policies that allow trans women to use single sex spaces. Ideological true beliefs help to maintain an ideology by giving the illusion of justification to false ideological claims and unjust practices. This also shifts the burden of proof to trans activists to explain why some cis women may feel threatened even though trans women are not a threat and do not put cis women at risk, which is particularly difficult to do within the bounds of accepted ‘reasonable debate’ as it involves pointing out that some cis women are fundamentally wrong about the reasons for their own fears. The ITBs in this case can be instances of ideological knowledge, since they concern people’s own beliefs about their feelings, so there are additional difficulties faced in addressing them. The existence of purported evidence also functions to quiet dissent among those who may begin to question an ideology and seek out explanations. As a result, injustice is not recognised, unjust practices remain, and the dominance of cissexist ideology is maintained.

⁶⁷ He was citing the paper ‘The Gender-Equality Paradox in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education’ (Stoet and Geary 2018). This article was also cited by Jordan Peterson and other anti-feminist Youtubers to make the same point (S. M. Lee 2020). The authors of the paper have since issued a correction for some of the data presented.

5.2 Curtailing the Sharing of Ideology Critique

Another way ITBs help to maintain an ideology is that they make sharing ideology critique more difficult. The presence of what can on the surface appear to be good evidence for ideological worldviews makes convincing others of the existence of ideology and the falsity of some ideological social meanings harder. The task is particularly difficult in the case of type 1 ITBs which directly reflect ideological social meanings. It is incredibly difficult to convince people that the truth is contingent on ideological processes and practices, especially when ideological social meanings are naturalising. It is difficult because it involves challenging people's interpretations of their true beliefs about the world, and it can often be an incredibly frustrating part of engaging with those who defend an ideology. ITBs make the challenge of getting people to recognise the existence of ideology more difficult because when people's beliefs are true, and they know they are true, changing their minds about the things they think follow from those true beliefs is much harder. For example, take the type 1 ITB, 'women are, on average, better at childcare than men'. The task of the person engaged in ideology critique cannot be to dissuade them of this belief, because it is (probably) true. Denials of the 'naturalness' of childcare abilities made by feminists may well be met by responses reflecting this true belief. This can also lead to accusations that activists and those engaged in critique who deny innate sex differences in childcare abilities are failing to account for the truth of the evidence. Sharing ideology critique effectively is made far more difficult by the presence of ITBs, and their use as 'evidence'.

In the trans panic, appeals to ITBs as evidence which curtails ideology critique occurs when anti-trans campaigners, particularly women, claim that their concerns aren't being taken seriously. Some cis women really do feel worried about sharing single-sex spaces with trans women, and feel that their concerns aren't taken seriously (Alston 2018). This is often because claims about risks posed by trans women in bathrooms and other single-sex spaces are rightly dismissed on the basis that there is no evidence that trans women are a threat in these spaces (Sharpe 2020). These claims are also challenged by activists on the basis that they reflect transphobic prejudices that trans women are predators. Despite repeated engagement on this topic, the claim that the concerns aren't being taken seriously (as has been made by a group of nurses attempting to take their employer to court over policies that allow trans women to use women's changing rooms (Mortimer 2024)) persists, because some cis women still feel threatened by trans women or feel that their privacy is invaded by the presence of trans women. Because the belief that they feel threatened or feel their privacy is invaded by the presence of trans women is true, it is much more difficult to tackle. It is incredibly difficult to challenge someone who is appealing to something true, especially in this case where the truth they are appealing to is their own sense of

fear or apprehension, which means this is also a case of ideological knowledge. The repeated claim that concerns are not being taken seriously, which is partially based on an ideological true belief, makes it more difficult to share ideology critique because this critique is portrayed as failing to account for the truth – in this case, the truth of the existence of concerns.

Anti-trans activists hold ITBs that some people have certain concerns, but often shift between claims reflecting this true belief, and claims that the concerns are justified, or that the issue (trans women in single-sex spaces) is concerning – this is what Sodha (2025) does when she moves from the true claim that some cis women feel that their safety is put at risk by the presence of trans women, to the claim that they are put at risk. The flip-flopping between these claims also leaves room for retreat, as when it is pointed out that trans women in single-sex spaces can't be genuinely concerning because there is no evidence of risk to cis women, anti-trans activists can retreat to the claim that they are just reporting the true claim that some women do have concerns. This is rhetorically advantageous for anti-trans campaigners, as having a true claim to retreat to can force their interlocuter to concede the true claim, which often leaves the false claim not properly addressed. Claiming that they are simply reporting the truth can also make anti-trans campaigners appear trustworthy, which also inhibits the ability of activists to convince others of critique.

5.3 The Role of Truth

Appeals to truth play an important rhetorical role for those defending ideologies and the practices they shape. Such appeals are used to portray those who are attempting to share an ideology critique as unscientific, anti-truth, or irrational. As I described in chapter two, appeals to scientific truth, fact, and reality are often made by anti-trans campaigners, such as the anti-trans campaign group 'Sex Matters' who name 'reality' as one of their principles (2025; see also Rustin 2022; Fair Play For Women 2025a). In cases where those appeals to truth are correct because of the way that ideology has shaped the world, this makes the job of those engaged in ideology critique even more difficult. ITBs can sometimes take the form of ideological 'common sense': beliefs that are widely held and accepted uncritically and appealed to as the basis of purportedly rational argument. Any kind of challenge to these beliefs, even if the challenge doesn't directly contradict the beliefs but rather questions why they are held and how they came to be true, can then be painted by defenders of ideology as irrational or contrary to common sense for questioning something 'everybody knows'.

It is also harder to share an ideology critique when it is not rhetorically advantageous to deny the true claims of those who are in the grip of or defending an ideology. This is the case for ITBs because they are often evidence of injustice; whilst the defender of ideology may point to an ITB

as evidence of ideology, often they demonstrate the reality of oppression. It is not in the emancipatory interests of the person engaging in ideology critique to deny the true claims made by those invested in ideology. This makes communicating the ideology critique more difficult: it cannot be done by denying claims made by those who are invested in ideologies, and it necessarily involves a more complicated critique.

This difficulty is faced by activists in the trans panic. Early in the trans panic, activists were able to point to statistics, such as those from a 2018 YouGov survey, that showed that the overall population was broadly supportive of trans people's rights to use single sex spaces (Smith 2020). However, as the trans panic has gone on, public opinion towards trans people in the UK has grown more hostile, as shown in the decreased support for trans-inclusive policies in repeated YouGov studies (Smith 2020; 2022; 2025). The growing opposition to trans people and trans rights in the UK is not something that activists can deny or ignore; that opposition is a part of the discrimination and injustice that trans people face. When faced with true claims that some cis women feel uncomfortable sharing single-sex spaces with trans women, activists can't deny this; to do so would undermine the testimony of trans people who are anxious to use single-sex spaces or self-exclude due to the presence of these attitudes or have experienced harassment by those who hold these beliefs, and would fail to acknowledge the level of hostility that trans women face. Anti-trans activists and politicians use diminished support for trans inclusive policies to justify continued unjust practices. The ideological true beliefs are used to perpetuate injustice, but the truth that is reflected by the ITBs is itself a consequence of continued injustice, so it is not in the emancipatory interests of trans activists to deny the ITB. Being unable to deny the true claims in order to deny any potential false implicature (the strategy Haslanger (2012b) suggests using when faced with potentially true generic claims) means that trans activists have to develop new strategies to challenge true ideological claims if they want to conversationally engage with those who employ them.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I've developed the concept of ideological true beliefs and used this concept to explain why some claims made by anti-trans activists in the trans panic are particularly difficult to tackle, and how they help to uphold an ideology. Ideology shapes the world through social construction, so beliefs that reflect the ideologically shaped world are true. These true claims are often epistemically problematic, they may be believed on the basis of bias or motivated reasoning, be resistant to counterevidence, or they might be missing information that leads people to reason incorrectly with the belief. However, there are also some cases where ideological true beliefs do not have these epistemic flaws and may also be cases of knowledge.

ITBs are often appealed to by defenders of ideology to provide evidence of false ideological claims. The presence of evidence for false ideological claims is one of the things that makes those false claims more difficult to tackle. Within a broader ideological context, the ability of defenders of ideology to be able to appeal to ‘the facts’ is rhetorically advantageous. A particular challenge faced by activists tackling ITBs is that ITBs often cannot be denied because it is not in the emancipatory interests of activists to do so because the truth they reflect is the reality of the unjust world; to be to deny ITBs would deny the reality of oppression.

In the trans panic, ITBs relating to concerns some cis women have about trans women in female spaces have made cissexist ideology more difficult to tackle. ITBs (expressed as claims) are a feature of the trans panic ‘debate’ that makes it particularly difficult for trans people and activists to engage with. To tackle ITBs, activists need to develop new strategies, because it is not in their interests to deny them. The scale of the transphobia faced by trans people in the UK is reflected in these ideological true beliefs; tackling this anti-trans backlash cannot involve denying that it exists. I suggest some potential strategies for responding ITBs in chapter seven, but ultimately, as I will also argue, activists should use alternative tactics to tackle the trans panic that do not involve engagement in ‘debate’ with anti-trans activists. The most effective way of tackling the pernicious effects of ideological true beliefs is to challenge the processes by which they are made true.

Chapter 6: Ideology Critique

1. Introduction

Ideology critique is the process of revealing and addressing the existence of ideology and ideological oppression. Given that, as I argued in chapter two, cissexist ideology plays a key role in the trans panic, engaging in ideology critique must be a central part of tackling the trans panic. Critical theory emphasises that critique comes from those who are embedded within societies (Young 1990, 5). This is the approach to ideology critique that I will be taking.

The facts that, as I discussed in chapter one, ideology is often internalised, and that, as critical theorists emphasise, critique comes from those within a society not those outside of it, raises problems for ideology critique. These problems are often articulated as the problem of how we can know that an ideology is harmful and how can we know that critique disrupts or challenges an oppressive system, rather than just replacing it with a different one or reinforcing it (Haslanger 2017a, 160, 167). Given that ideology makes itself difficult to recognise by shaping dominant social meanings so ideological social meanings are often taken as ‘given’, and distorts our ability to recognise injustice, there is a theoretical problem of how we can ever really know that we have properly identified ideology. I will put aside the strong sceptical questions of whether it is ever truly possible to engage in ideology critique or know that we are properly engaged in it. What looks like ideology critique is happening in the world, and as I am engaged in a philosophical project that takes seriously things happening in the actual world, it makes sense to grant that at least some ideology critique is warranted. To fail to do so would undermine most positive activist projects. However, given the theoretical difficulties of developing a warranted ideology critique, it is nonetheless worth considering *how* this occurs, and what makes ideology critique warranted. Though I think we should set aside sceptical worries about if *any* warranted ideology critique could be developed, I take seriously worries about identifying which particular attempts at critique are warranted, and how it is possible to go about generating critique. These are the issues I engage with in this chapter.

In this chapter, I outline four key problems facing those engaging in ideology critique that concern how ideology critique can identify the morally problematic features of ideology. The *warrant problem* of ideology critique is the most significant of the four problems I discuss. This is the problem of how networks of social meanings can be shown to be ideological, and how an ideology critique can be judged to be emancipatory. I trace some potential solutions to these problems from feminist standpoint epistemology, drawing on both the work of Sandra Harding (1991) and Nancy Hartsock (2019), as well as contemporary authors who employ ideas from standpoint epistemology. I argue that the privileged knowledge thesis (that the lives of the

oppressed make them able to develop an understanding of that oppression (Hartsock 2019, 128)) alone cannot solve the problems of ideology critique, and that there are other issues with existing accounts of how a feminist standpoint could be used to generate warranted ideology critique. However, the ‘achievement thesis’ (that the privileged vantage point from which we can understand oppression must be struggled for (Hartsock 2019, 129)) of standpoint epistemology does reveal a solution to the problem of ideology critique: consciousness raising.⁶⁸ I also consider some further practical challenges that inhibit the development or sharing of ideology critique.

I use the term ‘ideology critique’ as a success term for critique that has successfully identified ideology. ‘Ideology critique’ on this account is therefore always warranted (as opposed to ‘attempted’ ideology critique, which may not be), but I also use the term ‘warranted ideology critique’ to make it clear when or how a method of generating ideology critique is specifically addressing the warrant problem.

2. Challenges for Developing Warranted Ideology Critique

Ideology critique faces several epistemological and normative challenges.⁶⁹ Firstly, ideology critique faces what I will call the *warrant problem* of how a warranted critique of ideology can be generated. Ideology critique does not only highlight the epistemically deficient features of ideology (i.e. falsehoods and distortions), but also has a political role (Haslanger 2017a, 160). Ideology critique involves identifying how ideology organises people in unjust ways. The warrant problem is the problem of how we (people from within societies, rather than social critics ‘outside’ of societies) can make assessments about what is unjust under conditions of ideology, given that dominant ideologies obscure our abilities to be able to accurately identify injustice.⁷⁰ The warrant problem concerns the issue of how networks of social meanings can be shown to be ideological, and how an ideology critique can be judged to be emancipatory. A solution to the warrant problem will tell us how we go about generating an ideology critique that can properly identify injustice and oppression, and, having identified injustice and oppression, then identify an ideology.

⁶⁸ Haslanger (2021b) also argues that consciousness raising is the methodology by which warranted ideology critique can be generated. Whilst I draw much from Haslanger’s account of the problems of ideology critique and her account of how consciousness raising can generate warranted ideology critique, the route by which I arrive at the same conclusion is different.

⁶⁹ I draw the following challenges from Celikates’ (2016) normative, methodological, and explanatory challenges, referenced in Haslanger (2017a, 160–61).

⁷⁰ As I outlined in chapter one, ideologies do this by shaping our interpretations of the world, providing us with frameworks and hermeneutical resources with which to interpret the world, shaping what we value or disvalue, and shaping what we pay attention to (Haslanger 2017a).

I will also consider a sub-problem of the warrant problem, the *looping problem*, which concerns how an ideology critique can be generated when ideology ‘makes itself true’ such that ideological claims sometimes accurately describe the world. Ideology becomes embedded in practices and supports unjust ways of organising the world. It makes itself true as when the world is organised according to the logic of an ideology it will run in accordance with it, at least partially (Haslanger 2019a, 119). The challenge that ‘looping’ presents is that it means that ideologies, despite having their basis in falsehood, can make themselves true, so that distorted ideological interpretations of the world come to reflect the world as it is, which makes it harder to identify the ideology (Haslanger 2017a, 157). I discussed the related issue of ideological true beliefs in chapter five. Whereas in that chapter, I considered how the way ideology shapes the world can make it difficult for activists to respond to true claims that reflect ideology and share ideology critique, here I consider how the fact that ideology ‘makes itself true’ renders it difficult to develop an ideology critique in the first place. The challenge for ideology critique is how to generate a warranted critique of ideology when that ideology at the very least appears to accurately reflect the world.

A further issue faced by those engaging in ideology critique, separate from the warrant problem, is the *internalisation problem*: how is it possible that ideologically oppressed groups internalise ideologies, but also develop critiques of ideologies? A theory of ideology critique does not need to explain why it is that particular people internalise ideology and others do not. But a theory or method of ideology critique must be able to account for heterogeneity among members of the same social group, or those who are oppressed by an ideology in similar ways. An answer to the warrant problem must be able to account for the fact that people, including members of groups who are oppressed by ideology, can internalise this ideology. At the same time, ideology critique often comes from within communities of the oppressed. The internalisation of ideology is not homogenous among members of marginalised groups, and some of them are able to ‘see past’ or overcome ideological distortions. An answer to the warrant problem must strike the balance of allowing for both internalisation of ideology and resistance.

There are other additional problems raised by the development of ideology critique. Activists are often divided over what they consider to be the cause of or an instance of injustice, or what the right solution is. For example, when responding to instances of hermeneutical injustice, different members of the same oppressed groups sometimes endorse different and mutually exclusive resistant hermeneutical resources. A warranted method of ideology critique must be able to provide some way of assessing the competing claims made by those who are working to tackle ideological oppression, and the strategies they develop from these for pursuing justice. A further

related problem is how to identify and deal with politically harmful movements which shroud themselves in the language of ideology critique. As well as groups challenging ideology who aim to alleviate oppression, there are those whose challenges to dominant ideologies aim to replace existing dominant ideologies with ones which further entrench oppression or go beyond what is widely accepted; for example White Nationalist movements (Haslanger 2019c). A solution to the warrant problem must clearly rule out cases such as these. I refer to these two related problems collectively as *the problem of competing explanations*, as they involve assessing different diagnoses of ideology.

3. Potential Solutions

A method for generating warranted ideology critique will be able to provide a response to these problems. It will allow for heterogeneity among members of a social group who are oppressed by a system of ideology in recognition of the fact that some recognise ideological features, and some do not. It will explain why there might be competing ideology critiques within communities and will allow for incomplete and tentative critique; it will not require the critic of ideology to have all the answers. As ideology is defined functionally (ideologies function to sustain systems of oppression), ideology critique can be defined functionally too: ideology critique functions to identify and challenge networks of social meanings that uphold systems of oppression.

A crucial methodological commitment for developing an account of ideology critique is that ideology critique and practices of resistance are already happening; answers to these questions must account for the features of critique and practices of resistance as they exist in the world. Common features of real-world practices are that critique often but not exclusively emerges from those who are oppressed by ideology, that critique is generated by groups rather than individuals, and that this emerges within the context of activist movements. For example, the US civil rights movement was led by people who were themselves oppressed by racist, segregationist ideology, and their critiques of both the ideology and the oppressive and discriminatory practices the ideology upheld were developed among groups of oppressed people, often those who were members of campaigning organisations such as churches or newly set up activist organisations. Ideology critique is developed by groups as it involves identifying patterns of oppression, not just naming individual experiences. Historical social justice movements such as civil rights movements fit this description. Contemporary forms of ideology critique which also exemplify this include efforts to tackle the ideology of ‘rape culture’ in educational settings. For example, the ‘Everyone’s Invited’ campaign has drawn attention to the high levels of sexual assault and

harassment in schools, and the ideology of rape culture that upholds this injustice, by collating the experiences of thousands of victims, mostly girls, on their website (Criddle 2021; Sara 2021).

Given the influence of ideology on the dominant hermeneutical resources which can prevent marginally situated knowers from fully understanding their own experiences, an explanation for how ideology critique is generated must balance two competing factors. The first of these is the hermeneutical injustices that can prevent marginalised people from fully understanding their own experiences, and the second is the fact that hermeneutical resistance emerges from within marginalised communities when groups experience dissonance between their experiences and the available hermeneutical resources (Srinivasan 2016, 378).

It is unlikely that there is a totally infallible method of ideology critique, given the insidious nature of ideology. An answer to the question of how a warranted ideology critique can be generated will be a best available solution, rather than a totally robust method.

In what follows, I outline three potential ways to explain how warranted ideology critique can be developed. All three take their impetus from feminist standpoint epistemology. The first rests on the privileged knowledge thesis and one particular interpretation of the achievement thesis; the second is a more thorough understanding of what it means to have a specifically feminist standpoint; and the last is a re-articulation of the achievement thesis as a requirement for consciousness raising, which I argue is the most reliable methodology for developing warranted ideology critique.

3.1 Limits on the Internalisation of Ideology

The first potential solution to the warrant problem is to argue that individuals who are themselves oppressed by an ideology can ‘see past’ it or do not internalise it and are therefore able to gain the critical distance needed to generate a warranted ideology critique. One such argument is put forward by Ivy, who argues that it seems that members of marginalised groups will have experiences that make them less likely to internalise ideology (2018). Drawing on standpoint epistemology, Ivy claims that the oppressed are better positioned to recognise their oppression. This is an articulation of the situated knowledge thesis, that knowledge is a product of a social position, and crucially, the privileged knowledge thesis, that certain standpoints enable a person to see social conditions more accurately – in this case, the standpoint of those who are oppressed by an ideology. Ivy argues that members of oppressed groups do not automatically recognise ideology, but that they achieve this knowledge through the experience of struggling against oppression (2018, 487). Focussing on the ideology of TERF propaganda, Ivy suggests transgender women are able to see the transmisogynistic trope that trans women are

sexual predators for what it is, propaganda, because they know that they are not predators (2018, 487). Ivy raises a crucial point that reflects a key feature of ideology critique: if anyone is likely to have access to information that reveals the epistemic and moral deficiencies of ideologies, it is those people whose lived experiences appear to directly contradict ideology.

However, this potential answer to the warrant problem fails to provide an adequate response to the internalisation problem. The effects of ideological oppression mean that even when individuals have experiences that appear to conflict with ideology, they may experience themselves as the problem, rather than recognising the oppressive system. Ivy articulates the ‘struggle’ required for the achievement of a critical standpoint as a struggle against oppression. In her discussion of how trans women can recognise TERF propaganda, she says trans women’s ‘lived experiences clearly refute the claims in TERF propaganda’ and that struggling against propaganda such as ‘predator’ tropes of trans women gives trans women ‘better access to the knowledge that the propaganda is false’ (2018, 487–88). However, this fails to account for the ways that many people who are oppressed by ideologies internalise those ideologies, including in ways that can leave them with false beliefs about themselves. For example, a person who experiences a sense of dissonance between their gender identity and the way they are gendered by others is having an experience that conflicts with cissexist ideology that expects unity between a person’s assigned sex, gender expression, and gender identity. Rather than their experiences revealing to them that cissexist ideology is oppressive, a person whose gender identity and desired gendered expression conflict with the demands of cissexist ideology may have internalised that ideology and view themselves as mentally ill or their own identity or desired gendered presentation as somehow ‘wrong’, instead of recognising the oppressive system. Recounting her experiences as a teenager having realised she was trans, ‘Carolyn’ (2020) describes how ‘I knew that society saw trans people as wrong and evil – and I thought that must mean that I was wrong and evil.’ As is obvious from stories such as Carolyn’s, simply having experiences that should conflict with ideology is not enough to recognise an ideology.

Members of oppressed groups clearly do internalise the ideologies that harm them, at least some of the time; for example, Stanley gives examples of how what he calls ‘negatively privileged’ groups (which I take to be groups who are oppressed by ideologies) are indoctrinated in dominant ideologies through colonial education (Stanley 2015, 235–37). Ideologies are sometimes imposed upon those they oppress who have little access to alternative understandings, as is the case when ideologies are imposed through education systems. Though Ivy argues that trans women can know that they are not sexual predators, this is complicated by the phenomena of internalised transphobia and homophobia. Fricker notes in her discussion of how dominant

hermeneutical resources impacted Edmund White's understanding of his sexuality in the 1960s that powerful collective understandings (in White's case 'bogeyman' constructions of 'The Homosexual') construct both a person's experiences and their own sense of self (2007, 164–65). Even when describing how he is attracted to men in a tender and loving way, White states how he 'never doubted that homosexuality was a sickness' (White, 1983, cited in Fricker 2007, 164). Despite having experiences which seem to conflict with homophobic ideology about the nature of attraction, White did not doubt this aspect of that ideology. Ideology can be internalised unconsciously, even by those who profess beliefs which explicitly contradict harmful ideology. Standpoint theorists are right that a person's social identity can have an impact on what they are in a position to know due to the impact on their experiences (Toole 2019), but being a member of a marginalised group and those experiences on their own do not provide access to the 'privileged vantage point' that Ivy claims. Experiences of oppression and injustice alone are not enough to recognise ideology because when an ideology is fully internalised, the oppressed will not recognise their experiences as conflicting with an ideology.

Ivy's standpoint-based solutions to the warrant problem also fail to account for the looping problem. While this is not relevant to her example of ideology that presents trans women as a danger to cis women and as sexual predators (since ideology cannot make these claims true), the looping problem is another reason why Ivy's view cannot be generalised as a methodology for generating warranted ideology critique. Ideology is worldbuilding — it can make itself true by entrenching false ideas in practices (Haslanger 2019a, 119). For example, sexist ideology dictates that women are naturally more nurturing and better carers for children. Because of this, women are given more caring responsibilities and men are not given these responsibilities, meaning some women may become better caregivers because of the experience they have gained as part of social practices guided by sexist ideology. Ivy says that the 'lived experiences' of the oppressed group 'refute the claims' made by oppressive ideologies, but in cases where ideology has shaped those lived experiences so that they conform with ideological expectations, this is not the case (2018, 487). Because of the worldbuilding nature of ideology, a woman who spends a significant amount of her time caring for children may understand herself as more capable of giving this care than the men around her, and she may well be right. Her lived experiences will not conflict with ideology, so she is not necessarily better placed to identify or refute ideology. Individuals are 'hailed into a subject position' by ideology: they freely perform practices guided by ideology, rather than being forced into them (Haslanger 2021b, 26). As such, those who are oppressed by ideologies and perform practices guided by them may consider themselves to be freely choosing to act in accordance with an ideology and not recognise their own oppression. There may be women pressured into caring for children who find themselves to be less able to do

so or women who do not take on caring responsibilities who do have experiences which conflict with ideology, but this will not be the same across all members of a group under conditions of ideology. Certain experiences that members of oppressed groups have do not necessarily give access to more objective knowledge (as claimed by some proponents of the privileged knowledge thesis) because of the worldbuilding effects of ideology.

