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Janice Raymond, Doublethink, transgenderism, feminist, transsexualism, newspeak, patriarchy, single-sex spaces, gender, LGBTQ+

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TRANS DOUBLETHINK AND NEWSPEAK

A REVIEW OF
DOUBLETHINK: A FEMINIST CHALLENGE TO
***TRANSGENDERISM* BY JANICE G. RAYMOND (SPINIFEX,**
2021)

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KEYWORDS

Janice Raymond, *Doublethink*, transgenderism, feminist, transsexualism, newspeak, patriarchy, single-sex spaces, gender, LGBTQ+

WHEN I PICKED UP *DOUBLETHINK: A FEMINIST CHALLENGE TO TRANSGENDERISM* (2021) by Janice Raymond I anticipated that it would be a unique contribution to the emerging feminist literature on transgenderism. Raymond's earlier work *The Transsexual Empire* (1979) was the very first feminist book on transsexualism and it broke new conceptual ground. Instead of individualising transsexualism as a medical/ psychiatric condition it placed transsexuality within the 20th-century context of patriarchy, sexism, Big Pharma, and new medical technologies (surgery and cross-sex hormones to fabricate "sex change"). As the title suggests, Raymond concluded that the politics of transsexuality was a form of cultural imperialism, and her analysis has proved highly prescient.

Doublethink, Raymond's second book on this topic written 40 years later, focuses on the current, 21st century social context to which the imperialist history of transsexuality has inexorably led. The title alludes to George Orwell's dystopian social science fiction novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in which the citizens of the land of Oceania, a totalitarian superstate, are under strict control. Complete allegiance to Oceania is maintained by the policing of thought rather than by overt force. A major tool is *doublethink* whereby people are led to hold contradictory, logically incompatible ideas about what is or isn't true without experiencing cognitive dissonance. Doublethink is achieved through changes to the language or *newspeak*. If people question the state's narratives, re-education programmes, backed up by threats of violence, coerce dissidents to abandon their critical faculties and become quiescent and unthinking. Orwell's book is a cautionary tale about how seemingly benign political power can in reality be despotic. Raymond suggests that "trans doublethink and newspeak," and the punishment that follows if women and men question them, mirror some of the same strategies of social control under the guise of gender fluidity, liberal values, and freedom.

In the 21st century, the word *transsexualism* has been replaced by *transgenderism* or simply *trans*. Trans refers to people who *self-identify* as the opposite sex as well as those transsexuals who have undergone medical treatment. Raymond describes how trans is an example of doublethink, a phenomenon that disproportionately impacts women because of the sexism and sexual violence still prevalent in the 21st century. Within current patriarchy, doublethink takes the form of the “truth” that a man with no body modification can be female “inside” and thus be a *trans woman* (and vice versa for women who identify as “trans men”). Doublethink has been aided by newspeak which systematically erases the reality of biological sex. Accordingly, newspeak women can have penises, boy babies can be born female, and wrongly assigned as male by doctors, men can menstruate, conceive, and give birth, and so on. These impossibilities are accepted as empirical facts by many so-called progressive people who also fail to see the blatant sexism. Women are referred to as menstruators or cervix havers; breastfeeding is now chestfeeding; vaginas are front holes and so on. Raymond notes that “trans newspeak strips away from us the very word ‘women’” but nevertheless “retains this word for self-declared women,” that is, men (p.5).

Without any surgical or hormonal modification of their bodies, men are increasingly sanctioned by the state and its representative bodies to access women’s and girls’ formerly single-sex spaces such as lavatories, changing rooms, rape crisis centres, and prisons. Children and young people alleged to have been “born in the wrong body” suffer brutal medicalisation in the name of alleged “gender fluidity.” The idea that it is possible for men to be women has been disseminated through the social body by government agencies, the law, academia, lobby groups, the media, bioethics, sports regulators, diversity and inclusion training, educational policy, and medical practices. Women who resist doublethink and newspeak are castigated and ostracized to enforce compliance. They are not only slurred as TERFs (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists), but their language is policed as “hate speech,” they can be cancelled from public engagement, have their livelihoods threatened.

Despite its valuable contribution, I was a little disappointed by *Doublethink* on two broad counts. Firstly, it has a central flaw. With a strange irony, Raymond sometimes uses newspeak herself and thus reproduces at times the very doublethink that the book is dedicated to exposing. She acknowledges the necessity of using truthful language but simultaneously wants to escape becoming “a language czar