3.2 The Feminist Standpoint

Ivy's articulation of the privileged knowledge thesis, and her understanding of the achievement thesis, fail to provide answers to the warrant problem. However, there are other ways of articulating these theses that form part of feminist standpoint theory, which have been used to ground critiques of ideology (Hartsock 2019, 128–29). Though there is diversity among the positions taken by standpoint theorists, roughly, standpoint theorists agree that what one is in a position to know is a product of a social position (the situated knowledge thesis) and that people in some social positions, typically those who experience a particular type of oppression, are in a position of epistemic privilege (the privileged knowledge thesis) (Grasswick 2018). A feminist standpoint is one that has a privileged vantage point on sexist social conditions; key to feminist standpoint theories is the idea that certain social positions are better for providing a less partial and more objective view of the world (Harding, 1991, 121–33; Hartsock 2019, 128; Jaggar 2004, 57). However, a feminist standpoint is an achievement, not just a social position, and has to be struggled for (Harding 1991, 127; Hartsock 2019, 132; Toole 2019); this is the 'achievement thesis' of standpoint epistemology. As discussed in the previous section, the privileged knowledge thesis alone fails to account for the worldbuilding nature of ideology. Though a person's social position does have an impact on their experiences which can influence what they are in a position to know, experiences of oppression and injustice alone are insufficient to recognise ideology. However, feminist standpoint theory has more resources to offer to potentially ground warranted ideology critique. Therefore, in this section, I focus on the nature of the feminist standpoint which standpoint theorists claim can generate a warranted critique of ideology, and the achievement thesis, articulated differently to the way it is given by Ivy. While feminist standpoint theory focusses on how a feminist standpoint can generate critique of patriarchal ideology, I take the general methodology of feminist standpoint theory to be applicable to other ideologies.

Feminist standpoint theory, particularly the work of Hartsock (2019), draws on ideas from Marxist theory that a person's position in relation to labour influences what they can know about the world; accordingly, the working class are better placed to understand social relations under capitalism (Grasswick 2018). Hartsock considers the experiences of women under conditions of

sexual division of labour to form the basis of a feminist standpoint which can reveal the partial perspectives of what she terms ‘abstract masculinity’ (2019, 140). Other standpoint theorists, such as Harding, emphasise that women’s experiences alone cannot provide reliable grounds for critique because women’s participation in social practices and interpretations of their own experiences are shaped by social relations (1991, 123). All standpoint theorists argue that a feminist standpoint is developed from the experiences of women but is an achievement rather than an automatic consequence of occupying a social position. A feminist standpoint is one that can reveal the limitations of a sexist or patriarchal ideology and therefore could potentially provide a solution to the warrant problem. On this account, a warranted ideology critique could be developed from the experiences or social position of women, and from that social position a feminist standpoint that enables the critical distance necessary for generating ideology critique can be achieved.

However, Hartsock’s original articulation of the feminist standpoint as developed from a social position occupied by all women has been widely criticised (including later by Hartsock herself) for failing to account for differences among the experiences of women (2019, 272). Hartsock proposed that the feminist standpoint is developed from a social position that results from the sexual division of labour, but many women’s experiences of the sexual division of labour differ from that which she proposed was the basis of a feminist standpoint, particularly those of women of colour and lesbians (Pohlhaus 2002). Hartsock argued that the social position that critique is generated from is characterised by women’s labour occurring in the home and the reproductive labour of bearing and raising children, along with a model of how male and female children are raised to understand themselves in relation to their parents (2019, 135–39). However, this does not reflect the experiences or histories of many Black women, who have different experiences of engaging in labour outside the home, and lesbians, who do not provide sexual labour for men and whose understanding of themselves often differs from the gendered expectations set by their parents.

Because she envisioned the feminist standpoint being drawn from one particular social position, the methodology of generating a warranted ideology critique from a feminist standpoint fails to answer questions about how differences in ideology critiques among members of oppressed groups can be explained. If the feminist standpoint is drawn from one specific experience of the sexual division of labour, Hartsock cannot explain why those who seemingly achieve this feminist standpoint develop different and competing critiques of patriarchal ideology. An account of how warranted ideology critique can be developed needs to reflect the ideology critique which is actually occurring in the world, which includes critique developed by black women and

lesbians; but Hartsock's original account of the feminist standpoint cannot explain how women whose experience of the distribution of labour differs dramatically from the way she envisioned it are able to develop warranted ideology critique. As such, the development of a feminist standpoint, in the manner articulated by Hartsock, cannot solve the problem of competing explanations, and fails to provide a satisfactory account of the development of ideology critique.

However, other standpoint theorists articulate a different view of the relationship between social position and standpoint which does not require a particular experience of the sexual division labour, which could potentially avoid this problem. Many standpoint theorists such as Harding (1991) emphasise the importance of starting with 'women's lives' as a way of exposing the inconsistencies and diagnosing the harms of male supremacy without prescribing a universal feature of 'women's lives' that makes this possible. However, it is not obvious what it means to 'start with women's lives' when it is claimed (at least by some authors) that experiences are insufficient to provide the basis of a standpoint (Pohlhaus 2002, 287). While a standpoint is not a social position, one interpretation of 'starting from women's lives' would mean that only those in a particular social position (in this case, women) could achieve a feminist standpoint. The link between social position and the standpoint from which an ideology critique can be developed also seems, on some accounts, to rule out the possibility of critique from allies who are not themselves members of an oppressed group (Pohlhaus 2002, 288). Though Harding claims men can be feminists, it is not clear on her account if men can have a 'feminist standpoint' because the standpoint is developed from the perspective of women's lives (1991, 128).

An answer to the warrant problem needs to be able to account for the fact that critique is usually developed by those oppressed by an ideology, but not exclusively; the accounts of feminist standpoint theory discussed thus far fail to do this because they cannot account for the way that allies and those who are not themselves oppressed by an ideology develop ideology critique. When considering the case of patriarchal ideology, the point that allies can develop warranted ideology critiques may seem marginal, but the role of allies in developing and disseminating ideology critique is crucial to the history of the development of other forms of ideology critique, particularly when the ideologically oppressed group are comparatively small or geographically isolated. For example, it has been important to the development and dissemination of critique of ideology that functions to oppress Palestinians that ideology critique can be engaged in by people who are not themselves Palestinian. For example, the work of Israeli historian Ilan Pappé has been crucial for understanding the expulsion of Palestinians from their land in 1948 as an act of ethnic cleansing (2007). The development of a standpoint as articulated in the feminist standpoint literature discussed thus far cannot be the grounds for warranted ideology critique

because it cannot account for the problem of competing explanations, or the potential way that allies can come to develop ideology critique.

However, the achievement thesis (that a feminist standpoint is achieved through struggle rather than merely a product of a social location) does offer possibilities for developing warranted ideology critique. Ivy (2018) articulates the ‘struggle’ of the achievement thesis as the struggle of an individual that occurs while experiencing oppression, but this ‘struggle’ can also be articulated as engagement in some form of resistant activity, resulting in the achievement of a position from which ideology critique can be articulated. This engagement in collective struggle as articulated by standpoint theorists such as Jaggar (2004, 57) is what offers a potential solution to the warrant problem.

Jaggar argues that struggle is necessary for discovering a feminist standpoint because women’s perceptions of the world are distorted by ideology, but she gives no further details on what that ‘collective struggle’ for discovering a feminist standpoint is, beyond the fact that it is ‘political and scientific’ (2004, 57). As experiences and lives are structured by practices which manifest ideology, the ability to critique ideology requires engagement with theory and political involvement – the achievement thesis is necessary to overcome the looping problem. However, many standpoint theorists give few details about what exactly the struggle or political activity that is necessary to generate a feminist standpoint is, nor explanations about its epistemic benefits over just experience or social position. Standpoint theory lacks explanations of what is involved in ‘achieving’ a critical standpoint, and how that process of achievement overcomes the issues faced in relying on a social position which is not achieved. To develop a warranted critique of ideology based on insights from the achievement thesis requires giving greater clarity and detail on the process that needs to be followed for a warranted critique of ideology to be developed.

3.3 Consciousness Raising

Haslanger argues (and I agree) that consciousness raising is a method that can generate warranted ideology critique (2021b, 24–25). Consciousness raising as a solution to the warrant problem is a development of the achievement thesis of standpoint epistemology. Haslanger (drawing on Young (1990) and Mansbridge (2001)) describes consciousness raising as beginning with a ‘gut refusal’ or ‘desiring negation’ towards experiences of oppression, which can also be experienced by people who are not themselves members of the relevant oppressed group (Haslanger 2021b, 46–49). Members of marginalised communities do not always experience a conflict between their experiences and ideological interpretations, and even if they know they are experiencing harm they may not locate the cause of this as a system of oppression. The ‘desire to

be happy' in response to one's own or another's experiences of suffering enables the possibility of critique, but that 'desiring negation', or 'discontent' does not yet constitute a warranted critique of ideology (Young 1990, 5–6; MacKinnon 1989, 85). This sense of dissonance is not intrinsic to any experience or social position and can be experienced by those who are not themselves oppressed by ideology. I am not offering an explanation for why this sense of dissonance arises in some people and not others, merely noting that it does.

In consciousness raising, concerns from the 'gut refusal' or 'desire' are shared with others in groups, often away from members of a dominant group (Haslanger 2021b, 50–51).

Consciousness raising is the process by which impressions of discontent are made coherent (MacKinnon 1989, 85). The process of articulating concerns in a group often leads to hermeneutical invention, the development of a new paradigm, and a hypothesis about the cause of injustice (Haslanger 2021b, 52). This hypothesis can then be tested and revised, and a moral claim that challenges the unjust practices can be articulated (Haslanger 2021b, 53–54). Through consciousness raising, seemingly anomalous experiences are connected as patterns and understood as forms of oppression (Frye 1990, 175).

Dominant ideology shapes how people act and interact so that they uphold an ideology without repressive enforcement; it is internalised and maintained by participants, including those it oppresses (Haslanger 2021b, 26). Consciousness raising is the process by which ideology is de-internalised, through which experiences that challenge ideology come to be understood as conflicting. Through consciousness raising in groups, oppressed individuals who have previously experienced discontent or discrepancies between their experiences and the explanations and understanding offered by ideology come to understand that 'it's not just me', and the process of identifying ideology, unjust practices, and systems of oppression begins.

The development of ideology critique happens in groups, because by sharing their experiences in groups, people are able to recognise patterns of injustice. This is reflected in the work of Patricia Hill Collins, who argues that Black feminist thought which resists racist oppression has been developed collectively in spaces away from oppressors (2009, 12–13, 28). This group-based consciousness raising often results in hermeneutical invention: once a group has realised that they have shared experiences that have previously not been fully articulatable, they develop new concepts and frameworks to enable the articulation of those experiences. In Fricker's example of Carmita Wood, the term 'sexual harassment' was generated from a group of women sharing their experiences of unwanted sexual advances at work for the first time, a form of consciousness raising (2007, 150). Fricker notes how consciousness raising is the method by which experiences which have been obscured can be shared and resources for understanding them developed (2007,

148). Consciousness raising shifts a person's perspective on the world, and this can reveal aspects of experiences that were previously obscured by ideology (Haslanger 2021b, 44). Hermeneutical resistance is a practice of addressing the deficiencies of ideological hermeneutical resources, of making explainable the experiences which are occluded or obscured by ideological hermeneutical resources, and this hermeneutical resistance, a form of ideology critique, is warranted when it is developed from consciousness raising.

We are now able to offer some tentative answers to the problems of ideology critique. Ideologically oppressed people often internalise ideology, but at least some experience what has been called a 'sense of discontent' (MacKinnon 1989, 85), 'gut refusal' (Mansbridge 2001, 4), or 'desiring negation' (Young 1990, 6), which provides the impetus to develop a critique of ideology, though is not yet itself an ideology critique. This is because at least some people are able to recognise their own suffering or the suffering of others as wrongful; people have at least some basic knowledge of justice and injustice (Haslanger 2017a, 166–67). This is an answer to the internalisation problem: it acknowledges that ideology is internalised by those it oppresses, and that this oppression can prevent ideologically oppressed people from recognising ideology, but also leaves room for the fact that sometimes, they do. This sense of discontent can also emerge among people who are not themselves experiencing ideological oppression but have some spark of recognition of the wrong experienced by others – it is not tied to a particular social position or set of experiences, though it is more likely to arise among those who have experiences of oppression. Consciousness raising offers a solution to the warrant problem; ideology critique is warranted when it challenges systems of oppression, and consciousness raising is a methodology for identifying systems of oppression. Because it is collective not individual, the process of consciousness raising reveals patterns of oppression and unjust practices which are obscured by ideology; this is a methodology for determining what experiences are individual and which are the result of systematic injustice. From there, a hypothesis about the cause of injustice can be developed which can be tested and acted on (Haslanger 2021b, 52–53).

Consciousness raising can address the problem of competing explanations because competing critiques from within marginalised communities can be assessed based on whether they have utilised the methodology that consciousness raising gives to develop a warranted critique. This will exclude competing critiques that are put forward by single members of oppressed groups, as groups are needed to engage in consciousness raising in order to properly identify patterns of injustices and group-based oppression. When competing critiques are both developed from consciousness raising, they can be assessed through hypothesis testing (Haslanger 2021b, 53).

Consciousness raising results in the articulation of a moral claim about the wrongness or injustice of a set of practices and the social meanings that uphold them; one way to test these claims is by utilising tactics that challenge or change what the competing critiques have identified as ideological, and see if this results in a change or reduction in the injustice or harm experienced by an oppressed group.

Politically harmful movements which use the language of ideology critique to justify their ideas and associated hermeneutical invention are not ideology critique because they fail to identify oppression. We can test this, as the hypotheses of the causes of perceived wrongs generated by politically harmful movements fail to withstand testing, precisely because they have failed to identify genuine oppression (Haslanger 2021b, 53). So-called ideology critique which reinforces patterns of oppression and continues to organise people in unjust ways is not ideology critique at all.

The resistant practices engaged in by young trans people and trans activist groups are clear examples of consciousness raising. For many trans young people, the process of consciousness raising and recognising the injustice experienced by trans people comes hand in hand with their own realisation of their trans identity. As George and Goguen point out, a much seized upon feature by anti-trans campaigners is that groups of trans young people often develop their sense of their trans identity together, along with their commitment to campaigning against issues of injustice that affect them (2021, 17–18). This is the important ‘group’ feature of consciousness raising. Anti-trans campaigners present this as the ‘social contagion’ of trans identity to delegitimise the identities of trans young people (George and Goguen 2021, 17–18), but the fact that trans young people often collectively recognise the limitations of cissexist conceptions of gender, and are then able to recognise or develop their own trans identities, is actually a feature of consciousness raising, since a group environment enables recognition of the limitations of ideology.

The development of new hermeneutical resources within trans communities has been a prominent feature of the critique of cissexist ideology. The development of a critique of cissexist ideology has required the creation of a new vocabulary to express the nature of trans identities and the injustices experienced by trans people. This new vocabulary to describe injustice experienced by trans people has come out of discussion among trans people about their experiences, which has enabled them to recognise patterns of injustice and oppression. As new hermeneutical resources to describe trans existence and experiences have been developed, this has enabled a rapid sharing of ideology critique. Since cissexist ideology can prevent a trans person realising that they are trans, this has unsurprisingly resulted in larger numbers of people,

especially young people, coming to understand their own trans identity (George and Goguen 2021, 19). Much of this process of finding communities, sharing experiences, and developing new vocabulary, has occurred within online communities, which is also where hypotheses about the causes of harms and moral claims are often made and tested. The development of a critique of cissexist ideology has enabled campaigners to articulate the harms of injustices such as the denial of transition related healthcare to trans young people and the medicalised process by which trans adults are assessed to be suitable for transition related healthcare.

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, I am not interested in the question of *if* a warranted critique of cissexist ideology can be developed because this is a sceptical question and is not a useful line of inquiry for a project that is invested in understanding what is happening in the world. Activists are clearly engaging in ideology critique. Consciousness raising explains how this ideology critique is developed. This account accurately reflects what is happening in the world where people are engaged in resistance, as shown in the case of trans young people, who are finding communities, sharing their experiences, and developing new resistant hermeneutical resources with which the critique of cissexist ideology they develop can be more easily expressed.

4. Further Challenges to Ideology Critique

Consciousness raising offers the best solution to the warrant problem, as well as the internalisation problem and the problem of competing explanations. However, the problems faced by those engaging in ideology critique do not end with the development of a warranted ideology critique. Those developing ideology critique also face practical problems that inhibit their ability to develop critique, and barriers to sharing that critique. I have previously discussed how epistemic injustice is a barrier to sharing and spreading ideology critique in chapter two as claims generated by consciousness raising are often dismissed, inhibited, and obstructed when they are shared outside the communities of the oppressed. Within the trans panic, critique is particularly likely to be rejected because it is often presented in the context of a debate which is disadvantageous to trans people and those arguing for trans liberation. The nature of ideology itself makes it difficult to challenge; because ideology is often naturalising and widely accepted, it makes those challenging it appear to be addressing nothing of significance, or something that is widely recognised as valuable and beneficial. I've also discussed in chapter five how ideology produces ideological true beliefs, which are difficult for activists to respond to in a conversational exchange and make sharing ideology critique harder. In this section, I will briefly discuss some further practical problems that inhibit the development and sharing of ideology critique.

The sharing and development of ideology critique can be challenging because there are people who actively attempt to prevent it. When those in positions of power who have a vested social interest in maintaining ideologies and deficiencies in dominant hermeneutical resources are faced with resistance, they may attempt to suppress that resistance through censorship or violence. Ideological oppression often exists alongside non-ideological forms of oppression such as violent repression and limitations freedom of speech.⁷¹ As a result, acts of resistance often come at the cost of a significant risk to those engaging in them, which sometimes means that individuals aren't willing to take those risks, inhibiting the sharing of ideology critique (Finlayson 2015, 138). In repressive environments, publicly engaging in ideology critique can result in social exclusion, the loss of one's job or social circle, or imprisonment. Those engaged in ideology critique may find themselves excluded, either formally or informally, from places where they can share this critique, such as the media, or professions such as teaching, research, and journalism. These limitations on the sharing of ideology critique prevent new people from recognising its existence and joining activist and anti-oppression movements, as being exposed to critique can spark the 'sense of discontent' described by Young and others – limiting the sharing of ideology critique limits the growth of resistance movements (1990, 6). Repressive environments can also inhibit the ability of members of oppressed groups to physically meet, through restrictions on freedom of movement and freedom of assembly. This is a barrier to consciousness raising because consciousness raising is a collective activity. This sort of repression therefore inhibits the development of ideology critique.

Whilst these practices of repression may appear at first to be features of dictatorial regimes, and therefore unlikely to be relevant to the development of ideology critique for the purposes of the UK trans panic, some of these practices are taking place and are making engaging in ideology critique and sharing it harder. For example, a policy on X (formerly Twitter) treats the word 'cis' or 'cisgender' as a slur and limits the reach of posts that include these words. Those who use the words 'cis' and 'cisgender' can potentially be banned from X (Cuthbertson 2024). The word 'cis' is an example of a resistant hermeneutical resource which has been developed to explain and differentiate the experiences people have in relation to gender and sex and is necessary for developing a critique of cissexist ideology. By restricting the ability of people to use this word online, X has placed a practical restriction on the ability of people to engage in ideology critique.

Policies that inhibit the development and sharing of critique of cissexist ideology have also been proposed, and in some cases put into action, by the British government. For example in 2023, the

⁷¹ This is non-coincidental; ideology often emerges as a rationalisation for these non-ideological forms of oppression and repression.

Conservative government proposed guidance for schools that denied that it was possible for children to be transgender and restricted the ability of teachers to inform children about the possibility that they could be trans (Bland 2023). By refusing to recognise that children and young people under the age of 18 could be trans and limiting the ability of teachers to share information about the possibility for being trans, this guidance, if enacted, could prevent trans children and young people from experiencing the ‘spark of recognition’ necessary for developing ideology critique and instead lead them to internalise cissexist ideology. Cissexist ideology is explicitly reinforced by the proposed guidance, which argued that children and young people should be made to wear uniforms that align with their assigned sex, ‘except from in exceptional circumstances’, and repeated the idea that young people may be changing their gender because of ‘social media’ or because they are being ‘pressured’ to do so (Bland 2023).⁷² When an ideology is explicitly endorsed and enforced by a government, such as through the imposition of guidance or law, this limits the ability of those who have recognised the ideology to share critique and makes it harder for those who are subject to that guidance to recognise the ideology.

5. Conclusion

I have argued that ideology critique is happening, but we still need an account that tells us how a warranted critique is generated. Consciousness raising offers that account and can explain how people are able to gain the critical distance necessary for ideology critique, how they are able to recognise patterns of injustice and oppression, and the role played by hermeneutical resistance and invention. Ideology critique can face further practical challenges to its development in the form of repressive practices that limit the ability of activists or members of oppressed groups to meet in public spaces, and limitations on their ability to share and spread this ideology critique to others. I’ve also pointed out some ways that this is occurring in the trans panic. Nonetheless, warranted critique of cissexist ideology has been developed, and provides the impetus for activism to help tackle the trans panic and related injustices currently happening to trans people in the UK. In the next chapter, I consider some potential tactics activists can use to tackle the trans panic.

⁷² This guidance has not been enacted but easily could have been (the guidance was proposed towards the end of the Conservative government in 2023 and was not able to be enacted before the 2024 election). The current government is likely to release new guidance for how schools should treat trans pupils in response to the April 2025 Supreme Court decision on the definition of sex for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010.

Chapter 7: Tactics for Overcoming the Trans Panic

1. Introduction

In previous chapters, I have sought to diagnose features of the trans panic, identify different forms of injustice occurring within it, identify argumentative moves and techniques used by anti-trans activists, and explain the nature and role of cissexist ideology. I have also looked at how warranted ideology critique can be developed, and how this is occurring in trans communities. In this final chapter, I turn my attention to possible tactics for tackling the trans panic. As I discussed in chapter two, engaging with the ‘debate’ framing of the trans panic is detrimental to trans people and the cause of trans liberation because the debate framing itself is unjust, and within the context of a debate trans people experience epistemic injustice. The debate framing of the trans panic is premised on false information and serves the interests of anti-trans activists. ‘Debate’ sustains the cissexist ideology/epistemic injustice feedback loop; as I outlined previously, the trans panic is characterised by a feedback loop between ideology and epistemic injustice where cissexist ideology shapes available hermeneutical resources and stereotypes about trans people, leading to epistemic injustice, which then makes ideology difficult to tackle. In this chapter, I consider tactics that activists can use that do not involve engaging with the debate framing. These tactics target one or both of cissexist ideology and epistemic injustice, as well as institutions that play an important role in sustaining the feedback loop.

The first tactic I discuss is the tactic of encouraging the development of epistemic virtues, which is the suggestion Fricker makes for tackling epistemic injustice. I largely reject this tactic, as I argue it fails to address epistemic injustice in the trans panic because of the way this epistemic injustice is caused by ideology. I then discuss two different forms of protest: firstly, marches and rallies, then direct action and embodied protest. I also consider encouraging moral re-appraisal (through the development of solidarity movements and activist art), and changing and challenging practices and social spaces that are shaped by ideology. These tactics show some promise for tackling the trans panic, though all face limitations. Lastly, I consider the often-suggested tactic of ‘changing hearts and minds’ through conversations with individuals. Whilst I do not think that this tactic is an effective way of tackling the trans panic, I acknowledge that activists are often placed in situations where engaging in this tactic is unavoidable, and I trace some potential positive outcomes from this tactic, alongside its substantial limitations. It is for those directly engaged in activism themselves to decide what tactics to pursue; my goal in this chapter is not to prescriptively tell activists which tactics they should be pursuing. In fact, as I discuss, most of these tactics are already being engaged in by trans liberation activists. Rather, my goal is to consider how these tactics can tackle the trans panic, and how each tactic speaks

differently to the dynamics I have identified. Ultimately, I argue that it will take a combination of many different tactics to bring an end to the trans panic, as the different tactics I highlight here all intervene in the cissexist ideology/epistemic injustice feedback loop in different ways, and all aspects of the feedback loop must be tackled to fully stop the trans panic.

2. Epistemic Virtues

Fricker suggests that the development of epistemic virtues can be used to combat epistemic injustice (2007, 91–93, 169). Since the trans panic is characterised by a feedback loop involving epistemic injustice, this is worth investigating as a potential strategy for overcoming it. Fricker notes that an individual's prejudices are often reflective of the attitudes of the society in which they grew up, and argues that the development of the virtue of testimonial justice on the behalf of a hearer is necessary for them to develop a 'critical stance' towards those attitudes and 'correct' those prejudices (2007, 82, 98).⁷³ On her account, developing this critical stance and correcting for prejudices prevents testimonial injustice because the virtuous hearer does not downgrade the credibility of their interlocuter. The virtue of hermeneutical justice is similarly corrective and involves being aware that when an interlocuter is struggling to effectively communicate something this is because they are 'struggling with an objective difficulty' caused by a lack of appropriate hermeneutical resources, and not because what they are saying is 'nonsense' or because they have some sort of individual intellectual failing (Fricker 2007, 169). Utilising this strategy to combat the trans panic would involve encouraging the development of these virtues by those who are engaged in 'debate' around the trans panic, as well as among the wider population who are the audience of the trans panic 'debate' so that they do not reject or dismiss the testimony of trans people. If Fricker is correct, it follows that if these virtues were widely adopted, this would mean that the 'debate' framing of the trans panic would become less detrimental for advancing the cause of trans liberation, as trans people would face fewer barriers to having their testimony taken seriously and their testimony would be less likely to be rejected.

2.1 Limitations of Epistemic Virtues

However, the development of these virtues is unlikely to be an effective strategy for tackling the trans panic because the strategy does not account for the role of ideology in epistemic injustice, or the broader trans panic. The two main problems with this strategy I will discuss are that it is an attempt to fix a structural issue with a solution that focusses on individuals as perpetrators (as

⁷³ The virtue of testimonial justice can also be displayed naively by those who do not hold prejudices, primarily by children (Fricker 2007, 94–95).

has been discussed by Anderson (2012), among others), and that it requires the co-operation of those individuals.

Whilst Fricker acknowledges the role of oppressive social structures, particularly in her account of hermeneutical injustice, the strategies of testimonial and hermeneutical virtue treat epistemic injustice as something that can be tackled at the individual level. By focussing on individuals as perpetrators, instead of the wider social structures and dynamics that result in epistemic injustice, the root cause of the injustice is not addressed and the solution offered by a virtue-based approach can only mitigate the harms of epistemic injustice or offer small reductions in the number of occurrences.⁷⁴ Anderson analogises using the virtue of testimonial justice to tackle structural testimonial injustice to the use of charity to tackle institutional poverty; structural solutions would be ‘better and more effective’ (2012, 171). As Fricker notes, the individual prejudices that drive testimonial injustice tend to reflect wider social attitudes and stereotypes; I have argued that these are shaped by cissexist ideology in the case of the trans panic. Encouraging the strategy of developing the virtue of testimonial justice risks incorrectly portraying the trans panic as the result of the prejudices of individuals, rather than a broader ideology which is upheld through social structures, which could mean that other tactics that aim to tackle these structural forms of injustice are ignored or not pursued. To truly eradicate testimonial injustice, the cissexist ideology which shapes these prejudices must be tackled.

When a person is in the grip of ideology, they will not recognise the existence of their prejudices, so encouraging people to develop the virtue of testimonial justice is unlikely to be successful, especially when prejudices against trans people are widespread and deeply entrenched because they are ideological. A similar objection has been raised in existing literature, that those who hold prejudices are unlikely to be able to detect them, as they are automatic and unconscious (Anderson 2012, 167; Sherman 2016). Sherman (2016, 238) goes as far as to suggest that encouraging people to reflect on their prejudices can actually reinforce them; by reflecting on their prejudices they may reaffirm them as most people think that most of their assessments of credibility are fair and accurate.

The strategy of developing epistemic virtues involves asking the perpetrators of an injustice, who don’t recognise the existence of that injustice, to become better people. It is not a viable strategy when prejudice is shaped by ideology, so is not an effective means to tackle the trans panic. Because prejudice is often unconscious, it can affect the thinking of those who consciously reject

⁷⁴ Fricker (2010) has said in later work that she thinks that structural solutions are necessary for combatting epistemic injustice, but emphasises that the development of virtues is a part of the solution, whereas I argue that structural solutions are the only solutions, and that the development of virtues to combat epistemic injustice is not possible in many cases, and where possible is largely ineffective.

stereotypes. Though Fricker argues that we can use this dissonance between our judgements of credibility and conscious endorsements to identify our prejudices, because prejudices are so deeply entrenched, people do not always feel this dissonance (Anderson 2012, 167). Those in the grip of ideology, who may reject that a stereotype or prejudice is unjust at all, are not going to experience dissonance, so this is not a viable strategy for engaging with them. Tackling the testimonial injustice that has played a key role in the trans panic requires addressing the root cause of the testimonial injustice: the controlling images of trans people that are internalised as prejudices. Whilst testimonial justice may be a useful virtue to cultivate within activist spaces to enable better communication within a group that already recognises the existence of cissexist ideology, it has limited scope for addressing the key role played by testimonial injustice in the trans panic because it does not tackle the controlling images that shape prejudices.

Because the underlying role of the controlling images that shape prejudices isn't addressed by individuals developing the virtue of testimonial justice, the other harmful effects of these controlling images also aren't addressed by this strategy. In the trans panic, the controlling image of trans women as violent, predatory, or a threat to cis women enables the 'debate' framing to emerge. Even if the virtue of testimonial justice were to be widely adopted, this wouldn't undermine the wider role of the controlling image in shaping the framing of 'debate', which is itself harmful even if it were not to cause epistemic injustice. The best outcome the widespread adoption of the virtue of testimonial justice could produce would be a debate without epistemic injustice, but justice and an end to the trans panic requires there to be no debate at all. The widespread cultivation of epistemic virtues is not a solution to epistemic injustice that is shaped by ideology, but even if these virtues were to be widely cultivated and could tackle epistemic injustice, this would not undermine the injustice of the existence of 'debate' itself.

The virtue of hermeneutical justice (being alert to the possibility that one's interlocuter is struggling to communicate owing to a gap in available hermeneutical resources) may be useful for people in activist spaces (particularly non-trans allies) to develop to assist with communication within those spaces, but it is insufficient to counter hermeneutical injustice in the trans panic (Fricker 2007, 169). The virtue of hermeneutical justice is a post hoc harm minimisation strategy for the effects of hermeneutical marginalisation and ideology's influence on hermeneutical resources. Like in the case of testimonial justice, this virtue would not be taken up effectively by the people who would need it the most (those in the grip of cissexist ideology) and again tries to solve a structural problem with an individualised solution. Hermeneutical injustice is caused by the exclusion of marginalised groups from the spaces where dominant hermeneutical resources are developed and shared, positions of power where people have greater

influence over the development of dominant hermeneutical resources, and the related influence of ideology over the development of dominant hermeneutical resources. Interventions that target individuals during exchanges in which people may lack the requisite hermeneutical resources do not address the cause of the hermeneutical injustice, so won't remedy the issue at large.

The virtue of hermeneutical justice could be used to tackle some related forms of epistemic injustice such as wilful hermeneutical ignorance (as described by Pohlhaus, which occurs when dominantly situated knowers refuse to take up hermeneutical resources developed by marginalised groups (2012)), since recognising that marginalised people lack requisite hermeneutical resources may make one more sensitive to their needs for the new resources they develop. However, it seems particularly unlikely that the virtue would be taken up in cases such as this. Those who reject new hermeneutical resources because they do not recognise the need for them are the least likely to be able to develop the virtue of recognising that difficulties in communicating can be caused by deficiencies in dominant hermeneutical resources. When it is not widely adopted, hermeneutical justice doesn't improve the available hermeneutical resources, and it does not alter the social conditions and ideology that shape dominant hermeneutical resources. Properly tackling hermeneutical injustice requires interventions that influence the process by which dominant hermeneutical resources are created and shared. This requires tackling the ideology which is central to this process.

3. Marches and Rallies

As I discussed in chapter two, engaging with the trans panic 'debate' results in epistemic injustice towards trans people. Debate is not a mechanism through which progress for trans liberation can be made in this context, because the existence of the debate itself is antithetical to trans liberation. Protest is a strategy that trans activists and their allies have used to engage with the issues of the trans panic outside of the debate framing. In this section, I argue that marches and rallies can be effective means to tackle some of the epistemic injustice experienced by trans people in the trans panic by fostering in-group communication and creating spaces where trans people can share testimony and hermeneutical resources with each other, but that their effectiveness in fundamentally changing the material conditions faced by trans people in the UK is more limited. Marches and rallies are unlikely to do much to undermine the 'debate' framing of the trans panic or fundamentally challenge dominant cissexist ideology.

In this section I discuss 'marches and rallies' as forms of protest. The sorts of protest I discuss in this section typically involve groups of people chanting slogans and giving speeches, do not involve physical violence or destruction of property, and typically take place in public spaces. I make the distinction between the protest actions discussed in this section and the actions

discussed in the next section on the basis of how the actions aim to communicate a message: in this section, I focus on forms of protest that primarily use speech to convey a message, whereas in the next section I discuss forms of protest action that use different means to communicate. I make the distinction between marches and rallies and the forms of embodied protest and direct action that I discuss in section 3 because, as I will discuss, the different actions involved intervene in the cissexist ideology/epistemic injustice feedback loop in different ways, so have different potential effects.

When a person is repeatedly and systematically subject to testimonial injustice, they can be systematically prevented from contributing to knowledge. Having one's testimony on a topic that is central to one's life or identity systematically disregarded involves what Fricker calls a 'sustained assault in respect of a defining human capacity' (2007, 59). This is what is occurring to trans people in the trans panic, especially if they attempt to engage with the 'debate' framing. In some cases, systematic testimonial injustice can also result in a loss of epistemic confidence, where a person begins to doubt whether they know what they do because others around them fail to recognise them as a knower. Whilst I think this is unlikely to occur in this case, being repeatedly subject to testimonial injustice can nonetheless be deeply psychologically damaging, and may also lead to testimonial smothering: not offering one's testimony because it is unlikely to receive the proper uptake (Dotson 2011).

Engaging in protest at a march or rally is a means to tackle testimonial injustice because during a protest those who often experience testimonial injustice are surrounded by other protestors who affirm their testimony. For example, in protests for trans liberation, chants and placards often assert the legitimacy of trans identity or testify to the harm of transphobia – testimony which, as I discussed in chapter two, is often disregarded or downgraded in a debate. These kinds of protest give those engaging in it a chance to build their epistemic confidence by having their testimony affirmed by others who are testifying to similar experiences and injustices. Whilst protests are often thought of as aiming to change particular policies or communicate to wider society or powerful members of it, protests also serve an important role in the communication between members of an in-group (Akbar 2020, 67). Especially because the percentage of the population who is trans is small, holding protests that consist of larger gatherings in public spaces alongside allies can serve as a way for in-group members to remain hopeful when faced with a hostile political and social climate. Akbar (2020) emphasises the important role that protest can play in

community building; I argue this community building role can also be utilised to tackle epistemic injustice.⁷⁵

For example, following the UK government's decision to block the Scottish Government's bill to reform the Gender Recognition Act in Scotland in January 2023, I attended a rally against the decision in Glasgow.⁷⁶ This protest was never going to reverse the decision made by the UK government but served as a way for those who were angered and saddened by the decision to come together and communicate that anger to one another, while asserting the importance of legal rights for trans people and opposition to the Conservative government. When faced with the widespread and institutional denial of what you know (that amendments to the GRA do not affect women's rights, in this case) protest serves as a place to offer that testimony without it being unjustly disregarded, and to reinforce epistemic confidence in oneself. Marches and rallies both create the physical space in which testimony that may otherwise be smothered or unjustly disregarded can be expressed loudly, and surround those who are victims of testimonial injustice with others who can affirm their testimony and experiences.

Marches and rallies are also sites of resistance to other forms of epistemic injustice. They are opportunities for epistemic communities to share new hermeneutical resources they have developed among themselves. Whilst these resources may not be accepted or taken up outside the epistemic community, protests are a particularly effective place for this type of resistance because they reach a wide in-group audience and provide marginalised people with a platform to do so that is often denied to them. Protests are spaces where members of oppressed groups can communicate with other 'similarly situated people' (Akbar 2020, 67); this provides a means for a marginalised group to combat testimonial injustice. Chants, slogans, speeches, and placards can be used to share new resources. For example, 'trans power' and 'trans joy' are often used in protests by trans activists: these are resistant hermeneutical resources that are useful for expressing resistance to dominant cissexist ideology.

I also argue that protests are places where hermeneutical sabotage can be resisted. Hermeneutical sabotage can involve the distorting of hermeneutical resources developed by marginalised groups (Edgoose 2024). Protests give trans people a space in which they can choose the way in which they speak and on what topic, as opposed to in a debate, where the agenda is pre-determined and anti-trans talking points must be responded to. In a protest, the effects of hermeneutical sabotage

⁷⁵ Medina (2023) also discusses how protest can be a means to tackle epistemic injustice, but focusses on overcoming silencing. I discuss this further in section 2.2.

⁷⁶ A bill that would have reformed the GRA in Scotland passed in the Scottish Parliament, but the UK government blocked the reform on the basis that it would interfere with UK-wide law. This was the first time that the UK government had blocked an act of the Scottish Parliament (Morton and Seddon 2023).

can be resisted by rejecting the distortion of resistant hermeneutical resources. Activists do this by using those resources in ways that are consistent with the resistant usages originally developed. When participating in a protest, activists do not need to engage with the use of distorted hermeneutical resources or new prejudiced hermeneutical resources developed by dominantly situated knowers and can explicitly reject these distorted and prejudiced hermeneutical resources. The worst possible effect of hermeneutical sabotage is that it could change the meaning of available hermeneutical resources, including resistant hermeneutical resources so thoroughly that it prevents the marginalised group from being able to use the resource to be able to communicate within their in-group. Protest spaces can be places where the terms that are at risk of having their meanings distorted can be re-asserted to help retain the hermeneutical resource for in-group communication and for marginalised people to have available for self-understanding.

Trans activists can also take up protest tactics from other protest movements to tackle cissexist ideology. For example, Medina discusses how the use of familial roles to express emotional testimony in protest can be a form of ‘affective resistance’ that challenges insensitivity towards certain injustices, as was used by protestors from the Mothers of the Plaza del Mayo, who used their role as mothers to help challenge insensitivities about the disappearances of their children under the military dictatorship in Argentina (2023, 226–27). Ideology obscures injustice in a way that can shape our affective responses, so protest tactics such as this that employ affective resistance that invites an audience to care about something can be a way to tackle an ideology. This is a tactic that can and has been used in the trans panic. For example, the family of Alice Litman, a transgender woman who died by suicide whilst on an NHS waiting list for transition-related healthcare, have joined activists and campaigners at protests holding signs that highlight their familial relationship, and have used their familial ties to campaign for better access to healthcare for trans people.⁷⁷ This is one way that protest can begin to undermine the cissexist ideology that feeds the trans panic feedback loop; tactics such as this draw attention to injustice that ideology obscures.

3.1 Limitations of Marches and Rallies

However, there are also limitations on the effectiveness of marches and rallies for tackling the trans panic. Medina highlights that one of the functions of protest is to draw attention to issues that have been ignored and confront institutional silences by calling on others to care about an

⁷⁷ In a statement following the inquest into her death, her parents said: “We can never bring Alice back, but we will keep campaigning to ensure that all trans people are able to live in dignity and receive the healthcare they need and deserve” (Good Law Project 2023). For the placards held by her family at Trans Pride in London which highlighted their familial relationship, see: https://www.instagram.com/p/CuguKDcImMf/?img_index=1

injustice (2023, 212, 238–39). But the trans panic is not an issue where there is an institutional silence: it is a moral panic defined by high levels of media attention surrounding trans people. Simply drawing attention to the issue is not an effective means of tackling the trans panic because the attention is already there. Medina argues convincingly of the role that protest can play in breaking structural and ideological silences, but the trans panic lacks many of the features of the examples he uses, such as the AIDs crisis in the 1980s and disappearances and murders perpetrated during the Argentinian military dictatorship in the 1970s (2023, 199–200). These were issues characterised by widespread public and government inattention, whereas the trans panic has been the focus of media and government attention, but that attention is characterised by high levels of transphobia and a failure to recognise injustice suffered by trans people. Marches and rallies in this case cannot have the same silence breaking effect that Medina describes, because there is no silence to break.

Whilst protest may be an effective means to communicate within an in-group, it is less effective for communication outside of the protesting community, and this kind of communication is often needed to make policy change and tackle institutional transphobia, as well as the broader dynamic of the trans panic. Protest is no guarantee of policy change, and the effects it has on the wider public are variable. While certain kinds of protest may have the potential for social transformation, there is also a risk of the development of what Thompson Ford calls ‘protest fatigue’ among a population: a general sense of cynicism about protest movements that has developed in response to the frequent and predictable use of protest as a tactic by social groups (Thompson Ford 2020). Marches and rallies have become a regular occurrence in most cities on many issues so there is less chance that any individual protest can cut through; it is easy for many protests to go ignored, limiting their effectiveness.

It is very difficult to empirically measure what impact, if any, protests have on anti-trans policies pursued by governments, the representation of the trans panic in the media, and anti-trans social attitudes, both among those with the power to make changes in these areas, and among the wider public. Protests can be a way to raise awareness of an issue among the wider population, but as previously discussed, the case at hand is not one where a lack of awareness in the problem. Though protests can be used to put pressure on politicians, their receptiveness to this is often unclear. Occasionally, politicians may tell us that their decisions have been influenced by protests, but often, even if they do change their position or course of action following a protest, it can be difficult to tell if the protest was that cause of this change. This is not a reason not to engage in protest; as Akbar discusses, given the importance of protest for community building and in-group communication, the success of a protest overall should not be measured by its

ability to appeal to those with power (Akbar 2020, 66–69). However, the lack of ability to appeal to those in power is a limitation on the effectiveness of protest as a tactic for tackling the trans panic.

In the trans panic, marches and rallies offer limited opportunity to challenge dominant cissexist ideology. This is because genuinely undermining the grip of ideology on a national scale requires a mass movement and mobilisation that trans liberation activists are unable to achieve alone, and because the nature of the injustice experienced by trans people in the trans panic can be difficult to draw attention to through protest. I highlighted how Medina (2023) has described how familial ties can be used to resist the insensitivity of people towards injustice, and ways this tactic can be used by trans activists. However, this tactic only works for highlighting some of injustices trans people experience, such as violence and lack of access to healthcare. The injustice of the debate framing itself and other injustices in which people are not physically harmed are harder to protest in this way. Whilst protest can be a site where opposition to aspects of cissexist ideology may be voiced and protestors can engage in consciousness raising that enables them to engage in ideology critique, protest in the trans panic has limited potential to create the kind of widespread social change that challenging an ideology requires.

There are examples of protest movements that have created meaningful change utilising ideology critique, such as the Black Lives Matter movement, which has successfully interrupted a social silence on the murders of black people by police and challenged ideological conceptions of the nature of policing (Reny and Newman 2021; Wu et al. 2023).⁷⁸ However, the Black Lives Matter movement has been characterised by ongoing protest action taking place at a local, national, and international scale. While mass protest movements have the potential to challenge ideologies, smaller scale and single event protests of the kind that it is possible for trans activists to organise don't receive the required level of social uptake to challenge dominant ideologies. This is not to say that this strategy could never work for trans activists, but work needs to be done to expand the number of people willing and able to organise and participate in co-ordinated mass-mobilisation before this is achievable. The type of marches and rallies that trans activists are currently capable of organising have the potential to cut through cissexist ideology and draw attention to injustice on a small scale but are insufficient for sparking the broad social change that is required to undermine the dominance of cissexist ideology.

⁷⁸ It's important to note that while the Black Lives Matter movement has successfully challenged ideological conceptions of policing, this critique is by no means universally accepted, and Black people in the UK continue to be targeted by the disproportionate use of policies such as stop and search (Home Office 2024).

While marches and rallies can be means to escape or tackle epistemic injustice, there are also forms of epistemic injustice that specifically target protestors. Protestors can be subject to silencing by the rhetoric used to describe them which makes the potential audience of their protest insensitive to it. Medina notes how the rhetoric of ‘rioting and looting’ has been used to de-legitimise the protests of Black racial justice campaigners, and that this rhetoric means their protest and testimony doesn’t receive proper uptake from their audience (2023, 236). Medina describes this as a form of agential epistemic injustice, because it undermines or compromises the epistemic agency of protestors by curtailing their ability to successfully engage in certain protest acts as the uptake of those acts is prevented or defective. However, this is also closely related to testimonial injustice, as the mechanism through which protestors’ epistemic agency is curtailed involves drawing on prejudicial stereotypes which downgrades their legitimacy to prevent the proper uptake of their testimony.

There is also a risk of this occurring within the trans panic, where trans activists are portrayed as ‘unreasonable’, and ‘extreme’ and are maligned as ‘aggressive’ or ‘intimidating’ (Simpson 2024; Jones and Slater 2020; Weaver 2023): transmisogynist stereotypes and controlling images which make an audience less receptive to their testimony. These stereotypes may also be applied to trans people who engage in protest to delegitimise their aims. As I discussed in chapter two, transmisogynistic controlling images of trans women as dangerous or aggressive are one way that injustices experienced by trans women are obscured and dismissed. When the aim of a protest is to draw attention to these injustices, the mobilisation of these controlling images against trans women is a way to undermine protestors’ ability to do this. These stereotypes seem especially likely to be applied to trans people who engage in protest action, even peaceful protest action, because normal actions in a peaceful protest such as shouting, expressing anger, and taking up public space are easy to portray as if they were affirmations of these stereotypes. This further decreases the likelihood of the proper uptake of demands, limiting the effectivity of protest action.

Though marches and rallies can offer alternative means for trans activists to campaign outside of the ‘debate’ framing, the reception of those protests, including any media coverage of them, is still subject to interpretation through the ‘debate’ framing and cissexist tropes. The use of controlling images in portrayals of trans protestors is one example of this. For example, trans people at a peaceful protest in support of hate-crime law in Scotland were described as ‘abusive’ and ‘intimidating’ (Simpson 2024). The ‘debate’ framing of protest is particularly clear in media coverage of counter protests by both trans and anti-trans activists; coverage in these cases typically considers ‘both sides’ of the injustices experienced by trans people, frames proposals to

limit trans people's human rights and participation in public life in the language of 'controversy', and often repeats anti-trans rhetoric and transphobic language un-critically (e.g., Simpson 2024; BBC News 2023b). This creates a double bind for protestors; it is typically part of the goal of a protest to attract media attention to receive greater publicity for the demands they make and greater attention to their cause, but when they do attract media attention, this attention is framed through the lens of 'debate'. For this reason, while protests can be an effective way to combat some forms of epistemic injustice and reduce the harmful effects of other forms of epistemic injustice, protest is unlikely to be successful for communicating the experiences of trans people to an audience or shifting the framing of the trans panic overall. Because the actions of protestors are still framed to outsiders as taking place within a context of a debate, protest cannot fully escape the epistemic injustice/cissexist ideology feedback loop.

Media coverage of marches and rallies that doesn't perpetuate the debate framing would require genuine engagement with the issues raised by protestors, including an acknowledgement of the broader hostile climate faced by trans people, and would not include un-critical platforming of anti-trans talking points and dog-whistles; when these were brought up, they would be identified as such. However, due to the dominance of cissexist ideology, this type of media coverage does not exist in mainstream media outlets, because the 'debate' framing is what is taken to be 'neutral' and therefore fair coverage for legitimate journalism. This is not a reason not to protest, but it is a limitation on the effectivity of protest for tackling the trans panic. Marches and rallies give trans people and activists alternatives outside of the debate framing and some means with which escape certain kinds of epistemic injustice, but they do little to tackle the debate framing itself, or the dominance of cissexist ideology.

4. Active Disruption and Embodied Protest

In this section, I discuss the potential of tactics that involve active attempts to stop or change harmful events or practices (direct action) and embodied forms of protest that involve actions beyond speech. Not all these protest actions are forms of direct action (because they do not all involve directly attempting to stop a harmful practice), but I discuss these tactics together because they all involve some kind of typically embodied action that goes beyond speech, and therefore can be used to attempt to intervene in the feedback loop in a different way to the kinds of protests discussed in the previous section. These actions sometimes break the law, are often disruptive of the activities of the institutions or people they target, and may use outrageous methods to communicate. These are other tactics that activists can and have used to campaign for trans liberation and to tackle the ongoing trans panic. Much literature on direct action, civil, and uncivil disobedience is focussed on the issue of whether and when these types of actions are

permissible, when and if it is possible for uncivil disobedience to be justified, and if we have a duty to obey the law (e.g., Delmas 2018; Lyons 1998; Lefkowitz 2007). These questions are relevant to activists in the trans panic, but they are not the issues that I focus in on here. Instead, I consider whether, and if so, how, these types of actions could work to tackle the dynamic of the trans panic that I have identified. I constrain my discussion to the types of action that may be considered justifiable in some cases by theories of the permissibility of civil and uncivil disobedience; I won't, for example, be discussing the effectiveness of acts that could be considered violent terrorism.⁷⁹ Having established which tactics may be effective for tackling the trans panic, there will be further questions about the permissibility of these actions that require settling, but these questions are beyond the scope of the project I intend to engage in here. Questions of whether the actions are permissible may also depend on their potential benefits; this is what I aim to establish in this section.

In this section, I first consider boycotts, which I argue are unlikely to be effective for tackling the trans panic due to the small size of the trans liberation movement, before discussing tactics under the broad headings of 'output targeting' and 'communication' tactics, though of course, in practice many tactics have both functions. I identify some forms of direct action that may halt the reproduction of cissexist ideology and the continuation of the 'debate' framing of the trans panic, and forms of embodied protest that may be effective for communicating a message outside of the 'debate' framing of the trans panic, helping to overcome epistemic injustice. However, I argue that these tactics are unlikely to be effective for tackling the content of cissexist ideology itself.

4.1 Boycotts

The 'debate' framing of the trans panic is perpetuated in part by media companies that continue to produce news articles, television programs, and the like which utilise it. Though the 'debate' framing emerges from cissexist ideology, media companies make decisions that contribute to the dominance of this framing of the trans panic, which itself perpetuates the trans panic. Many media companies have also actively used harmful and transphobic rhetoric or provided a platform for others to do so.⁸⁰ Therefore, these companies are an obvious target for direct action campaigns. Presumably, part of the incentive for these companies to sustain the trans panic 'debate' is that this type of coverage is profitable for them. Direct action can be used to attempt to make it unprofitable. One tactic for achieving this is mass consumer boycotts of companies that perpetuate the framing of 'debate'. By making the 'debate' framing of the trans panic

⁷⁹ For example, theorists who have defended some use of violent civil disobedience place limits on the use of violence, such as not hurting innocent bystanders (LaBossiere 2005; Delmas 2018, 48–50; Brownlee 2012, 198–99).

⁸⁰ E.g. The Guardian (2018), the BBC (Lowbridge 2021), and Channel 4 (Lester 2018), to give a small selection.

unprofitable for media companies, this could help to challenge the trans panic by reducing the number of places that this ‘debate’ occurs and its prominence, therefore reducing the epistemic injustice experienced by trans people in these ‘debates’ and removing a space in which cissexist ideology is reinforced. Mass boycotts can also be an effective way to publicly admonish those companies and to remind others of the wrongful action of the company. For example, people in Liverpool boycotted The Sun newspaper following its coverage of the 1989 Hillsborough disaster, in which The Sun blamed Liverpool fans themselves for the deaths of 97 supporters and shared untrue and offensive allegations that the victims were responsible for their own deaths. The boycott had a dual function of both hitting the profits of the newspaper and communicating that their coverage was morally unacceptable. Boycotts can both target profits and draw attention to wrongdoing.

However, mass consumer boycotts of media companies are not workable for trans activists; the media organisations involved are often too large or too dominant for the trans liberation movement to successfully boycott them because the movement itself is too small. Boycotts would not be large enough to affect profits, and the dominance of cissexist ideology, as well as the small scale of the boycott, would undercut the moral messaging.⁸¹ Boycotts can draw attention to injustice, but drawing attention to injustice is not enough under ideological conditions where the fact that something is unjust is likely to be obscured. Those engaging in a boycott are likely to be viewed as a minority group making a fuss over nothing, rather than effectively communicating what’s wrong about the current media coverage of trans issues.

Trans journalists have engaged in boycotts by refusing to work for media organisations that have peddled transphobia, but there are too few trans journalists for this to have a major impact on the company’s finances or journalistic viability (Hunte 2022). Because this type of boycott by workers can be done publicly and prominently by those involved, it may be more effective in communicating the moral messaging, but again, cissexist ideology undercuts the effectiveness of this messaging. This action also has a high financial cost for journalists, as engaging in it means giving up a source of income, potentially making this action unsustainable, or resulting in the knock-on effect of trans people leaving journalism entirely. This type of action from workers may communicate effectively to others who are already aware of the injustice of the trans panic, but it is unlikely to be an effective means to spark a recognition of injustice from those in the

⁸¹ For example, there was a campaign to boycott the Guardian that encouraged people to cancel their subscriptions because of transphobic coverage (Kelleher 2021), but this had no noticeable effect on the Guardian’s coverage or opinion pieces concerning trans people.

grip of ideology, because they are likely to reject claims from trans people that they are experiencing injustice.

4.2 Output-Targeting Tactics

Given boycotts have limited viability for a small movement, trans liberation activists must use different tactics if they are to undercut the profitability of media companies or communicate the injustice of their existing coverage. For example, activists could organise sit-ins at the offices of these organisations, undermining the company's ability to function and using the sit-in as a way to both communicate the harm of the debate framing and to negotiate for better coverage of trans people and the issues that affect them. More radical actions available to activists include DoS (Denial of Service) cyber-attacks on the online pages of media companies or anti-trans organisations, hacking social media pages, or sabotaging the printing of newspapers. As well as hitting profits as a way to persuade profit-motivated companies to change their coverage of trans issues, these actions aim to physically prevent the publication and dissemination of transphobic material and the continuation of the 'debate' rhetoric by those, it targets regardless of whether profit is a motivation.⁸²

The trans panic is characterised by high levels of sensationalised media coverage which harms trans people and reinforces dominant cissexist ideology; the media is a key site in which the trans panic feedback loop is taking place. The tactics of sit-ins, DoS Attacks, and sabotaging publications (when aimed at media companies) tackle the trans panic by temporarily pausing this output of this coverage, temporarily pausing at least one way the trans panic is perpetuated. Targeting anti-trans group's own dissemination of transphobic material is another way to halt this output. This strategy was successfully used by Trans Kids Deserve Better: a group of trans youth activists who engaged in direct action when they stopped some sessions of the conference of the anti-trans group LGB Alliance by releasing thousands of crickets into the auditorium where the event was being held (Them 2024). As the campaign group argued, LGB alliance are engaged in an 'acceleration of transphobic hate and misinformation, which drives much of the attack on our healthcare and our dignity' (Them 2024). This action directly intervened in the cissexist ideology/epistemic injustice feedback loop by temporarily stopping the reproduction and sharing of cissexist ideology from taking place at this conference.

However, this strategy does little to tackle the underlying cissexist ideology. The fundamental tenets of cissexist ideology, such as the sex/gender binary, remain unchallenged by these actions. This means that even if these tactics were entirely successful in getting media companies to stop

⁸² As previously mentioned, I take it that there are further questions about if and when these actions can be justified; my goal here it to highlight how they could be effective to counter the dynamics I have identified.

perpetuating the trans panic (which would itself be a significant achievement) or were even able to permanently stop anti-trans organisations from releasing content that reinforces cissexist ideology, the social conditions that produced the trans panic would remain. This tactic has potential to temporarily pause aspects of the trans panic and the reproduction of cissexist ideology but is insufficient to undermine the ideology itself.

4.3 Communication Tactics

One of the challenges faced by activists and campaigners for trans liberation in the trans panic is that they are denied an effective means to communicate to others. Trans people are only given a chance to speak through the ‘debate’ framing which systematically disadvantages them and are subject to epistemic injustice that means that they are unlikely to be believed or taken seriously, undermining their ability to communicate effectively. As I discussed in section 3, though marches and rallies can provide spaces for activists to communicate with each other outside the debate framing, they are likely to be interpreted through that framing in media coverage and are unlikely to be effective at communicating to others. Though all protest and direct-action tactics are communicative in some way, in this section, I focus on tactics that are primarily communicative, that is, a primary goal of the tactic is to communicate a message to some wider audience, either through direct action, or through disruptive and uncivil forms of protest. The communicative tactics discussed here involve actions beyond speeches, chants, and holding placards, which I discussed in section 3.

Direct action and embodied and disruptive protest offer further means by which activists can communicate, or demand to be listened to, outside of the framing of ‘debate’. One method activist groups have used to demand to be heard is to hijack the means of mass communication. People protesting against the introduction of Section 28 of the local government act, which banned discussion of and teaching about homosexuality in British schools from its introduction in 1988 until its repeal in 2000 in Scotland and 2003 in the rest of the UK, did this by abseiling into the House of Lords when they were passing the legislation (which was filmed), and breaking into a news studio to interrupt a live BBC news broadcast, shouting their demands (Godfrey 2018). Another means to demand to be heard that has been used by activists is to take over advertising space, such as on trains or bus stops. Activists have hijacked advertising space to give information about how people can resist deportations (Barnes 2018), to call for a ceasefire in Gaza and draw attention to the conditions faced by queer Palestinians living under Israeli occupation, and demand the British government stop sending weapons to Israel (Butt 2023).

This type of action can be effective because it is a way that information or an activist message can be distributed to a wide range of people, but in a format where anti-trans activists aren’t

given a ‘right to reply’, as occurs when they speak through mainstream media which utilises the ‘debate’ framing. In the case of advertising campaigns, there is no individual at risk of experiencing testimonial injustice. Engaging in direct action or protest can be the only means available for activists to make radical demands or use their own language to describe the injustice of what is occurring, because radical activist demands are often excluded from dominant media conversations about trans people. For example, in debates over reforming the GRA, there was no discussion of radical activist demands to remove legal sex entirely. Because this demand was entirely excluded from ‘debate’ about the Gender Recognition Act, direct action and protest that takes over a means of communication would have been one method available for communicating it. While marches and rallies often rely on media coverage that reproduces the debate framing to amplify their message, these forms of radical action are themselves ways to disseminate information and testimony, so are able to share a message outside of the debate framing.

These types of actions can also be a means to tackle the widespread ignorance about trans people and the injustice they face as they can provide information to a new audience in a new way. As the activist takeover of advertising space to highlight injustice and violence experienced by queer people in Palestine show, this can also be a means with which ideology critique can be attempted, through drawing attention to the existence of an injustice which, due to ideology, is often unrecognised, ignored, or given insufficient time and attention relative to the scale of the injustice being committed. These embodied and disruptive tactics can be an effective at providing this information to those who would not attend or otherwise witness a protest.

Direct action and embodied protest also provide opportunities to send a message to a relevant organisation or authority by alternative means when words, including those expressed in marches and rallies, are likely to be dismissed or ignored. For example, following leaked draft guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in 2022 that trans people who do not hold a GRC should be excluded from single sex spaces including toilets, the activist group ‘Pissed Off Trannies’ held what they called a ‘piss in’ by leaving bottles purporting to be urine outside the EHRC headquarters. This was an attempt to communicate that trans people would be left with no toilets to use if the guidance were implemented, and drew on the legacy of forms of protest used by activists during the AIDs crisis that used outrageous methods to draw attention to injustice (Tsjeng and Wade 2022). It is incredibly difficult to judge whether a protest action communicated a message successfully; successful communication requires uptake by an audience, and without the EHRC confirming that they acted in response to this protest, this cannot be guaranteed. However, following the protest, the draft guidance being protested was not

released as official guidance by the EHRC so while it is not possible to confirm if this protest action caused the EHRC to drop the proposed guidance, this action was part of a wider campaign that achieved its goal.⁸³ While trans people saying this message were likely to be ignored (and often are in public ‘debate’ around this issue), this more radical tactic resulted in some media coverage of the issue, and there was considerable discussion of the protest on social media, suggesting that this tactic contributed towards the overall success of the campaign.

In another example of how activists have taken radical action to protest an unjust policy, following decisions to ban trans young people from accessing puberty blockers, members of the group Trans Kids Deserve Better scaled the building of the NHS England headquarters and camped out there for several days (C. Lee 2024). As they pointed out, the perspectives of trans people, and trans young people in particular, are often entirely excluded from decision making about their healthcare. Bringing protests to the place where decisions such as these are taken and using radical, outrageous, or newsworthy tactics makes the demands of trans people more difficult to ignore than when they are voiced in marches and rallies – while it may be possible to ignore the words they say, it is far more difficult to ignore the teenager camping on the roof.

While typical protests rarely make the news and can be subject to ‘protest fatigue’, radical action can be a means to attract attention, as both the ‘piss in’ and the release of crickets did. These tactics intervene in the trans panic feedback loop by providing a means to communicate where trans people are less likely to find their testimony is ignored or not taken seriously. By using embodied and outrageous tactics, they demand to be heard.

4.4 Further Limitations of Direct Action and Embodied Protest

One often cited drawback of engaging in shocking or confrontational tactics such as those described in this section is that they can prompt further backlash. Some backlash did occur after the ‘piss in’ outside the EHRC in the form of online comments and articles from anti-trans campaigners. The risk of backlash is often cited as a reason not to engage in radical protest actions, the supposed risk being that rather than improving the situation faced by an oppressed group, it will make it worse.

However, responses such as this misconstrue the aims of some radical tactics and conflate individual responses to these actions with the broader structural or institutional problems they target. The risk of backlash largely does not impact the effectiveness of actions that are aimed at

⁸³ However, due to the April 2025 Supreme Court ruling which defined sex as ‘biological sex’ for the purpose of the Equality Act and is being interpreted by the EHRC as excluding trans people from single-sex spaces, including toilets, there is uncertainty about what guidance will be enforceable in the long-term (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2025). Full guidance from the EHRC is expected to be released later in 2025.

communicating a message to a target such as an organisation or company which are not designed to change the minds of a broader population; these actions aim to make the issue salient to a particular target. Nor does it alter the effectiveness of direct-action tactics that physically prevent the reproduction and sharing of transphobic rhetoric and cissexist ideology, such as actions that target media outlets, or the release of crickets at an anti-trans conference. Whilst individuals' anti-trans views play a role in the trans panic, and backlash can impact the success of direct action that aims to communicate a moral message or give information to a wider audience, a far more substantial and causal role is played by institutions with power that have embraced cissexist ideology and transphobic fearmongering, and these institutions are what direct action and radical protest typically target. For example, the goal of the 'Pissed off Trannies' action was to make it salient to the EHRC that trans people would be left without access to toilets if their recommendations were followed, and that policies based on the ideological position that trans women endanger cis women in single-sex spaces have a material effect on trans people's lives. This was not a protest action designed to end the trans panic by making trans people appear likeable, so any resulting backlash from individuals is not a mark against the effectiveness of the protest.

There are, of course, risks that members of the public would view radical acts undertaken by trans people as evidence for their existing prejudices against them, and in a worst-case scenario, this could motivate individual acts of violence or harassment towards trans people or be utilised by those with power to further scapegoat trans people. However, this kind of backlash also occurs when trans people engage in non-radical tactics, including when they participate in 'reasonable debate'. For example, trans women who participated in a live television 'debate' on trans rights on Channel 4 were faced with members of audience repeatedly shouting 'penis' at them (Lester 2018). If backlash occurs when engaging in largely ineffective but 'respectable' actions, as well as when engaging in confrontational and shocking but potentially effective action, the risk of backlash cannot be a reason to avoid engaging in radical action. Backlash in the form of people voicing discriminatory and hurtful views about trans people is a potential risk of radical protest actions and confrontational direct action, but those views aren't what these forms of protest are trying to change: these actions aim to intervene at a different point in reproduction of cissexist ideology. While prominent anti-trans figures may utilise radical activists who engage in direct action as scapegoats, this is not something that direct action causes. Anti-trans politicians utilise trans people as scapegoats regardless of what they do,⁸⁴ and

⁸⁴ Trans women have been made into anti-trans scapegoats for activities such as participating in competitive swimming (Lia Thomas), standing for an internal local position within the Labour Party (Lily Madigan), and being nominated for a book award (Torrey Peters).

it would be wrong to portray radical protestors as enabling these prejudiced responses from anti-trans figures.

The major limit on the effectiveness of embodied protest and direct action is that while the action itself gives activists an opportunity to communicate outside of the ‘debate’ framing, it is likely to be interpreted through that framing, and therefore not fully escape from the feedback loop. When these actions are covered by the media, it is still likely to be framed through the lens of ‘debate’, and because of the nature of the action taken, activists are likely to be subject to accusations of unreasonableness or irrationality. Direct action and disruptive protest that targets media companies or anti-trans groups’ events are particularly at risk of being covered through this framing because of the role of appeals to ‘free speech’ within the trans panic, which I discussed in chapter two. For example, protestors who blocked entrances to the showing of an anti-trans film in Edinburgh were dubbed ‘censorious bullies’ by anti-trans campaigners, and coverage of the protests in the media reflected the typical ‘debate’ framing by including coverage of ‘both sides’ of the issue, and uncritical coverage of anti-trans positions (BBC News 2022). Any disruption of the media or news is likely to be portrayed by anti-trans campaigners as an attack on press freedom or free speech, rather than a demand for improved press coverage.⁸⁵

The same is true of any disruption to events where anti-trans views are voiced, which is often portrayed as ‘silencing’. For example, a speaker at the LGB Alliance conference that was disrupted with crickets tweeted that this was an attempt to intimidate them into silence (Butler 2024). As a result, some direct-action tactics could risk being co-opted by anti-trans activists in a way that might continue the feedback loop, which would make this tactic less effective.

However, this response from anti-trans activists also occurs when engaging in the kinds of non-disruptive protest discussed in section 2. For example, when non-disruptively protesting outside the conference of the group Woman’s Place UK (an anti-trans organisation) in 2020, an attendee of the conference accused me of ‘silencing women’.⁸⁶ As I discussed in chapter two, even participating in the ‘debate’ gets framed as an attack on the free speech of anti-trans activists, who claim accusations of transphobia are a form of ‘silencing’. The re-framing of direct action and embodied protest as an attack on free speech may limit how effective it is as a tactic, but this re-framing occurs for other, less effective tactics, so is not a sufficient reason to reject this tactic.

⁸⁵ Some of these tactics do involve some kind of limitation on the speech of anti-trans activists. I assume here that some restrictions on speech may be warranted in some cases (e.g., restrictions on hate speech), and that the issue of whether of these tactics are permissible will require settling once the issue of whether they are effective has been established.

⁸⁶ The vast majority of the thirty or so protestors I was with were women. The protest was entirely peaceful. We did not enter the venue or interrupt the conference, which was attended by a few hundred people. No one was prevented from speaking or attending the conference.

Though, as I've discussed, direct action can stop or pause the reproduction and sharing of cissexist ideology, the role these tactics can play in tackling cissexist ideology itself is more limited. While radical forms of protest may result in more uptake and recognition of injustice than ordinary forms of protest, it is still likely to be limited. Medina describes several forms of radical protest and direct action that successfully drew attention to injustices, such as the use of die ins by ACT UP (2023, 250–57). But what made these forms of action successful was that they drew attention to something that was previously widely ignored and that many people were unaware of: deaths from AIDs. The wrong was also visceral; people were dying because there was no investment or research into potential treatments. As I discussed in section 2.2 on the limitations of protest for drawing attention to injustice, in the trans panic the injustices themselves are harder to visualise, and the relevant issues are also not ignored. This makes it more difficult to use protest to draw attention to injustice in this case, which limits the capacity for direct action to challenge cissexist ideology. As with marches and sit ins, these actions do not tackle cissexist ideology itself, although they are able to tackle its reproduction.

Direct action and embodied protest can be effective ways to tackle aspects of the trans panic by putting pressure on the media companies that perpetuate it, and other organisations which are committing injustices against trans people and can pause the feedback loop by halting the activities of these organisations. Radical communication tactics used by protestors and as part of direct action are also more effective than participating in a debate for making trans people's voices heard, and as such offer opportunities to tackle widespread ignorance and begin to challenge the ideological obscuring of injustice experienced by trans people. However, because these tactics do not target cissexist ideology itself, and may still be interpreted through the debate framing, other tactics are also needed to tackle the trans panic.

5. Eliciting Moral Re-Appraisal

Much of the challenge of tackling the trans panic comes from the fact that it is an ideological moral panic. Tackling it involves getting people to recognise the existence of cissexist ideology and their role within it; this is what has been termed the 'illumination problem' for ideology critique (Haslanger 2021b, 39).⁸⁷ Ideology obscures injustice, and it does this by shaping interpretations of the world so people do not recognise injustice or do not care about the people who suffer it. One way ideology shapes interpretations of the world is by shaping affective responses to it, such as what people are afraid of, what they are disgusted by, and what they find

⁸⁷ Getting people to recognise the existence of an ideology doesn't require them to develop an academic understanding of what ideology is. By 'recognise the existence of an ideology' I mean recognise that the social meanings ideology consists of are epistemically distorted, recognise the existence of injustice, and reject the naturalising claims of an ideology.

concerning. In the trans panic, this affects how those in the grip of cissexist ideology react to trans people and policies and practices towards them; these negative affective responses towards trans people result in further injustices. For example, the controlling image of trans women as dangerous and predatory is internalised by those in the grip of cissexist ideology who then react to trans women with fear and disgust, and these affective responses motivate violent transmisogyny. This controlling image, as discussed in chapter two, facilitates the ‘debate’ framing of the trans panic and makes it difficult for trans people to tackle misinformation about the effects of GRA reform. As I discussed in chapter five, the way that ideology shapes fears about trans women leads to ideological true beliefs about the widespread existence of those fears, and these beliefs can make responding to those who are defending unjust practices (such as banning trans women from single-sex spaces) particularly difficult.

Convincing people that trans women should have access to single-sex spaces is unlikely to be successful when widespread cissexist ideology means that people respond to trans women as if they were predatory and fail to recognise denials of access to single-sex spaces as unjust. These ideologically influenced affective responses, along with the other ways ideology shapes interpretation of the world through its provision of hermeneutical resources, tropes, and scripts are a significant barrier for recognising injustice. In this section, I discuss the tactic of eliciting moral reappraisal. The methods of eliciting moral reappraisal discussed in this section aim to spark a recognition of injustice, attempting to undermine ideology’s power to obscure that injustice.

5.1 Building Solidarity Movements

Solidarity can be a means to spark moral recognition; building solidarity movements and appealing to that solidarity is a tactic that activists can use to challenge the way ideology obscures injustice. I have in mind the form of solidarity Sally Scholz calls ‘political solidarity’ which ‘arises in response to a situation of injustice or oppression’ (2008, 34).⁸⁸ Those engaged in political solidarity ‘make a conscious commitment to join with others in struggle to challenge a perceived injustice’ (Scholz 2008, 34). Scholz (2008, 83–84) identifies consciousness-raising as an obligation of the role of a solidaristic actor; as in the case of consciousness raising within a marginalised group, consciousness raising as part of a political solidarity movement involves developing an awareness of oppression and injustice and building a desire for social change, as well as a willingness to participate in bringing about that change. The building of solidarity movements is also a way to foster recognition of injustice between oppressed groups.

⁸⁸ For alternative accounts of solidarity, see Hancock (2011), Sangiovanni (2024), and Forst (2024).

There is potential for the building of solidarity movements to respond to the trans panic, particularly because there are other and overlapping oppressed groups that are currently subjected to similar forms of injustice to trans people. Joining forces with other social justice movements where the perpetrators of injustice are the same or the methods of wrongdoing are similar can be a way to foster mutual recognition of injustice, as well as to expand the movement of people active in fighting for trans liberation. Similar culture war tactics to those employed by the media and politicians towards trans people have been used against racial justice campaigners, refugees, immigrants, disabled people, and Muslims in the UK. These groups have also found themselves scapegoated and stereotyped, often for political gain, and members of these groups also face challenges with getting others to recognise the existence of injustice done to them because of oppressive ideologies. Activists involved in other movements for justice are also able to identify the wrongs committed against an oppressed group that often go unrecognised. Building a solidarity movement by engaging in mutual organising, protest, and direct action against shared institutional perpetrators of injustice can be a way to strengthen both movements. Pointing out the similarities in experiences between oppressed groups to those who already recognise the injustice committed against another group can be a means to spark recognition of the injustice experienced by trans people.

It is also important to recognise that the trans panic has not occurred in isolation. It has taken place within a broader resurgence of right-wing culture-war tactics and the growth of the far right that threatens many oppressed groups. Solidarity with anti-racist, migrant, and refugee rights groups is necessary to organise in a coordinated way against the far-right and culture-war actors, and to properly address the threat that they pose. Solidarity is also essential for properly tackling intersectional forms of injustice. Recognising that these issues are connected because they are perpetuated by the same institutions and have victims in common is vital for properly tackling them and can also be a means to foster solidarity. This is especially applicable in cases relating to overlapping and intersectional ideology; as discussed in chapter two, cissexist ideology is also racist and sexist, so an effective critique of cissexist ideology will critique its racism and sexism. Organising together with anti-sexist and anti-racist activists is one effective way to do this. Building solidarity movements is a way to invite moral re-appraisal by encouraging others to recognise overlapping and intersectional ideologies. It is also a way to strengthen social justice movements by articulating how their struggles are connected and increasing the number of people involved in broader social justice and anti-oppression movements, including campaigns for trans liberation.

There are many solidarity movements active in the UK, including some connected to trans liberation. For example, the activist group ‘Lesbians and Gays Support the Migrants’ are a queer solidarity group campaigning to end the UK’s hostile environment immigration policies who explicitly draw on the legacy of the 1980s solidarity group ‘Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners’. These activists are building a broad anti-oppression social movement that links the struggles of oppressed groups, emphasising that they are in solidarity with all those who are oppressed by the government in the UK, and that queer liberation requires recognising the difficulties faces by queer migrants and refugees, and committing themselves to take action to combat injustice. They emphasise how the prison industrial complex, which includes the detention of immigrants and asylum seekers, as well as prisons, police, and border guards harms all marginalised people, including queer people.⁸⁹ Having recognised the existence of an ideology in one sphere, activists are often better placed (though by no means guaranteed) to recognise ideology elsewhere. This recognition of injustice and ideology can help to tackle the trans panic and other ongoing cases of injustice obscured by ideology. The recognition of injustice disrupts the epistemic injustice/ideology feedback loop, and the building of a solidarity movement invites more people to participate in other forms of action to combat the trans panic.

5.2 Art

Art has the capacity to both draw attention to and make people care about an issue, and has been used as a form of protest and method of resistance by social justice and anti-oppressive movements, such as the use of documentary films for the Palestinian cause (Van Gils and Shwaikh 2016), or the feminist art movement. Though some are sceptical about the potential role of art in teaching us about morality, or making us more moral (e.g., Hamilton 2003) art can be a means to generate moral recognition through prompting affective responses; emotions can be a source of moral knowledge, can contribute to moral understanding, and can draw our attention to salient moral issues (Roeser 2018). Whether that is caring about fictional characters in a film or a book, or being confronted by a challenging artwork, art appears to have some capacity to encourage moral breakthroughs through affective means. This has the potential to be harnessed as a method of ideology critique, though as I will explain, this is not without qualification.

Cissexist ideology leads people to feel hatred, fear, or disgust towards trans people; art can be a means through which people are encouraged to have different emotions towards trans people. Roeser argues that art contributes to our ability to engage in moral reflection by allowing us to ‘transcend’ our own perspective by ‘appealing to our imagination and compassion’ (2018, 162). One reason that art has the capacity to do this is because there are fewer limitations on its

⁸⁹ Information about LGSM can be found on their website: <https://www.lgsmigrants.com/>

methods than typical forms of activism. Art is often consumed or viewed in different spaces and places that are deemed outside of the standard political realm, where perhaps people may be more open to new ideas. Fiction or somewhat fictionalised accounts of true events can be a powerful way to introduce people to the emotions and experiences of others; fiction cannot and often should not be used in much traditional activism but can be hugely valuable in art for helping people make moral breakthroughs and recognise another's experience as an injustice. This is because fiction enables certain types of first-person accounts and a view inside the head of those experiencing injustice that is not otherwise achievable and can be a means to prompt empathy and compassion that lead to a recognition of the existence of injustice. For example, there are reports of people who became vegetarians after watching the children's film 'Babe', in which animals (who in the film, can talk to one another) are portrayed as not wanting to die (Nobis 2009).

Although art can be a means to generate empathy, the truly radical possibility for art is that it may serve as a means of ideology critique; art can be a means to generate recognition of the suffering or hurt done to individuals, and also a means to draw attention to the ideology which upholds injustice. Art has the potential to provide the spark of recognition for people in the grip of cissexist ideology and prompt them to then begin to question the worldview that previously prevented them from recognising or caring about injustice. I am not an artist, so I leave it to artists to determine what artworks utilised to tackle the trans panic would be like. I take it that not just any artwork that concerns trans people or is created by a trans person will function to help expose cissexist ideology and encourage moral breakthroughs, but also that there is a wide range of possible artworks that could challenge cissexist ideology. This includes artworks that employ fictional accounts, autobiography, and both artworks that do and don't directly engage with injustice experience by trans people. I don't think that for artworks to have this function they necessarily have to be produced with the goal of inspiring moral breakthrough among those in the grip of cissexist ideology, but they must in some way speak to the experiences of trans people or the nature of cissexist ideology. I don't think it's a requirement that artwork is produced by trans artists to fulfil this function, but I do think it is inevitable that most of this type of art will be produced by trans artists.

One example of the kind of activist artwork I have in mind is the non-binary performance artist Travis Alabanza's production 'Burgerz'. Alabanza's theatre production took impetus from an incident in which they were transphobically harassed by someone who threw a burger at them, and employed humour and absurdity to explore transphobic violence and onlookers' responses to it (Fisher 2019). Art, in this case theatre, offers the opportunity to explore the effects of

transphobic violence on individuals through creative and thought-provoking means; this is a means to inspire moral breakthrough as rather than simply being told about the existence of violence, the audience is directly confronted with the violence, and the impact it had on the person who experienced it.

One of the central myths of the trans panic is that trans women are a danger to cis women in all-female spaces. This ideological myth has shaped affective responses, so that people, particularly cis women, in the grip of cissexist ideology may genuinely feel scared by the presence of a trans woman, because they have internalised the controlling image of trans women as aggressive and predatory. This affective response then leads to ideological true beliefs about the existence of fears about trans women in all female spaces, as I explored in chapter five. Art can be a way to engage with these affective responses. Direct conversation or ‘debate’ on why people feel worried, afraid or have ‘concerns’ is unlikely to be successful and likely to backfire. As I discussed in chapter five, questioning or challenging claims of cis women’s fears of trans women leads to accusations of ‘silencing’ women and putting women ‘at risk’ (e.g., Kirkup 2019).

Art can provide other ways for trans people to respond to and engage with transphobic controlling images and the negative and transphobic affective responses of others. Artists could choose to engage with those transphobic responses directly, for example by including representations of transphobia or transphobic language in art such as film or novels, but artists can also use other methods to challenge people’s affective responses towards trans women, such as providing fictional first-person perspectives of the experience of being perceived as a ‘threat’, or through creatively exploring controlling images of trans people, for example, in visual artworks. Art can serve to confront and challenge controlling images, as well as other aspects of cissexist ideology. Whilst highlighting the nature of the injustice experienced by trans people in the trans panic can be difficult in protests and direct action, art does not have these limitations. Art can also be used to explore and expose other aspects of cissexist ideology, such as binarism and gendered spaces, as well as the pathologisation of trans identity. For example, CN Lester’s short story ‘Virago’ (2023) explores the history of the medicalisation of trans identity, whilst challenging the categories used to both recognise and medicalise gender non-conforming people. Art can be used to encourage moral re-appraisal by exposing these aspects as ideological and inspiring a critical attitude towards them.

5.3 Limitations of Moral Re-Appraisal

Eliciting moral re-appraisal is not the same thing as just attempting to change the minds of those in the grip of ideology; eliciting moral reappraisal involves consciousness raising, providing new information, and using varied tactics to encourage perspective taking that facilitates moral

breakthroughs. This is a tactic that largely targets people as individuals, but the goal is to disrupt ideology by undermining its ability to obscure injustice. However, dominant ideologies are often deeply entrenched in both social institutions and the minds of individuals, so even with the use of creative tactics, there are always going to be limitations to a tactic that involves getting those who are in the grip of ideology to change their perspective. For example, one incredibly effective tactic that has been used to elicit moral re-appraisals in the face of ideology that obscures injustice is the use of videos of police violence against Black people by racial justice campaigners. Rather than just giving information about the existence of police violence and murders, the use of videos encourages moral re-appraisal by viscerally revealing the nature of the violence, undermining the ideological view of the police as blameless for the harm they cause and the racist assumption that Black people who are shot or injured by police are somehow 'deserving' of violence. It was the video of the murder of George Floyd by police which sparked widespread anti-racism protests across the US and the world and statistics show how viewing videos of police violence reduces trust in the police (Braga, Horowitz, and Hurst 2023). However, despite the wide circulation of videos showing police murdering unarmed Black people, there are still people simply never view police violence as blameworthy (Olasov 2021, 193). Even very effective tactics for encouraging moral reappraisal are not foolproof, so a variety of tactics must be used to disrupt ideology.

Moral re-appraisal has little effect if it is not followed up by action. Promoting the recognition of injustice needs to be followed up with action to intervene or address the injustice, otherwise it risks become a toothless 'awareness' campaign. Appealing to solidarity largely manages to avoid this by emphasising the importance of taking action alongside those who are oppressed or victims of injustice. This underlines the importance of utilising many tactics in the trans panic; those whose moral recognition may be sparked through art can then encouraged to participate in protest and direct action.

While art offers the possibility of prompting moral re-appraisal, it is easy to overstate the role that art can play in a person's moral education, which is variable, depending in part on how receptive a person is to art. There are some people who gain little through engagement with art, and those who do gain moral insight through art may be the sort of people who are sensitive or attuned to suffering or injustice anyway, meaning that the actual impact of the art itself is minimal (Hamilton 2003, 42–43). The use of art to prompt moral re-evaluation is not going to be an effective tactic for everyone. Even if people can re-evaluate their moral outlook or sense of injustice in light of an artwork, there is no guarantee that they will apply this to their everyday lives. For example, through reading a novel that provides some insight into the experiences of

trans people's experiences with the diagnostic model for trans healthcare, a person in the grip of cissexist ideology may come to recognise, in the context of the novel, the injustice of the pathologisation of trans identity. However, this moral recognition may not be applied to actual people in the world. Hamilton (2003, 39) suggests that it is easier to be sensitive towards fictional characters than real people, and while I disagree with his suggestion that sensitivity towards fictional characters could in some way 'use up' a person's capacity for compassion, it is certainly true that the sorts of insights gained through fiction may be difficult for those in the grip of ideology to apply outside of a fictional context.

There are also further practical limitations on the use of art as a tactic. As van Gils and Shwaikh point out in their discussion of Palestinian documentary films as a form of resistance, art cannot have any impact if it isn't seen, and Palestinian films are rarely given a wide international release (2016). Artists who produce artwork as a form of resistance or protest often face challenges in getting their artwork into the sorts of places where it could be seen or consumed by a wider audience, and often wider exposure involves a trade-off between producing artworks (such as music, film, or fiction) which are marketable, or will receive financial backing, and the radical and anti-oppressive message or goals of the artist.

Inviting moral re-appraisal can be an effective tactic for tackling the trans panic, but the methods of doing it face practical challenges, and the strategies available by no means guarantee success; those in the grip of many intersecting ideologies are unlikely to be reachable through the development of solidarity movements, and some people are simply unreceptive to art.

6. Changing Practices

Ideologies, as I argued in chapter one, consist of social meanings and are non-cognitive – they do not consist of beliefs. Ideologies shape practices including the ways in which we organise our space. I follow Haslanger in understanding social practices as existing on a 'spectrum' from 'explicitly co-ordinated... rule-governed' behaviour to 'regularities in behaviour that are the result of shared social schemas'; practices 'coordinate our behaviour around resources' (2018, 235, 237). Ideologies also shape the physical objects we create and use, as well the practices concerning how we use them. I take 'oppressive things' as discussed by Liao and Huebner (2021), to be objects, social environments, and physical spaces shaped by ideology and ideological practices; Liao and Huebner discuss how things such as physical objects can be oppressive because they are in congruence with an oppressive system, such as racism or transphobia. Because ideology is non-cognitive and shapes practices and the physical environment, addressing an ideology requires more than just changing people's minds. This is also because, as I discussed in chapter one, those who consciously reject an ideology can still act

in accordance with it – changing people’s minds is insufficient for preventing them from engaging in ideological practices (Finlayson 2016, 16). Liao and Huebner argue that because oppressive things such as objects and social environments are in congruence with an oppressive system, they shape our thoughts, biases, and actions so that we continue to reinforce and perpetuate that oppressive system, even if we do not consciously believe in it (2021, 105). Tackling cissexist ideology therefore requires changing the practices and physical environment that it shapes, and this is a tactic that activists can pursue in response to the trans panic. This tactic does not always directly engage with the trans panic, but as the trans panic feedback loop is sustained by cissexist ideology, tackling cissexist ideology is a way to undermine the feedback loop. This highlights why a diversity of tactics is necessary for tackling the trans panic: different strategies target different parts of the feedback loop, and we need diverse strategies to tackle all aspects of it.

Addressing cissexist ideology requires addressing practices that uphold the binary sex/gender system that makes trans identities appear non-sensical or threatening (aspects of cissexist ideology I outlined in chapter two), and practices that sustain social meanings such as controlling images about trans people. It is only through addressing these practices that cissexist ideology can be dismantled, because, as Liao and Huebner discuss, if you change minds without changing the environment that ideology shapes, the ideology remains and practices will continue to uphold ideology in a way that will also end up shaping prejudices and ideological thinking (2021, 104). Because cissexist ideology is also sexist (the binary gender roles it partially consists of are also oppressive towards women) there is considerable overlap here with the work of feminist activists to challenge gender stereotypes in practices and the physical environment.

For example, the ‘Let Toys be Toys’ campaign against the gendering of children’s toys tackles the idea that there are certain activities or interests that are ‘for boys’ or ‘for girls’.⁹⁰ This campaign against gender stereotyping also tackles cissexist ideology by undermining one of the practices that upholds the idea that men and women have entirely separate interests, which makes the idea of trans identities appear impossible or otherwise somehow wrong. The campaign does not only aim to change social norms about what toys are ‘gender appropriate’, they also campaign to change physical spaces such as toy shops by removing ‘for girls’ and ‘for boys’ signs, the marketing of certain toys as ‘girls toys’ and ‘boys toys’, and change practices about what sorts of gifts are given to children. Cissexist ideology paints trans people as ‘abnormal’ for their actions or interests which contravene gender stereotypes, for example, having interests in activities or toys that are not those deemed ‘appropriate’ for members of their sex assigned at

⁹⁰ See <https://www.lettoysbetoys.org.uk/> for further details about their campaign.

birth. Many trans adults were gender non-conforming children, many of whom suffered shaming or bullying because of their non ‘gender appropriate’ interests, which leads some trans people to internalise the idea that they are ‘wrong’ or feel shame because of their identity, or gendered expression and interests. This is an aspect of cissexist ideology: the practice of gendering toys and interests for children and admonishing those whose interests do not align with binary sexed norms upholds the social meaning of trans identities as impossible, and when they occur, wrong, pathological, or shameful. Campaigns such as ‘Let Toys be Toys’ help to undermine the practice of assigning certain activities or interests to boys or girls, which helps to undermine this aspect of cissexist ideology.

Other practices that trans activists are campaigning to change are those that directly relate to the treatment of trans people, particularly in healthcare. These practices are a direct source of injustice and uphold cissexist ideology. For example, the pathologisation of trans people is upheld through the current diagnostic model for trans healthcare in the UK.⁹¹ Trans people in the UK also require a medical diagnosis to change the sex recorded on their birth certificate, which upholds the idea that trans people’s ‘legitimacy’ as a member of the gender they identify as is determined by medical experts, not themselves, and that what it means to be trans is to be diagnosable according to criteria established by medical experts. This is a practice that is shaped by cissexist ideology, but also continues to shape attitudes towards trans people, and is a direct cause of injustice. Some Gender Identity Clinics (GICs) in the UK still use the diagnosis of ‘gender dysphoria’ (a mental illness) from the DSM-5, which continues to uphold the controlling image of trans people as mentally ill.⁹²

Ending these practices, for example, by moving to a system of informed consent in access to healthcare, self-declaration in all forms of legal sex, or abolishing the concept of legal sex entirely, would undermine the role of cissexist ideology in shaping these practices, and hopefully put an end to the injustices experienced by trans people who are forced to engage with these practices.⁹³ Moving away from the diagnostic model of trans healthcare and legal recognition would help to counteract the ideological controlling image of trans people as mentally ill, and the ideological position that trans identity is something that can be ‘diagnosed’ by a medical

⁹¹ Practices in the healthcare of trans people in the UK vary both within the NHS and outside of it. Receiving gender-affirming healthcare in the UK requires a diagnosis which is given following assessment by a doctor (though different healthcare settings use different diagnoses), as opposed to non-pathologizing models of trans healthcare such as informed-consent models, which are used in some other countries.

⁹² As opposed to a diagnosis of ‘gender incongruence’ used by other GICs and private healthcare providers, which is not a mental illness.

⁹³ Explaining all the ways that trans people experience injustice in transition-related healthcare and in accessing legal recognition in the UK would be a book in itself. Of particular note are the exceptionally long waiting lists to access gender affirming care in the UK (in April 2025, the GIC in Glasgow is currently offering first appointments for people referred to their services 6 years ago). For further discussion see Pearce (2018), and Faye (2021, 64–114)

authority. These tactics target the feedback loop by directly undermining the dominance of cissexist ideology and specifically challenging the controlling image of trans people as mentally ill, which is a cause of testimonial injustice. This is a tactic which is currently being pursued; there are many trans activist organisation and charities, as well as individuals, who have been involved with attempts to change practices in healthcare for trans people in the UK, such as TransActual and Action for Trans Health.

As well as the previously mentioned practices which require changes on a national scale, there are also many localised practices that limit expansive, non-binary, or fluid gender expression (reflecting cissexist ideology), that may be easier for activists to change. For example, the University of Glasgow previously had a gendered dress code for graduations, with different rules on what types of dress were allowed by men and women, which was changed following my suggestions to the university administration that this policy should be changed because it was discriminatory and excludes non-binary people. Whilst not a major cause of injustice when compared with practices surrounding healthcare, practices that enforce binary gender roles and forms of presentation and expression are one way cissexist ideology makes deviance from binary gender roles appear abnormal and pathological. Changing practices that reflect this, such as gendered dress codes, is undermining an ideological practice. Undermining practices that reflect or reinforce the ideological position that trans people are abnormal or pathological helps to undermine the trans panic by disrupting the dominance of cissexist ideology which drives it.

Some forms of gendered space and the practices that exist within them can also reflect or uphold cissexist ideology; for example, gendered toilets can often be sites where trans people face discrimination and exclusion from people who ‘police’ the gendered space to exclude those who appear to be trans or whose gendered presentation doesn’t fit within typical binary norms. Because of fears of ‘gender policing’, trans people also often self-exclude from gendered toilets, which limits their ability to fully participate in life outside of their homes, and gender policing results in increased anxiety and stress for trans people (Jones and Slater 2020, 843–44; Slater and Jones 2018, 38). ‘Gender policing’ is an ideological practice; cissexist ideology shapes the idea that everyone is either a man or a woman and that their appearance must fit within the binary gendered norms and dictate the gendered spaces they should have access to. ‘Gender policing’ is the practice of challenging those whose appearance or presentation fails to fit within those norms, literally reinforcing cissexist ideology, and attempting to exclude those who deviate from cissexist norms of appearance from public spaces.

The practice of gender policing can be tackled by directly intervening when it takes place; there is a role here for cisgender bystanders and activists to challenge this practice and point out that it

is both inappropriate and unjust when it occurs. Gender policing and trans people's self-exclusion from public space can also be tackled also by changing aspects of that physical space. For example, some activists have used posters in toilets to remind people not to police gendered space.⁹⁴ Posters such as these aim to change practices by making it explicit that the ideological practice of gender enforcement is not permitted in that space. Another option available is to make some gendered spaces such as toilets gender-neutral. This limits the possibility for gender policing by changing the physical environment that enables it. As in the case of gendered dress codes, the practice of gender policing reflects cissexist ideology and binary conceptions of gender. However, gender policing also often occurs in response to the internalisation of the controlling image of trans women as predatory; trans women are excluded from gendered spaces by this practice because people believe they are a threat. Changing this practice aims to undermine the dominance of cissexist ideology and challenge this controlling image, as well as to prevent cases of discrimination against trans people.

This type of activism has recently been made more challenging, as there is currently (in April 2025) uncertainty surrounding trans people's legal rights to access single sex spaces including toilets, following the April 2025 supreme court ruling that 'sex' for the purpose of the Equality Act is defined as 'biological sex' (*For Women Scotland Ltd (Appellant) v The Scottish Ministers (Respondent)* 2025). As such, attempting to ensure that single sex-spaces and toilets in the UK are trans-inclusive may not be aligned with the law. Nonetheless, as discussed in the previous section, illegal actions may be justified and effective for tackling oppressive practices. Anti-trans activists, the equalities minister, and the public body in charge of enforcing equality law (the EHRC) are interpreting the ruling as if it were a trans bathroom ban, meaning that trans people may be faced with more gender policing, making engaging in this tactic a pressing need (Phillips 2025; Equality and Human Rights Commission 2025). Many organisations, individuals, and groups will continue to take action to tackle gender policing, regardless of its legality.⁹⁵

Another way that activists can change practices that reflect and reinforce cissexist ideology is through establishing different practices within their own spaces and communities. Rather than appealing to an authority or campaigning for others to change, this method of changing practices can be done within a marginalised community or community of activists, and if successful, the practices can then be shared outside of that community. For example, the practice of displaying or declaring one's pronouns and asking other's pronouns was developed within activist spaces.

⁹⁴ For an example, posters telling people not to confront those who they thought were using the 'wrong' toilets were put up at the University of the West of England, in Bristol (BBC News 2019).

⁹⁵ For example, UK-based punk band 'itoldyouiwouldeatyou' put out a statement following the ruling stating they would refuse to play at venues that gender policed their toilets. Their statement can be found here: https://www.instagram.com/p/DIs-Nc_NaEW/?hl=en&img_index=1

These practices undermine cissexist ideology by undermining the assumption that a person's gender identity is the same as their sex assigned at birth, and that this can and should be detected from a person's appearance. These pronoun practices challenge the 'normality' of cissexist ideology by revealing the oddity of assuming the sex of strangers and reduces the chances of people experiencing misgendering.

Because cissexist ideology is so dominant, the practices it shapes affect many aspects of our lives, such as practices about appropriate clothing, administrative systems, access to services, and the way we raise children; I have included just a small number of examples of the types of practices that can be changed by activists. These practices and the way they shape physical space are part of what makes cissexist ideology appear 'natural' and 'normal'. By challenging these practices, activists reveal the existence of cissexist ideology and can shape new resistant practices that are not a cause of injustice towards trans people. By undermining the way that cissexist ideology shapes practices, and is embedded in practices, cissexist ideological social meanings start to lose their dominance. If practices in the world aren't oriented around the idea that there are two separate binary gender categories and that those who deviate from these are abnormal or threatening, then these social meanings become less like 'common sense'. Changing practices also changes what is true about the world; this is one way to undermine the usage of ideological true beliefs that I discussed in chapter five. By undermining cissexist practices, cissexist ideology becomes less dominant, so its role in sustaining the feedback loop of the trans panic is weakened.

6.2 Limitations of Changing Practices

If successful, the tactic of changing ideological practices to address cissexist ideology is an excellent one, because it directly targets a source of injustice towards trans people. This tactic does not over emphasise the role that individuals play in upholding cissexist ideology and is a structural solution to a structural problem. However, activists face a number of challenges when attempting to implement this tactic. The first is identifying which practices are ideological and causing injustice. While warranted ideological critique can help to solve this problem (as discussed in the previous chapter, through group consciousness raising, people can correctly identify injustice), there is often disagreement within an activist community about what alternative, just practices look like. This is an instance of a wider problem faced by activist communities when there is internal division about the correct course of action, and of wider disagreement within feminist activism and philosophy about if a just gendered arrangement requires the abolition of gender and gendered practices. For example, when existing cissexist practices are trans exclusionary, there is often debate within trans communities about whether

alternative practices should be trans-inclusive gendered practices or if gendered practices should be abolished entirely. For example, should toilets be gendered but inclusive, or exclusively gender neutral? Should we never assume someone's pronouns and always ask, use they/them as a default, or adopt a trans inclusive gendered pronoun assumption? Should we legally recognise non-binary genders along with making gender recognition for binary trans people easier, or abolish legal sex entirely? These are not questions to which there are always clear answers. Decisions about which forms of resistant practices should be taken up are complex; we might adopt a pragmatic approach and pursue the practices that are most easily achievable. We may treat different social settings on a case-by-case basis to determine which alternative practice or change to the physical environment works better there.

This problem facing activists is one aspect of a broader philosophical problem: while we have workable tactics to recognise injustice, determining what a just society looks like is difficult, and the process of determining what it looks like, or experimenting with different practices, can lead to fractures and divisions within activist communities. This challenge makes implementing resistant practices harder, but this is not a catastrophic limitation for activists. Because we have a relatively reliable mechanism for identifying injustice, activists can use this to check that the alternative practices they are attempting to implement are not entirely the wrong ones.

Ultimately, by pursuing a variety of different types of resistant practices in different activist communities, geographical settings, or social spaces, activists will be in a better position to determine which ones work well, and which kinds of changes to practices prompt backlash. New practices may not be perfect, but attempting to change practices and experimenting with a range of different practices can also be a way for activists to refine, improve, and make changes to tactics to ensure they are effective, can be safely implemented, and are workable. The difficulties activists face with implementing new tactics should prompt activists to pursue a range of different tactics.

Like most activist strategies, changing practices often comes with a risk of backlash from those who are invested in the ideological status quo. Particularly when that backlash comes from those in positions of power, this can seriously limit the ability of activists to implement changes to practices. For example, backlash to the growing activist movement to make more toilets gender neutral led to the former Conservative government introducing legislation that mandated that new buildings be built with gendered toilets, as part of a broader political strategy of engaging in 'culture war' tactics.⁹⁶ When challenging dominant cissexist ideology, the backlash reflects the

⁹⁶ Though it was publicised as if it were a restriction on gender-neutral toilets, the legislation does not ban gender neutral toilets, it simply mandates that gendered toilets also be available (Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Rowley, and Badenoch 2024).

fact that this ideology remains dominant. For example, ensuring that trans women are welcome and able to access women's spaces such as toilets and changing rooms is one way to undermine the ideological perception that trans women are a risk or are predatory in those spaces, but efforts to make changes to practices or physical spaces to ensure trans women can access those spaces is likely to be met with resistance due to the dominance of cissexist ideology. Backlash is a significant limitation for this practice because backlash in this case is not just an expression of opposition to the tactics pursued by activists; rather, backlash can actively prevent practices from being changed, meaning that the tactic cannot be fully implemented.

Though this risk of backlash can limit the ability to change practices that require appealing to an authority, this risk does not affect the prefigurative practices that activists develop within their own communities. This highlights the importance of building activist communities where experimental, new, and resistant, prefigurative practices can be developed, and trying out a multiplicity of new tactics to discover which of them are the most effective and the scale of backlash each of them promote. Resistant communities can and do exist both in person and online; whilst in-person communities and spaces offer opportunities to experiment with changes to physical space and the use of resources or objects which might reflect ideology, online spaces can be particularly effective for developing new linguistic practices, as new practices can be quickly adopted and shared. The risk of backlash is a significant limitation to this tactic, but this demonstrates the importance of building resilient community spaces that can be shielded from the worst of these effects, and also demonstrates the importance of a diversity of tactics.

7. 'Changing Hearts and Minds': Responding to Individuals

As discussed in chapter two, the debate framing of the trans panic is unjust - the result of cissexist ideology - and engaging in it results in further injustice towards trans people. Debating with individuals is not the best strategy for tackling the trans panic for the same reasons, and furthermore it cannot tackle the structural problems that shape the trans panic. The claim that the trans panic is caused simply by individuals' prejudiced or ignorant attitudes and could be tackled by 'changing hearts and minds' is often repeated by liberal and well-meaning people, but this is not a strategy that will work to end the trans panic, as I will demonstrate. However, responding to transphobic individuals is often unavoidable, as activists and trans people often find that people bring the debate to them. Those who repeat prejudiced and untrue claims about trans people include the friends and family members of activists. Whilst aiming to change hearts and minds is not an effective strategy for ending the trans panic, it is often something activists are forced to attempt to do. Therefore, it may be worth considering what the best strategies are for dealing with these kinds of interactions and what impact, if any, they can have on the trans panic.

7.1 Limitations of ‘Changing Hearts and Minds’

A strategy of ending the trans panic by convincing people not to be transphobic is not one that will end the trans panic. There are several reasons for this. As discussed in the previous section, changing minds is insufficient for tackling cissexist ideology. As I discussed in section 1 when I considered the virtue of testimonial justice, individual based solutions are insufficient for tackling structural problems. This strategy is also unlikely to be successful because of the considerable role played by those who are deeply wedded to cissexist ideology and have power to shape the current trans panic. There will always be some people who are unreachable through personal appeals and one on one conversations, and in the trans panic, many of these people hold considerable sway in public life, religious institutions, and politics. For this strategy to be an effective way to tackle the trans panic would require a mass mobilisation of people having individual conversations with the large percentage of the population whose attitudes are influenced by dominant cissexist ideology. The scale required for this strategy to be effective is not possible for the trans liberation movement to achieve because there are simply not enough people to engage in this strategy successfully. This strategy involves asking trans activists to put themselves in a position of vulnerability to engage with those who they know believe and are likely to repeat transphobic stereotypes, and may be actively hostile towards trans people, which further limits who can engage in this strategy (as many people cannot risk putting themselves in this position of vulnerability), as well as limiting how effective the strategy is likely to be. If this strategy is to be useful at all, it can only be used under a narrow set of circumstances.

The use of personal appeals and familial or friendly relationships may be one way that negative affective responses towards trans people can be challenged. It’s a methodology that is frequently brought up by some liberal pro-trans voices, the idea being that knowing a trans person closely would mean that someone is less likely to be actively transphobic or support anti-trans policies (e.g., James 2023). This idea is often extrapolated from research on same-sex marriage, which has consistently suggested that straight people who know gay people are more likely to support same sex marriage (DellaPosta 2018). But this is not necessarily a transferrable idea, and the insidious part about ideology is that it can affect even the closest forms of relationships. If knowing a trans person made a person significantly less susceptible to anti-trans arguments, we would expect to see measures of acceptance of trans people increase as the number of trans people increases, but this pattern has not materialised. There have been large increases in the number of people who publicly identify as trans over the last ten years, but YouGov’s repeated study on attitudes towards trans people and trans rights in the UK suggest a decrease in support between 2018 and 2025 (Smith 2020; 2022; 2025).

Whilst it is hard to get an accurate assessment on whether people's attitudes towards trans people have changed substantially since the start of the trans panic, it is undeniable that the political climate towards trans people has gotten worse, and has resulted in policy changes that have been detrimental towards trans people, such as restrictions on the medical care trans teenagers can access, and restrictions on the ability for trans people to compete in sports, including at the grass-roots level (Triggle 2024; McLaughlin 2025; Kearns 2025). The data available is limited, but repeated YouGov polls have found that while people who know a trans person are more likely to be supportive of trans rights than people who don't, there is still a high level of anti-trans views that reflect cissexist ideology among cis people who know trans people.⁹⁷ For example, while people who know a trans person are more likely to think that trans women should be able access toilets, changing rooms, and domestic violence shelters that align with their gender identity than those who don't know a trans person, more people who know a trans person think trans women shouldn't be able to access these spaces (particularly if they have not had some form of gender affirming surgery) than those who do (Smith 2025). Therefore, a strategy of changing transphobic attitudes towards trans people through encouraging some kind of 'mass befriending' by trans people is unlikely to be an effective strategy to end the trans panic, as many those who know trans people do not support trans-inclusive policies and are likely to still endorse transphobic ideological myths (Smith 2025).

7.2 Potential Possibilities

However, as previously mentioned, directly engaging with individuals can be unavoidable, because people often bring this 'debate' to activists and trans people. I take it that there are some people who it is almost never worth activists engaging with. This includes people who have been so entirely radicalised by cissexist ideology that they are not open to any sort of genuine conversation and are unlikely to take seriously anything said by a trans person or in support of trans liberation. However, there are people who are genuinely confused about what is taking place in the trans panic, and while many of their attitudes may be shaped by dominant cissexist ideology, there is also a potential they could come to recognise this ideology. I take it that, given that this strategy has little prospect of fully overcoming the trans panic, the goals it can serve are more modest. These are: to prompt people to question cissexist ideological social meanings, to convince them to reject stereotypes of trans people, to prompt them to take up information which has been obscured from them by cissexist ideology and tackle their own ignorance, and to change their negative affective responses towards trans people. If these things are achieved, this

⁹⁷ There is very little data available on the attitudes of cis people towards trans people in the UK and how they have changed over time. While one repeated survey cannot give us a precise understanding of attitudes towards trans people, it is sufficient to give us some general information about patterns of attitudes.

kind of engagement may recruit another person to engage in trans liberation activism and participate in the kinds of protest action and changes to practices previously described. It may also have other beneficial effects, such as preventing that individual from perpetuating or engaging in transphobia.

Strategies for engaging with individuals who bring the debate to activists will typically aim to spark the recognition of ideology through prompting the interlocuter to recognise either cissexist ideology's epistemic failings, or the injustice it obscures. The strategy that these conversations employ will be highly context-specific and depend on who the person being engaged with is, the relationship between the people, the presence of other power dynamics, and time constraints. In some cases, these relationships may be useful for helping to get the interlocuter to recognise the existence of injustice (e.g. against their own child), but in others, these relationships may make engaging in these conversations riskier for the trans person or activist involved. These variables make general statements about how to engage in these kinds of interactions difficult; in what follows I instead give an example a strategy that could be used.

One potential strategy for engaging with people as individuals is to provide the information that ideology obscures in an attempt to tackle ignorance. For example, an activist can explain that being trans is not a mental illness, and that trans women don't pose a threat in single-sex spaces (perhaps citing studies that show this such as that conducted by Hasenbush et. al. (2019)). This strategy has proved ineffective for activists who have attempted to engage in media debates and online discussions but could potentially be of use when engaging with people on an individual level. This is because on an individual basis, personal relationships can be more effectively utilised. Whilst in public, political, and media discussions, trans people and activists are always disadvantaged by dominant cissexist ideology, epistemic injustice, and a balance of power that favours anti-trans positions, in personal interactions, the power balance isn't always as detrimental to trans people or pro-trans voices. Having an established relationship of trust with someone may help them to see their interlocuter as trustworthy, and be less likely for them to dismiss testimony, or more likely to seriously consider their testimony and the information they provide. Conversations such as these do not directly intervene in the trans panic feedback loop, but they do have the potential to recruit more allies to the cause of trans liberation to help engage in other activities which do have more impact, and to prompt individuals to reject transphobia in their everyday lives.

8. Conclusion

There is no one tactic that will end the trans panic. What I have offered in this chapter is a selection of tactics that can be used together to target different aspects of the trans panic to a

greater or lesser extent and intervene in the feedback loop in different ways. As I have emphasised, these tactics focus on the structural causes of the trans panic, rather than individual-based solutions, though some individual-based solutions can have smaller positive impacts. The tactics discussed target different point of the feedback loop: protest tackles epistemic injustice, direct action targets the reproduction of cissexist ideology, and changing practices targets the content of the ideology itself, whilst encouraging moral reappraisal aims to disrupt the way that ideology obscures injustice, as well as tackling other aspects of cissexist ideology and increasing the size of the activist movement. Whilst these tactics are less effective, ‘changing hearts and minds’ may also help to recruit more allies into activism and the development of epistemic virtues may have benefits within activist communities. As I have outlined, all these tactics face potential challenges and limitations, so utilising a multiplicity of tactics is necessary to ensure the entirety of the feedback loop is ended.

There are also other types of activist work taking place that fall outside of the scope of this chapter because they do not clearly intervene in the trans panic feedback loop, but remain essential for the continuation and health of trans communities. Activist work such as mutual aid, action on homelessness, and behind the scenes advocacy work with decision makers in the NHS and in government to directly shape the policies that affect trans people’s lives are all essential to ensure that trans communities are able to continue existing and engaging in activism, and to ensure the strength of community spaces where resistant epistemic resources and practices can be developed. I also recognise that it is not possible to describe all the tactics that are possible for intervening in the trans panic here; my discussion of potential tactics in no way rules out the possibility that there may be others. While the trans panic has not gone away or dissipated in the last seven years, it has changed, with new areas of focus and different lines of transphobic attack and cause for ‘concern’. As the focus of the trans panic continues to change, activists may require further new tactics to engage with it, or tactics mentioned here may become of less use to tackle the precise dynamic of the trans panic. However, the outline I give here serves to illustrate how different kinds of tactics can be used to help intervene in the feedback loop in different ways, and so may help with the identification of other potential tactics that aim to intervene in the feedback loop.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have provided an explanation of what is currently occurring in the UK's trans panic by appealing to the interlinked nature of cissexist ideology and epistemic injustice. I outlined the relationship between ignorance and ideology and pointed to some ways that ignorance has played a role in the trans panic. I have also outlined some tactics utilised by anti-trans campaigners in the context of 'debate': hermeneutical sabotage, and the use of ideological true beliefs. I've then given an account of how warranted ideology critique can be developed through consciousness raising, and lastly, I've explored how a multiplicity of tactics can be used, and are already being used, by activists to tackle the trans panic.

Trans people in the UK right now are facing threats to their ability to continue normal life in this country. The April 2025 Supreme Court ruling limits trans people's ability to exist in public spaces and workplaces (through restricting their ability to access toilets), their ability to access domestic violence shelters and healthcare, and their ability to participate in sports. This most recent attack on trans people's rights is shocking, but it in many ways confirms the analysis of the trans panic I have given. The Supreme Court defined 'sex' for the purpose of the Equality Act as 'biological sex', putting into law the conception of sex provided by cissexist ideology. During the process of the hearing, the court refused to admit interventions from trans people about how this legal change would detrimentally affect them, and disregarded contributions from human rights organisations that this ruling would undermine trans people's human rights – cases of pre-emptive testimonial injustice (which occurs when groups are not asked for information or to share their opinion due to due prejudices towards the group) and content-based epistemic injustice (Amnesty International UK 2025; Davis 2021; Fricker 2007, 130). At the same time, the Supreme Court claimed that the ruling 'does not cause disadvantage to trans people', a denial of injustice which is only possible because of the way that cissexist ideology obscures their ability to recognise what would otherwise be obvious injustices, and utilised trans exclusionary hermeneutical resources that reflect cissexist ideology, such as repeatedly referring to trans women as 'biological males' (*For Women Scotland Ltd (Appellant) v The Scottish Ministers (Respondent)* 2025, para. 265).

The ruling also embraces the hermeneutical sabotage of the term 'lesbian', by accepting a definition of 'lesbian' that excludes all lesbian trans women, as well as cis women who are attracted to all women including trans women (*For Women Scotland Ltd (Appellant) v The Scottish Ministers (Respondent)* 2025, para. 206). This is a particularly powerful case of hermeneutical sabotage as the ruling encodes the sabotaged meaning of the term into the law.

The Equality Act allows those who share a protected characteristic to organise groups and clubs that only include people who share that characteristic. The ruling that trans lesbians should be excluded from lesbian spaces was built on the ideological true belief that some cis lesbians ‘are no longer using lesbian-only spaces due to the presence of trans women’ (For Women Scotland Ltd (Appellant) v The Scottish Ministers (Respondent) 2025, para. 207). This true claim was used to support the legal change that mandates that trans women are to be excluded from women’s single-sex spaces (including lesbian clubs and organisations) because it is not recognised that this claim is only true because of some cisgender lesbians’ internalisation of cissexist ideology, which leads them to see trans women as a threat to them and their lesbian identities.⁹⁸ Moreover, this reasoning suggests that the judges saw cisgender women’s potential self-exclusion from lesbian spaces because a trans woman might be there as an injustice, but do not see the total legal exclusion of trans lesbians (as well as cis women who are attracted to trans women) from lesbian spaces as an injustice, showing the influence of cissexist ideology on perceptions of injustice.

In the face of an all-out assault on their legal rights, in the last month, trans activists and their allies have responded in their thousands by protesting on the streets across the UK, including in communities as small and remote as the Orkney islands (Cobham 2025; theorkneynews 2025). Members of the activist group ‘Trans Kids Deserve Better’ protested by scaling the building of The Telegraph, a national newspaper that has published a large amount of content that is hostile towards trans people (Factora 2025). They have continued to use radical tactics to challenge the UK’s ban on puberty blockers for trans youth such as smearing fake blood on the NHS headquarters to demand the release of a report on trans suicides, and have also utilised artistic tactics such as leaving decorated cardboard coffins and tombstones outside the office of the current health secretary, Wes Streeting.⁹⁹ These actions fall clearly into the framework I outline in chapter seven, as examples of rallies, embodied protest and the use of art to encourage moral re-appraisal.

The Supreme Court ruling, if enacted in line with the EHRC’s interim guidance, makes life almost impossible for trans people in the UK. Facing the consequences of this legal ruling is a

⁹⁸ Specifically, the ruling means that single-sex spaces and membership organisations must include and exclude people based on their ‘biological sex’. According to the ruling, a lesbian is defined as a ‘female who is sexually attracted towards... other females’, (where ‘female’ is understood to refer to ‘biological sex’) so rules that allow membership clubs to include only people who share a certain protected characteristic (such as being a lesbian) can only include or exclude people on the basis of this definition of ‘lesbian’ (For Women Scotland Ltd (Appellant) v The Scottish Ministers (Respondent) 2025, para. 206).

⁹⁹ The fake blood protest and cardboard coffins and tombstones can be seen in photographs on their Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DJhdDoOsaIR/>
<https://www.instagram.com/transkidsdeservebetter/p/DDAOCGxO4cd/>

terrifying prospect for trans people, me included. But the response from trans communities, the wider public, and activist groups like Trans Kids Deserve Better gives me optimism that there is and will continue to be a sizable movement of people who are willing and ready to challenge this legal enforcement of cissexist ideology, who will make their voices heard, and will demand to be listened to. If there is one thing to be taken from this thesis, I hope it is that we should all be part of that movement. The feedback loop between cissexist ideology and epistemic injustice that is sustaining the trans panic can be broken, but it will take work. I hope the insights of this thesis are useful to all those who participate in that work.

Bibliography

- Adu, Aletha. 2023. 'Gender-Affirming Care for Children "Form of Conversion Therapy"', Says Badenoch'. *The Guardian*, 6 December 2023, sec. Society.
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/dec/06/gender-affirming-care-for-children-form-of-conversion-therapy-says-badenoch>.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2016. 'An Affinity of Hammers'. *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3 (1–2): 22–34. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-3334151>.
- Akbar, Amna A. 2020. 'The Radical Possibilities of Protest'. In *Protest and Dissent: NOMOS LXII*, edited by Melissa Schwartzberg, 62:64–80. New York: New York University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479810512.003.0004>.
- Alston, Katie. 2018. 'The Transgender Arguments Dividing Society'. BBC News. 5 March 2018.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-43255878>.
- Althusser, Louis. 2014. 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'. In *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, translated by Ben Brewster, 232–72. London: Verso.
- Amnesty International UK. 2025. 'Amnesty International UK's Third-Party Intervention in the Supreme Court Appeal of the Case of For Women Scotland v Scottish Ministers, Taking Place on 26th and 27th of November 2024'. Amnesty International UK. 6 March 2025.
<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/amnesty-international-uks-third-party-intervention-supreme-court-appeal-case-women>.
- Anderson, Elizabeth. 2012. 'Epistemic Justice as a Virtue of Social Institutions'. *Social Epistemology* 26 (2): 163–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2011.652211>.
- Asher, Nicholas, and Francis Jeffry Pelletier. 2013. 'More Truths about Generic Truth'. In *Genericity*, edited by Alda Mari, Claire Beyssade, and Fabio Del Prete, 312–33. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199691807.003.0012>.
- Bachmann, Chaka L., and Becca Gooch. 2018. 'LGBT in Britain: Trans Report'. Stonewall/YouGov. https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/lgbt_in_britain_-_trans_report_final.pdf.
- Bailey, Alison. 2017. 'Tracking Privilege-Preserving Epistemic Pushback in Feminist and Critical Race Philosophy Classes'. *Hypatia* 32 (4): 876–92.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12354>.
- Barnes, Tom. 2018. 'Activists Replace 200 Tube Adverts with Instructions on How to Prevent Deportations'. *The Independent*, 18 December 2018, sec. News.

- <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/international-migrants-day-deportations-tube-adverts-lgbt-piccadilly-victoria-central-lines-a8689296.html>.
- Bassi, Serena, and Greta LaFleur. 2022. 'Introduction: TERFs, Gender-Critical Movements, and Postfascist Feminisms'. *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 9 (3): 311–33. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-9836008>.
- BBC News. 2019. 'UWE Bristol Hits Back at Online Trans Toilet Criticism'. BBC News. 12 February 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-bristol-47213433>.
- . 2022. 'University of Edinburgh Film Screening Cancelled Due to Protest'. BBC News. 15 December 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-63986755>.
- . 2023a. 'Trans Women May Be Banned from Women's NHS Wards'. BBC News. 3 October 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-66994133>.
- . 2023b. 'Transgender-Related Protesters Divided by Police in Belfast'. BBC News. 16 April 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-65293157>.
- Bettcher, Talia Mae. 2007. 'Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers: On Transphobic Violence and the Politics of Illusion'. *Hypatia* 22 (3): 43–65.
- . 2014. 'When Selves Have Sex: What the Phenomenology of Trans Sexuality Can Teach Us About Sexual Orientation?' *Journal of Homosexuality* 61 (5): 605–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2014.865472>.
- . 2017. 'Getting "Naked" in The Colonial/Modern Gender System: A Preliminary Trans Feminist Analysis of Pornography'. In *Beyond Speech: Pornography and Analytic Feminist Philosophy*, edited by Mari Mikkola, 157–76. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190257910.003.0008>.
- Bland, Archie. 2023. 'What Does the Trans Guidance for England's Schools Say?' *The Guardian*, 20 December 2023, sec. Society. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/dec/20/what-does-the-trans-guidance-for-englands-schools-say>.
- Blease, Charlotte, Havi Carel, and Keith Geraghty. 2017. 'Epistemic Injustice in Healthcare Encounters: Evidence from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome'. *Journal of Medical Ethics* 43 (8): 549–57. <https://doi.org/10.1136/medethics-2016-103691>.
- Blondeel, Karel, Sofia de Vasconcelos, Claudia García-Moreno, Rob Stephenson, Marleen Temmerman, and Igor Toskin. 2018. 'Violence Motivated by Perception of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity: A Systematic Review'. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 96 (1): 29–41L. <https://doi.org/10.2471/BLT.17.197251>.

- Bondy, Patrick. 2016. 'Counterfactuals and Epistemic Basing Relations'. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 97 (4): 542–69. <https://doi.org/10.1111/papq.12136>.
- Braga, Dana, Juliana Menasce Horowitz, and Kiley Hurst. 2023. 'Support for the Black Lives Matter Movement Has Dropped Considerably From Its Peak in 2020'. Pew Research Centre. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2023/06/14/support-for-the-black-lives-matter-movement-has-dropped-considerably-from-its-peak-in-2020/>.
- Brownlee, Kimberley. 2012. *Conscience and Conviction: The Case for Civil Disobedience*. Oxford Legal Philosophy. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Butler, Alexander. 2024. 'Suspected Trans Rights Activists Disrupt LGBA Conference with Live Crickets'. The Independent. 12 October 2024. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/lgba-conference-westminster-crickets-trans-b2628244.html>.
- Butt, Maria. 2023. 'LGBT+ Activists Hack London Tube and Bus Adverts with Stories of Palestinians'. *The Independent*, 30 October 2023, sec. News. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/lgbt-activists-palestine-london-b2438425.html>.
- Caldwell, Simon. 2024. 'Catholic Bishops of England and Wales in "Absolute Harmony" with Vatican against Gender Ideology'. *Catholic Herald* (blog). 25 April 2024. <https://thecatholicherald.com/catholic-bishops-of-england-and-wales-in-absolute-harmony-with-vatican-against-gender-ideology/>, <https://catholicherald.co.uk/catholic-bishops-of-england-and-wales-in-absolute-harmony-with-vatican-against-gender-ideology/>.
- Carel, Havi, and Ian James Kidd. 2017. 'Epistemic Injustice in Medicine and Healthcare'. In *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, edited by Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus Jr., 336–46. Abingdon/New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315212043-33>.
- Carlson, Greg. 2008. 'Patterns in the Semantics of Generic Sentences'. In *Time and Modality*, edited by Jacqueline Guéron and Jacqueline Lecarme, 17–38. Dordrecht: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-8354-9_2.
- 'Carolyn'. 2020. 'Carolyn's Story'. Ban Conversion Therapy. 2020. <https://www.banconversiontherapy.com/carolyn-story>.
- Casciani, Dominic. 2025. 'Trans Former Judge to Challenge Supreme Court's Gender Ruling'. BBC News. 29 April 2025. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9qw2149yelo>.

- Celikates, Robin. 2018. *Critique as Social Practice: Critical Theory and Social Self-Understanding*. Translated by Naomi Van Steenberg. Essex Studies in Contemporary Critical Theory. London/New York: Rowman & Littlefield International.
- Cheryan, Sapna, Allison Master, and Andrew Meltzoff. 2023. 'There Are Too Few Women in Computer Science and Engineering'. *Scientific American*. 1 February 2023. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/there-are-too-few-women-in-computer-science-and-engineering/>.
- Cho, Kelly Kasulis. 2023. 'U.K. Prime Minister on Gender: "A Man Is a Man and a Woman Is a Woman"'. *Washington Post*, 5 October 2023, sec. World. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/10/05/rishi-sunak-gender-identity-transgender/>.
- Cobham, Tara. 2025. 'Tens of Thousands Protest Supreme Court Ruling's "Betrayal" of Trans Community'. *The Independent*, 19 April 2025, sec. News. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/trans-rights-protest-supreme-court-gender-ruling-b2736065.html>.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 2009. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Cooke, Millie. 2025. 'Doctors Condemn Supreme Court Ruling on Trans Women as "Scientifically Illiterate"'. *The Independent*, 29 April 2025, sec. News. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/trans-gender-supreme-court-ruling-bma-doctors-b2741304.html>.
- Cooper, Alexia, and Erica L Smith. 2011. 'Homicide Trends in the United States, 1980-2008'. Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice NCJ 236018. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/htus8008.pdf>.
- Corredor, Elizabeth S. 2019. 'Unpacking "Gender Ideology" and the Global Right's Antigender Countermovement'. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 44 (3): 613–38. <https://doi.org/10.1086/701171>.
- Criddle, Cristina. 2021. 'Everyone's Invited: Children Recount "Rape Culture" Experiences'. BBC News. 15 March 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-56407441>.
- Critcher, Charles. 2016. 'Commentary: Moral Panics Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow'. In *Revisiting Moral Panics*, edited by Vivienne E. Cree, Gary Clapton, and Mark Smith, xvii–xxxvi. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Cuthbertson, Anthony. 2024. 'X Users Are Having Their Accounts Restricted for Using the Term "Cisgender"'. *The Independent*, 15 May 2024, sec. Tech. <https://www.independent.co.uk/tech/x-cisgender-slur-cis-elon-musk-b2545355.html>.

- Davis, Emmalon. 2018. 'On Epistemic Appropriation'. *Ethics* 128 (4): 702–27.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/697490>.
- . 2021. 'A Tale of Two Injustices: Epistemic Injustice in Philosophy'. In *Applied Epistemology*, edited by Jennifer Lackey, 215–50. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198833659.003.0010>.
- DellaPosta, Daniel. 2018. 'Gay Acquaintanceship and Attitudes toward Homosexuality: A Conservative Test'. *Socius* 4 (January):1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023118798959>.
- Delmas, Candice. 2018. *A Duty to Resist: When Disobedience Should Be Uncivil*. New York: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190872199.001.0001>.
- Dembroff, Robin. 2020a. 'Beyond Binary: Genderqueer as Critical Gender Kind'. *Philosophers' Imprint* 20 (9): 1–23.
- . 2020b. 'Cisgender Commonsense and Philosophy's Transgender Trouble'. *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7 (3): 399–406. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-8553048>.
- . 2024. 'Intersection Is Not Identity, or How to Distinguish Overlapping Systems of Injustice'. In *Conversations in Philosophy, Law, and Politics*, edited by Ruth Chang and Amia Srinivasan, 383–98. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198864523.003.0021>.
- Dembroff, Robin, and Dennis Whitcomb. 2023. 'Content-Focused Epistemic Injustice'. In *Oxford Studies in Epistemology Volume 7*, edited by Tamar Szabó Gendler, John Hawthorne, and Julianne Chung, 48–70. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192868978.003.0003>.
- Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Lee Rowley, and Kemi Badenoch. 2024. 'Government to Lay New Law to Halt the March of Gender-Neutral Toilets in Buildings'. GOV.UK. 6 May 2024. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-to-lay-new-law-to-halt-the-march-of-gender-neutral-toilets-in-buildings>.
- Dotson, Kristie. 2011. 'Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing'. *Hypatia* 26 (2): 236–57. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01177.x>.
- . 2012. 'A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression'. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 33 (1): 24–47. <https://doi.org/10.5250/fronjwomestud.33.1.0024>.
- . 2014. 'Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression'. *Social Epistemology* 28 (2): 115–38.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2013.782585>.
- Doward, Jamie. 2018. 'Women's Groups Claim "Silencing" on Transgender Concerns'. *The Guardian*, 14 October 2018, sec. Society.

- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/oct/14/women-claim-intimidation-silencing-gender-recognition-act-debate>.
- Duffy, Nick. 2018. 'Metro Newspaper Runs Full-Page Ad Attacking Trans Rights Reforms'. *PinkNews*, 10 October 2018. <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/10/10/metro-newspaper-full-page-ad-attacking-transgender-reforms/>.
- Edgoose, Han. 2024. 'Hermeneutical Sabotage'. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 102 (4): 879–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2024.2351210>.
- El Kassar, Nadja. 2018. 'What Ignorance Really Is. Examining the Foundations of Epistemology of Ignorance'. *Social Epistemology* 32 (5): 300–310. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2018.1518498>.
- . 2019. 'The Irreducibility of Ignorance'. *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 8 (2): 31–28.
- Ellis-Petersen, Hannah. 2015. 'Nigel Short Says Men “Hardwired” to Be Better Chess Players than Women'. *The Guardian*, 20 April 2015, sec. World. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/20/nigel-short-uk-grandmaster-men-hardwired-better-chess-players-women>.
- Ely, John. 2022a. 'From “Chestfeeding” to “Human Milk”: How NHS Language Is Going Woke'. *Mail Online*, 30 June 2022, sec. Health. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-10968271/How-NHS-language-going-woke-quietly-scrubbing-women-inclusive-advice-pages.html>.
- . 2022b. 'Now NHS Midwives Are Told Sex Is “ASSIGNED” at Birth: Royal College’s “Inclusivity” Memo Sparks Fury among Medics'. *Mail Online*, 29 June 2022, sec. Health. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-10964279/Now-midwives-told-sex-ASSIGNED-birth-Royal-colleges-inclusivity-memo-sparks-fury.html>.
- Equality Act*. 2010. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>.
- Equality and Human Rights Commission. 2011. *Equality Act 2010 Services, Public Functions and Associations Statutory Code of Practice*. UK: TSO (The Stationery Office). https://web.archive.org/web/20240929002417/https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/servicescode_0.pdf.
- . 2025. 'An Interim Update on the Practical Implications of the UK Supreme Court Judgment'. 25 April 2025. <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/media-centre/interim-update-practical-implications-uk-supreme-court-judgment>.
- Factora, James. 2025. 'U.K. Trans Youth Activists Scale “Daily Telegraph” Offices, Hang a “SMELLEgraph” Banner'. *Them*. 18 April 2025. <https://www.them.us/story/uk-trans-kids-deserve-better-daily-telegraph-smellegraph>.

- Fair Play For Women. 2025a. 'Our Beliefs'. Fair Play For Women. 2025. <https://fairplayforwomen.com/about-us/our-beliefs/>.
- . 2025b. 'Our History'. Fair Play For Women. 2025. <https://fairplayforwomen.com/about-us/our-history/>.
- Falbo, Arianna. 2022. 'Hermeneutical Injustice: Distortion and Conceptual Aptness'. *Hypatia* 37 (2): 343–63. <https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2022.4>.
- Faye, Shon. 2021. *The Transgender Issue: An Argument for Justice*. London: Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin Books.
- Fine, Cordelia. 2011. *Delusions of Gender: The Real Science behind Sex Differences*. London: Icon Books.
- Finlayson, Lorna. 2015. 'On Mountains and Molehills: Problems, Non-Problems, and the Ideology of Ideology'. *Constellations* 22 (1): 135–46. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12129>.
- . 2016. *An Introduction to Feminism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fisher, Mark. 2019. 'Burgerz Review – Chop Chop, Get Wise to Transphobic Violence'. *The Guardian*, 5 August 2019, sec. Stage. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/aug/05/burgerz-review-chop-chop-get-wise-to-transphobic-violence>.
- Flores, Carolina. Forthcoming. 'Resistant Beliefs, Responsive Believers'. *Journal of Philosophy*.
- For Women Scotland. 2025. 'About'. For Women Scotland. 2025. <https://forwomen.scot/about/>.
- For Women Scotland Ltd (Appellant) v The Scottish Ministers (Respondent). 2025. UK Supreme Court, case 16. https://supremecourt.uk/uploads/uksc_2024_0042_judgment_updated_16f5d72e76.pdf
- Forst, Rainer. 2024. 'Solidarity: Concept, Conceptions, and Contexts'. In *The Virtue of Solidarity*, edited by Andrea Sangiovanni and Juri Viehoff, 35–55. New York: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197612743.003.0002>.
- Fricker, Miranda. 1999. 'Epistemic Oppression and Epistemic Privilege'. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 25 (January):191–210.
- . 2007. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2010. 'Replies to Alcoff, Goldberg, and Hookway on Epistemic Injustice'. *Episteme* 7 (2): 164–78. <https://doi.org/10.3366/epi.2010.0006>.
- . 2013. 'How Is Hermeneutical Injustice Related to "White Ignorance"?'. *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 2 (8): 49–53.

- . 2015. ‘Epistemic Contribution as a Central Human Capability’. In *The Equal Society: Essays on Equality in Theory and Practice*, edited by G. Hull, 73–90. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- . 2016. ‘Epistemic Injustice and the Preservation of Ignorance’. In *The Epistemic Dimensions of Ignorance*, edited by Martijn Blaauw and Rik Peels, 160–77. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9780511820076.010>.
- Fricker, Miranda, and Katharine Jenkins. 2017. ‘Epistemic Injustice, Ignorance, and Trans Experiences’. In *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, edited by Ann Garry, Serene J. Khader, and Alison Stone, 268–78. New York: Routledge.
- Frye, Marilyn. 1990. ‘The Possibility of Feminist Theory’. In *Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference*, edited by Deborah L Rhode, 174–84. New Haven/London: Yale University Press.
- George, B. R., and Stacey Goguen. 2021. ‘Hermeneutical Backlash: Trans Youth Panics as Epistemic Injustice’. *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 7 (4). <https://doi.org/10.5206/fpq/2021.4.13518>.
- Gleeson, Jules Joanne, and Elle O’Rourke. 2021. ‘Introduction’. In *Transgender Marxism*, 1st ed., 1–32. London: Pluto Press.
- Godfrey, Chris. 2018. ‘Section 28 Protesters 30 Years on: “We Were Arrested and Put in a Cell up by Big Ben”’. *The Guardian*, 27 March 2018, sec. World news. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/27/section-28-protesters-30-years-on-we-were-arrested-and-put-in-a-cell-up-by-big-ben>.
- Goetze, Trystan S. 2018. ‘Hermeneutical Dissent and the Species of Hermeneutical Injustice’. *Hypatia* 33 (1): 73–90. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12384>.
- Good Law Project. 2023. ““Bold and Brave” Alice Let down by “Underfunded and Insufficiently Resourced” Gender-Affirming Care’. Good Law Project. 13 October 2023. <https://goodlawproject.org/warm-and-kind-alice-let-down-by-unfit-for-purpose-transgender-healthcare-provision/>.
- Government Equalities Office. 2016. ‘Government Response to the Government Response to the Women and Equalities Committee Report on Transgender Equality’. London: HM Government. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a817d0ced915d74e62328a3/Government_Response_to_the_Women_and_Equalities_Committee_Report_on_Transgender_Equality.pdf.
- Grasswick, Heidi. 2018. ‘Feminist Social Epistemology’. In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2018. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford

- University. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/feminist-social-epistemology/>.
- Grierson, Jamie. 2023. 'World Cycling Body Tightens Rules on Transgender Athletes after Review'. *The Guardian*, 14 July 2023, sec. Sport.
<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2023/jul/14/world-cycling-body-tightens-rules-on-transgender-athletes-after-review>.
- Hamilton, Christopher. 2003. 'Art and Moral Education'. In *Art and Morality*, edited by José Luis Bermúdez and Sebastian Gardner, 37–55. Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Hancock, Ange-Marie. 2011. *Solidarity Politics for Millennials*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230120136>.
- Harding, Sandra G. 1991. *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Hartsock, Nancy C. M. 2019. *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited, and Other Essays*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Hasenbush, Amira, Andrew R. Flores, and Jody L. Herman. 2019. 'Gender Identity Nondiscrimination Laws in Public Accommodations: A Review of Evidence Regarding Safety and Privacy in Public Restrooms, Locker Rooms, and Changing Rooms'. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 16 (1): 70–83. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-018-0335-z>.
- Haslanger, Sally. 2012a. "'But Mom, Crop-Tops Are Cute!": Social Knowledge, Social Structure, and Ideology Critique'. In *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*, 406–28. New York: Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199892631.003.0015>.
- . 2012b. 'Ideology, Generics, and Common Ground'. In *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*, 446–78. New York: Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199892631.003.0017>.
- . 2012c. 'Ontology and Social Construction'. In *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*, 83–112. New York: Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199892631.003.0002>.
- . 2017a. 'Culture and Critique'. *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 91 (1): 149–73. <https://doi.org/10.1093/arisup/akx001>.
- . 2017b. 'Racism, Ideology, and Social Movements'. *Res Philosophica* 94 (1): 1–22.
<https://doi.org/10.11612/resphil.1547>.
- . 2018. 'What Is a Social Practice?' *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 82 (July): 231–47. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000085>.

- . 2019a. ‘Agency within Structures and Warranted Resistance: Response to Commentators’. *Australasian Philosophical Review* 3 (1): 109–21.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/24740500.2019.1705278>.
- . 2019b. ‘Cognition as a Social Skill’. *Australasian Philosophical Review* 3 (1): 5–25.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/24740500.2019.1705229>.
- . 2019c. ‘Disciplined Bodies and Ideology Critique’. Glass Bead. 2019.
<https://www.glass-bead.org/article/disciplined-bodies-and-ideology-critique/>.
- . 2021a. *Ideology in Practice: What Does Ideology Do?* The Aquinas Lecture. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press.
- . 2021b. ‘Political Epistemology and Social Critique’. In *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy Volume 7*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192897480.003.0002>.
- . 2024. ‘Social Systems and Intersectional Oppression’. In *Conversations in Philosophy, Law, and Politics*, edited by Ruth Chang and Amia Srinivasan, 399–426. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198864523.003.0022>.
- Hayton, Debbie. 2022. ‘My Autogynephilia Story’. UnHerd. 8 May 2022.
<https://unherd.com/2022/05/the-truth-about-autogynephilia/>.
- Heath, Joseph. 2000. ‘Ideology, Irrationality and Collectively Self-Defeating Behavior’. *Constellations* 7 (3): 363–71. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.00193>.
- Hermansson, Patrik. 2022. ‘Transphobia and The Far Right’. *HOPE Not Hate* (blog). 16 March 2022. <https://hopenothate.org.uk/2022/03/16/transphobia-and-the-far-right/>.
- Hinsliff, Gaby. 2019. ‘Maya Forstater’s Case Was about Protected Beliefs, Not Trans Rights’. *The Guardian*, 22 December 2019, sec. Opinion.
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/22/maya-forstater-case-about-protected-beliefs-not-trans-rights>.
- Holroyd, Jules, and Katherine Puddifoot. 2019. ‘Implicit Bias and Prejudice’. In *The Routledge Handbook of Social Epistemology*, 313–26. New York: Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315717937>.
- Holroyd, Jules, Robin Scaife, and Tom Stafford. 2017. ‘Responsibility for Implicit Bias’. *Philosophy Compass* 12 (3): e12410. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12410>.
- Home Office. 2024. ‘Police Powers and Procedures: Stop and Search and Arrests, England and Wales, Year Ending 31 March 2023 (Second Edition)’. GOV.UK. 14 March 2024.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/stop-and-search-and-arrests-year-ending-march-2023/police-powers-and-procedures-stop-and-search-and-arrests-england-and-wales-year-ending-31-march-2023>.

- Horbury, Ezra, and Christine “Xine” Yao. 2020. ‘Empire and Eugenics: Trans Studies in the United Kingdom’. *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7 (3): 445–54.
<https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-8553104>.
- Hunte, Ben. 2022. ‘Exclusive: Trans Journalists Pull Out of Guardian Newspaper’s Pride Coverage’. *Vice*, 9 June 2022. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/g5vx8j/guardian-trans-journalists>.
- Ivy, Veronica. 2016. ‘Epistemic Injustice’. *Philosophy Compass* 11 (8): 437–46.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12336>.
- . 2018. ‘The Epistemology of Propaganda’. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 96 (2): 483–89. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12429>.
- Jackson, Lucy. 2024. ‘Keir Starmer “Supports” a Ban on Transgender Women Competing in Women’s Sport’. *The National*, 12 March 2024.
<https://www.thenational.scot/news/24179099.keir-starmer-supports-ban-trans-women-competing-womens-sport/>.
- Jaeggi, Rahel. 2009. ‘Rethinking Ideology’. In *New Waves in Political Philosophy*, edited by Boudewijn de Bruin and Christopher F. Zurn, translated by Eva Engels, 63–86. New Waves in Philosophy. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230234994_4.
- Jaggar, Alison M. 2004. ‘Feminist Politics and Epistemology: The Standpoint of Women’. In *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*, edited by Sandra Harding, 55–66. New York/London: Routledge.
- James, Alastair. 2023. ‘Adam Lambert Slams “Ignorant” and “Foolish” Anti-Trans People’. *Attitude*. 3 July 2023. <https://www.attitude.co.uk/news/adam-lambert-slams-ignorant-and-foolish-anti-trans-people-439284/>.
- Jenkins, Katharine. 2023. *Ontology and Oppression - Race, Gender, and Social Reality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- John, Tara. 2024. ‘England’s Health Service to Stop Prescribing Puberty Blockers to Transgender Kids’. *CNN*, 13 March 2024. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/13/uk/england-nhs-puberty-blockers-trans-children-intl-gbr/index.html>.
- Jones, Charlotte, and Jen Slater. 2020. ‘The Toilet Debate: Stalling Trans Possibilities and Defending “Women’s Protected Spaces”’. *The Sociological Review* 68 (4): 834–51.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026120934697>.
- Kapusta, Stephanie Julia. 2016. ‘Misgendering and Its Moral Contestability’. *Hypatia* 31 (3): 502–19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12259>.

- Kearns, Sam. 2025. 'ECB Says Transgender Women Cannot Compete in Women's Cricket with Immediate Effect'. BBC Sport. 2 May 2025.
<https://www.bbc.com/sport/cricket/articles/c0l0rje87y5o>.
- Kelleher, Patrick. 2021. 'Guardian Readers Cancel Subscriptions over "Transphobic" Sarah Everard Article'. *PinkNews*, 4 October 2021.
<https://www.thepinknews.com/2021/10/04/the-guardian-readers-cancel-subscriptions-over-misleading-transphobic-sarah-everard-coverage/>.
- Kennedy, Natacha. 2013. 'Cultural Cisgenderism: Consequences of the Imperceptible'. *Psychology of Women Section Review* 15 (2): 3–11.
<https://doi.org/10.53841/bpspow.2013.15.2.3>.
- Kerr, Barra. 2019. 'Banned from Medium: Pronouns Are Rohypnol'. *Uncommon Ground* (blog). 3 June 2019. <https://uncommongroundmedia.com/banned-from-medium-pronouns-are-rohypnol/>.
- King, Daniel, Carrie Paechter, Miranda Ridgway, and researchers at Nottingham Trent University. 2020. *Gender Recognition Act: Analysis of Consultation Responses*. London: Government Equalities Office.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/919890/Analysis_of_responses_Gender_Recognition_Act.pdf.
- King, Keith A., R. Andrew Yockey, and Rebecca A. Vidourek. 2022. 'Transgender Individuals and Psychological Intimate Partner Violence: A National Study'. *Journal of Family Violence* 37 (2): 289–300. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-020-00219-4>.
- Kirkup, James. 2019. 'Women Are Being Silenced from Speaking about Transgender Rights'. *The Spectator*, 6 May 2019. <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/women-are-being-silenced-from-speaking-about-transgender-rights/>.
- Knight, Kathryn. 2022. 'Why Are Councils Getting Drag Queens to Read Stories to Children?' *Mail Online*, 5 August 2022, sec. News. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11085685/Why-councils-spending-taxpayers-cash-drag-queens-read-children-Asks-KATHRYN-KNIGHT.html>.
- LaBossiere, Barbara B. 2005. 'When the Law Is Not One's Own: A Case for Violent Civil Disobedience'. *Public Affairs Quarterly* 19 (4): 317–30.
- Lakeman, Richard. 2010. 'Epistemic Injustice and the Mental Health Service User'. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing* 19 (3): 151–53.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1447-0349.2010.00680.x>.

- Lawford-Smith, Holly. 2021. 'Trans Men Are Men (But Transwomen Are Not Women)'. *Holly Lawford-Smith* (blog). 29 March 2021. <https://hollylawford-smith.org/trans-men-are-men-but-transwomen-are-not-women/>.
- Lee, Claudia. 2024. 'Trans Teens Occupy Ledge of NHS England in Call for Equal Access to Healthcare'. *South London News*, 4 July 2024. <https://londonnewsonline.co.uk/news/lives-are-at-stake-trans-teens-occupy-ledge-of-nhs-england-in-call-for-equal-access-to-healthcare/>.
- Lee, Stephanie M. 2020. 'A Controversial Study Claimed To Explain Why Women Don't Go Into Science And Tech. It Just Got A 1,113-Word Correction.' *BuzzFeed News*, 13 February 2020. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/stephaniemlee/women-stem-gender-equality-paradox-correction>.
- Lefkowitz, David. 2007. 'On a Moral Right to Civil Disobedience'. *Ethics* 117 (2): 202–33. <https://doi.org/10.1086/510694>.
- Leslie, Sarah-Jane. 2007. 'Generics and the Structure of the Mind'. *Philosophical Perspectives* 21 (1): 375–403. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1520-8583.2007.00138.x>.
- . 2014. 'Carving Up the Social World with Generics*'. In *Oxford Studies in Experimental Philosophy*, edited by Joshua Knobe, Tania Lombrozo, and Shaun Nichols, 208–31. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198718765.003.0009>.
- Lester, CN. 2018. 'Genderquake: Channel 4 Propped Up Old Prejudices And Dressed It Up As Controversy'. *HuffPost UK*, 10 May 2018. https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/genderquake-channel-4-propped-up-old-prejudices-and-dressed-it-up-as-controversy_uk_5af40b2ee4b09bb419e527c8.
- . 2023. 'Virago'. In *Furies: Stories of the Wicked, Wild and Untamed*, 17–41. London: Virago Press.
- 'Let Women Speak in New Zealand'. 2023. *For Women Scotland* (blog). 26 March 2023. <https://forwomen.scot/26/03/2023/let-women-speak-in-new-zealand/>.
- Liao, Shen-yi, and Bryce Huebner. 2021. 'Oppressive Things*'. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 103 (1): 92–113. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12701>.
- Lowbridge, Caroline. 2021. "'We're Being Pressured into Sex by Some Trans Women'". BBC News. 26 October 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-57853385>.
- Luzzi, Federico. 2024. 'Deception-Based Hermeneutical Injustice'. *Episteme* 21 (1): 147–65. <https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2021.7>.
- Lyons, David. 1998. 'Moral Judgment, Historical Reality, and Civil Disobedience'. *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 27 (1): 31–49.

- MacKinnon, Catharine A. 1989. *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Mansbridge, Jane. 2001. 'The Making of Oppositional Consciousness'. In *Oppositional Consciousness: The Subjective Roots of Social Progress*, edited by Jane Mansbridge and Aldon Morris, 1–19. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Marsh, Sarah. 2018. 'Girlguiding Defends Transgender Policy after Criticism'. *The Guardian*, 26 September 2018, sec. Society.
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/sep/26/girlguiding-defends-transgender-policy-after-criticism>.
- Martín, Annette. 2021. 'What Is White Ignorance?' *The Philosophical Quarterly* 71 (4): 864–85.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/pq/pqaa073>.
- Mason, Rebecca. 2011. 'Two Kinds of Unknowing'. *Hypatia* 26 (2): 294–307.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01175.x>.
- McDonald, Andrew. 2024. 'Tories Put Trans Rights Row at Heart of UK Election Campaign'. *POLITICO*, 3 June 2024. <https://www.politico.eu/article/tories-put-trans-rights-access-row-at-heart-of-uk-election-campaign/>.
- McKiernan, Jennifer, and Henry Zeffman. 2025. 'Keir Starmer Does Not Believe Trans Women Are Women, No 10 Says'. BBC News. 22 April 2025.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crldey0z00ro>.
- McLaughlin, Chris. 2025. 'SFA Bans Trans Women Competing in Women's Football in Scotland'. BBC News. 29 April 2025. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj3xg4l7774o>.
- Meckler, Laura, and Josh Dawsey. 2021. 'Republicans, Spurred by an Unlikely Figure, See Political Promise in Targeting Critical Race Theory'. *Washington Post*, 21 June 2021.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2021/06/19/critical-race-theory-rufo-republicans/>.
- Medina, José. 2011. 'The Relevance of Credibility Excess in a Proportional View of Epistemic Injustice: Differential Epistemic Authority and the Social Imaginary'. *Social Epistemology* 25 (1): 15–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2010.534568>.
- . 2012. 'Hermeneutical Injustice and Polyphonic Contextualism: Social Silences and Shared Hermeneutical Responsibilities'. *Social Epistemology* 26 (2): 201–20.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2011.652214>.
- . 2013. *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and the Social Imagination*. Studies in Feminist Philosophy. New York: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199929023.001.0001>.

- . 2023. *The Epistemology of Protest: Silencing, Epistemic Activism, and the Communicative Life of Resistance*. Studies in Feminist Philosophy. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mills, Charles W. 1999. *The Racial Contract*. Cornell Paperbacks. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- . 2007. 'White Ignorance'. In *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, edited by Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana, 13–38. Ithaca: State University of New York Press.
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/gla/detail.action?docID=3407494>.
- . 2013. 'White Ignorance and Hermeneutical Injustice: A Comment on Medina and Fricker, Charles W. Mills'. *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 3 (1): 38–43.
- . 2017. 'Ideology'. In *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, edited by Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus, 100–111. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Moore, Mallory. 2022a. 'Alice Sullivan and Allison Bailey Are Misleading the Public and UK Government Bodies about Rape...'. *Medium* (blog). 9 January 2022.
<https://chican3ry.medium.com/alice-sullivan-and-allison-bailey-are-misleading-the-public-and-uk-government-bodies-about-rape-f9a9335f5df4>.
- . 2022b. 'For Women Scotland Join Christian Right and Far Right Activists for Conference against LGBT Sex Ed in Schools'. Trans Safety Network. 30 November 2022. <https://transsafety.network/posts/fws-christian-institute>.
- Mortimer, Cian. 2024. 'Darlington Nurse Criticises NHS Trust over "Inappropriate" Response to Trans Policy'. *The Northern Echo*, 20 November 2024.
<https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/24739471.darlington-nurse-spoke-transgender-row-womans-hour/>.
- Morton, Becky, and Paul Seddon. 2023. 'UK Government to Block Scottish Gender Bill'. BBC News. 16 January 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-64288757>.
- Moser, Charles. 2010. 'Blanchard's Autogynephilia Theory: A Critique'. *Journal of Homosexuality* 57 (6): 790–809. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2010.486241>.
- Munton, Jessie. 2019. 'Beyond Accuracy: Epistemic Flaws with Statistical Generalizations'. *Philosophical Issues* 29 (1): 228–40. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phis.12150>.
- Murray, Jessica. 2020. 'Teaching White Privilege as Uncontested Fact Is Illegal, Minister Says'. *The Guardian*, 20 October 2020, sec. World news.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/20/teaching-white-privilege-is-a-fact-breaks-the-law-minister-says>.

- Nagesh, Ashitha. 2022. 'Hate Crimes Recorded by Police up by More than a Quarter'. BBC News. 6 October 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-63157965>.
- Napolitano, M. Giulia. 2023. 'Prejudice, Generics, and Resistance to Evidence'. *Inquiry* 64 (8): 2571–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2023.2269261>.
- Nobis, Nathan. 2009. 'The "Babe" Vegetarians: Bioethics, Animal Minds and Moral Methodology'. In *Bioethics at the Movies*, edited by S. Shapshay, 56–73. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Observer Editorial. 2021. 'The Observer View on the Right to Free Expression'. *The Observer*, 27 June 2021, sec. Opinion. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jun/27/the-observer-view-on-the-right-to-free-expression>.
- O'Donnell, Katherine. 2019. 'The Theological Basis for Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist Positions'. In *Lesbian Feminism Essays Opposing the Global Heteropatriarchy*, edited by N Banerjee, K Browne, E Ferreira, M Olasik, and J Podmore, 81–102. London: Zed Books. <https://researchrepository.ucd.ie/handle/10197/11894>.
- Olasov, Ian. 2021. 'The Movement for Black Lives and the Language of Liberation'. In *The Movement for Black Lives: Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by Brandon Hogan, Michael Cholbi, Alex Madva, and Benjamin S. Yost, 176–96. New York: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197507773.003.0009>.
- Ore, Adeshola. 2023. 'Victoria to Ban Nazi Salute after "Disgusting" Scenes at Anti-Trans Protest'. *The Guardian*, 19 March 2023, sec. Australia news. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/mar/20/victoria-to-ban-nazi-salute-after-anti-trans-protest-melbourne-australia>.
- Pappé, Ilan. 2007. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.
- Pearce, Ruth. 2018. *Understanding Trans Health*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- . 2021. 'Reform of the Gender Recognition Act: Corrections to Oral Evidence'. <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/21023/pdf/>.
- Pearce, Ruth, Sonja Erikainen, and Ben Vincent. 2020. 'TERF Wars: An Introduction'. *The Sociological Review* 68 (4): 677–98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026120934713>.
- Pearce, Ruth, and Cal Horton. 2024. 'The U.K.'s Cass Review Badly Fails Trans Children'. *Scientific American*. 7 August 2024. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-u-k-s-cass-review-badly-fails-trans-children/>.
- Peitzmeier, Sarah M., Mannat Malik, Shanna K. Kattari, Elliot Marrow, Rob Stephenson, Madina Agénor, and Sari L. Reisner. 2020. 'Intimate Partner Violence in Transgender Populations: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Prevalence and Correlates'.

- American Journal of Public Health* 110 (9): e1–14.
<https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2020.305774>.
- Phillips, Aleks. 2025. ‘Trans Women Should Use Toilets Based on Biological Sex, Phillipson Says’. BBC News. 22 April 2025. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5y42zzwylvo>.
- Podosky, Paul-Mikhail Catapang. 2023. ‘Rethinking Epistemic Appropriation’. *Episteme* 20 (1): 142–62. <https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2021.8>.
- Pohlhaus, Gaile. 2002. ‘Knowing Communities: An Investigation of Harding’s Standpoint Epistemology’. *Social Epistemology* 16 (3): 283–93.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0269172022000025633>.
- . 2012. ‘Relational Knowing and Epistemic Injustice: Toward a Theory of Willful Hermeneutical Ignorance’. *Hypatia* 27 (4): 715–35. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01222.x>.
- Rawlinson, Kevin. 2017. ‘Don’t Make It Easier to Change Gender, Urge Conservative Activists’. *The Guardian*, 24 July 2017, sec. World news.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/24/dont-make-it-easier-to-change-gender-urge-conservative-activists>.
- Reny, Tyler T., and Benjamin J. Newman. 2021. ‘The Opinion-Mobilizing Effect of Social Protest against Police Violence: Evidence from the 2020 George Floyd Protests’. *American Political Science Review* 115 (4): 1499–1507.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421000460>.
- Richards, Steph. 2022. ‘Women’s Single Sex Spaces in Hospitals.’ TransLucent. 29 December 2022. <https://translucent.org.uk/womens-single-sex-spaces-in-hospitals/>.
- Roeser, Sabine. 2018. ‘Socially Extended Moral Deliberation about Risks: A Role for Emotions and Art?’ In *Socially Extended Epistemology*, edited by J. Adam Carter, Andy Clark, Jesper Kallestrup, S. Orestis Palermos, and Duncan Pritchard, 157–72. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rosario Sánchez, Raquel. 2022. ‘Is Common Sense Finally Returning to the Trans Debate?’ *The Telegraph*, 29 November 2022. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/11/29/common-sense-finally-returning-trans-debate/>.
- Rosen, Michael. 2000. ‘On Voluntary Servitude and the Theory of Ideology’. *Constellations* 7 (3): 393–407. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.00196>.
- Rufo, Christopher. 2021a. ‘@ConceptualJames The Goal Is to Have the Public Read Something Crazy in the Newspaper and Immediately Think “Critical Race Theory.” We Have Decodified the Term and Will Recodify It to Annex the Entire Range of Cultural

- Constructions That Are Unpopular with Americans.’ Tweet. @*realchrisrufo* (blog). 15 March 2021. <https://twitter.com/realchrisrufo/status/1371541044592996352>.
- . 2021b. ‘@ConceptualJames We Have Successfully Frozen Their Brand—"critical Race Theory"—into the Public Conversation and Are Steadily Driving up Negative Perceptions. We Will Eventually Turn It Toxic, as We Put All of the Various Cultural Insanities under That Brand Category.’ Tweet. @*realchrisrufo* (blog). 15 March 2021. <https://twitter.com/realchrisrufo/status/1371540368714428416>.
- Ruíz, Elena. 2020. ‘Cultural Gaslighting’. *Hypatia* 35 (4): 687–713. <https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2020.33>.
- Rustin, Susanna. 2022. ‘Trying to Erase the Biological Definition of Sex Isn’t Just Misguided – It’s Dangerous’. *The Guardian*, 28 June 2022, sec. Opinion. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jun/28/erase-biological-definition-sex-gender-self-identification-trans-transgender-feminist-case>.
- Sales, Dan. 2021. ‘Number of Migrants Landing in UK Is Now More than THREE Times 2020’. *Mail Online*, 22 November 2021, sec. News. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10229725/Number-migrants-landing-UK-THREE-times-total-2020.html>.
- Sandeman, George. 2021. ‘Welsh Government Accused of Erasing Biological Sex from School Curriculum’, 14 December 2021, sec. News. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/welsh-government-accused-of-erasing-biological-sex-from-school-curriculum-52b6lcp8t>.
- Sangiovanni, Andrea. 2024. ‘Solidarity: Nature, Grounds, and Value’. In *Solidarity – Nature, Grounds, and Value Andrea Sangiovanni in Dialogue*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. doi.org/10.7765/9781526172693.00007.
- Sara, Soma. 2021. ‘“Rape Culture Isn’t Limited to Private Schools”, Says Everyone’s Invited Founder’. *Inews*, 26 March 2021. <https://inews.co.uk/news/education/everyones-invited-founder-rape-culture-isnt-limited-to-private-schools-931857>.
- Saul, Jennifer. 2017. ‘Are Generics Especially Pernicious?’ *Inquiry* 66 (9): 1682–99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2017.1285995>.
- Scholz, Sally J. 2008. *Political Solidarity*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Serano, Julia. 2014. ‘A Personal History of the “T-Word” (and Some More General Reflections on Language and Activism)’. *Whipping Girl* (blog). 28 April 2014. <http://juliaserano.blogspot.com/2014/04/a-personal-history-of-t-word-and-some.html>.
- . 2016. *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Feminism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: Seal Press.

- . 2020. ‘Autogynephilia: A Scientific Review, Feminist Analysis, and Alternative “Embodiment Fantasies” Model’. *The Sociological Review* 68 (4): 763–78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026120934690>.
- Sex Matters. 2021. ‘Reviewing Annex B: How Can the NHS Fulfil Its Promise of Dignity and Privacy for All on Single-Sex Hospital Wards?’ <https://sex-matters.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Reviewing-Annex-B.pdf>.
- . 2022. ‘Sex in the Census: Reality v Paperwork’. Sex Matters. 22 February 2022. <https://sex-matters.org/posts/updates/sex-in-the-census-reality-v-paperwork/>.
- . 2025. ‘Sex Matters’. Sex Matters. 2025. <https://sex-matters.org/>.
- Shakespeare, Tom. 2014. ‘A Point of View: Happiness and Disability’. BBC News. 1 June 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-27554754>.
- Sharpe, Alex. 2020. ‘Will Gender Self-Declaration Undermine Women’s Rights and Lead to an Increase in Harms?’ *The Modern Law Review* 83 (3): 539–57. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2230.12507>.
- Shelby, Tommie. 2003. ‘Ideology, Racism, and Critical Social Theory’. *The Philosophical Forum* 34 (2): 153–88. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9191.00132>.
- . 2014. ‘Racism, Moralism, and Social Criticism’. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 11 (1): 57–74. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X14000010>.
- Sherman, Benjamin R. 2016. ‘There’s No (Testimonial) Justice: Why Pursuit of a Virtue Is Not the Solution to Epistemic Injustice’. *Social Epistemology* 30 (3): 229–50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2015.1031852>.
- Simion, Mona. 2024. *Resistance to Evidence*. Cambridge Studies in Philosophy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009298537>.
- Simpson, Craig. 2024. ‘Feminists Accuse Pro-Trans Activists of “Intimidation” on Scottish March’. *The Telegraph*, 6 April 2024. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/04/06/feminists-clash-pro-trans-activists-anti-hate-speech-march/>.
- Slater, Jen, and Charlotte Jones. 2018. ‘Around the Toilet: A Research Project Report about What Makes a Safe and Accessible Toilet Space’. Sheffield Hallam University. <https://doi.org/10.7190/9781843874195>.
- Smith, Matthew. 2020. ‘Where Does the British Public Stand on Transgender Rights in 2020?’ YouGov. 16 July 2020. <https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/30906-where-does-british-public-stand-transgender-rights>.

- . 2022. ‘Where Does the British Public Stand on Transgender Rights in 2022?’ YouGov. 20 July 2022. <https://yougov.co.uk/society/articles/43194-where-does-british-public-stand-transgender-rights-1>.
- . 2025. ‘Where Does the British Public Stand on Transgender Rights in 2024/25?’ YouGov. 11 February 2025. <https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/51545-where-does-the-british-public-stand-on-transgender-rights-in-202425>.
- Snorton, C. Riley. 2017. *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sodha, Sonia. 2025. ‘No Woman Should Be Forced to Change Her Clothes in Front of a Male Colleague’. *The Observer*, 9 February 2025, sec. Opinion. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/feb/09/no-woman-should-be-forced-to-change-her-clothes-in-front-of-a-trans-colleague>.
- Srinivasan, Amia. 2016. ‘Philosophy and Ideology’. *THEORIA. An International Journal for Theory, History and Foundations of Science* 31 (3): 371–80. <https://doi.org/10.1387/theoria.16446>.
- Stanley, Jason. 2015. *How Propaganda Works*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvc773mm>.
- Stock, Kathleen. 2018. ‘Changing the Concept of “Woman” Will Cause Unintended Harms’. *The Economist*, 6 July 2018. <https://www.economist.com/open-future/2018/07/06/changing-the-concept-of-woman-will-cause-unintended-harms>.
- Stoet, Gijsbert, and David C. Geary. 2018. ‘The Gender-Equality Paradox in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education’. *Psychological Science* 29 (4): 581–93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797617741719>.
- Taylor, Alex. 2021. ‘Disability and Dating: “Why Do People Think I’m My Boyfriend’s Carer?”’ BBC Three. 8 January 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/bbcthree/article/3fd6b74d-e71e-4327-b2f7-3257e6a3c1ea>.
- Taylor, Michael. 2020. *The Interest: How the British Establishment Resisted the Abolition of Slavery*. London: The Bodley Head.
- The Guardian. 2018. ‘The Guardian View on the Gender Recognition Act: Where Rights Collide’. *The Guardian*, 2018, sec. Opinion. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/oct/17/the-guardian-view-on-the-gender-recognition-act-where-rights-collide>.
- ‘The UK Workshop in Trans Philosophy’. 2021. Philevents.Org. 2021. <https://philevents.org/event/show/94865>.

- Them. 2024. 'Youth Activists Release Thousands of Live Crickets at Anti-Trans Conference in London'. Them. 11 October 2024. <https://www.them.us/story/youth-activists-live-crickets-disrupt-anti-trans-conference-london-j-k-rowling-lgb-alliance-trans-kids-deserve-better>.
- theorkneynews. 2025. 'Updated: Demonstrators Gather in Support of Trans Rights'. The Orkney News. 21 April 2025. <https://theorkneynews.scot/2025/04/21/demonstrators-gather-in-support-of-trans-rights/>.
- Thomas, Josh. 2018. 'Councillor Quits in Row over Cambridge's Transgender Toilet Rules'. CambridgeshireLive. 31 July 2018. <https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/cambridge-news/transgender-toilet-row-cambridge-councillor-14975106>.
- Thompson Ford, Richard. 2020. 'Protest Fatigue'. In *Protest and Dissent: NOMOS LXII*, edited by Melissa Schwartzberg, 62:161–88. New York: New York University Press. <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479810512.003.0007>.
- Toole, Briana. 2019. 'From Standpoint Epistemology to Epistemic Oppression'. *Hypatia* 34 (4): 598–618. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12496>.
- 'Trans People in the UK'. 2018. Government Equalities Office. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/721642/GEO-LGBT-factsheet.pdf.
- Transgender Trend. 2025. 'Transgender Terminology'. Transgender Trend. 2025. <https://www.transgendertrend.com/transgender-terminology/>.
- Triggle, Nick. 2024. 'Puberty Blockers: Indefinite Ban to Be Introduced'. BBC News. 11 December 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly2z0gx3p5o>.
- Tsjeng, Zing, and Bex Wade. 2022. 'Trans Activists Left Over 60 Bottles of Piss Outside the EHRC'. Vice. 6 September 2022. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/jgpj5y/pissed-off-trannies-ehrc-protest>.
- Turner, Janice. 2021. 'Conversion Therapy Ban Shouldn't Be Rushed'. *The Times*, 3 December 2021, sec. Comment. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/conversion-therapy-ban-shouldnt-be-rushed-fqqjk0dtf>.
- Van Gils, Martijn, and Malaka Mohammed Shwaikh. 2016. 'Fighting Without Weapons: Palestinian Documentary Films and Acts of Resistance'. *Asian Affairs* 47 (3): 443–64. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2016.1225903>.
- Walden, Celia. 2022. 'When It Comes to Gender Identity, Whatever Happened to Common Sense?' *The Telegraph*, 21 March 2022. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/columnists/2022/03/21/comes-gender-identity-whatever-happened-common-sense/>.

- Walker, Peter. 2025. 'MPs Fear UK Equality Watchdog May Take Months to Sign off Gender Guidance'. *The Guardian*, 26 May 2025, sec. Society.
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/26/uk-equality-watchdog-months-sign-off-gender-guidance-mps-fear>.
- Wallace-Wells, Benjamin. 2021. 'How a Conservative Activist Invented the Conflict Over Critical Race Theory'. *The New Yorker*, 18 June 2021.
<https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-inquiry/how-a-conservative-activist-invented-the-conflict-over-critical-race-theory>.
- Weaver, Matthew. 2023. 'Kathleen Stock Says She Is a "Moderate" as Protests Planned over Oxford Debate'. *The Guardian*, 29 May 2023, sec. UK news.
<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/may/29/kathleen-stock-says-she-is-a-moderate-as-protests-planned-over-oxford-debate>.
- Whittle, Stephen. 2002. *Respect and Equality: Transsexual and Transgender Rights*. London: Cavendish Publishing Limited.
- Whittle, Stephen, Lewis Turner, and Maryam Al-Alami. 2007. 'Engendered Penalties: Transgender and Transsexual People's Experiences of Inequality and Discrimination'. Equalities Review. Press for Change. https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/trans_country_report_-_engenderedpenalties.pdf.
- Wilson, A. N. 2017. 'A.N. WILSON on the New Dark Age of Intolerance'. Mail Online. 30 September 2017. [http://www.dailymail.co.uk/~article-4935418/index.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/~/article-4935418/index.html).
- Wollaston, Sam. 2021. 'Dining across the Divide: "I Was Surprised by Her Views on Eastern European Immigration as She Seemed so Open-Minded"'. *The Guardian*, 30 December 2021, sec. Life and style. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/dec/30/dining-across-the-divide-views-on-eastern-european-immigration-seemed-open-minded>.
- Woman's Place UK. 2025. 'About'. Woman's Place UK. 2025.
<https://womansplaceuk.org/about/>.
- Women and Equalities Committee. 2019. 'Enforcing the Equality Act: The Law and the Role of the Equality and Human Rights Commission'. House of Commons.
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/1470/1470.pdf>.
- Woomer, Lauren. 2019. 'Agential Insensitivity and Socially Supported Ignorance'. *Episteme* 16 (1): 73–91. <https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2017.28>.
- Wright, Jack. 2021. 'Record 3,500 Channel Migrants Arrived in July'. *Mail Online*, 1 August 2021, sec. News. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9849327/Record-3-500-migrants-arrived-July-Border-Force-intercepted-120-boats-month.html>.

- Wu, Henry H., Ryan J. Gallagher, Thayer Alshaabi, Jane L. Adams, Joshua R. Minot, Michael V. Arnold, Brooke Foucault Welles, Randall Harp, Peter Sheridan Dodds, and Christopher M. Danforth. 2023. 'Say Their Names: Resurgence in the Collective Attention toward Black Victims of Fatal Police Violence Following the Death of George Floyd'. *PLOS ONE* 18 (1): e0279225. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0279225>.
- Young, Iris Marion. 1990. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton Paperbacks. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press.
- Yours, Euan. 2023. 'Far Right Turn out in Force Supporting Gender Critical Feminist Rally in Glasgow'. Trans Safety Network. 22 February 2023. <https://transsafety.network/posts/glasgow-far-right-standing-for-women>.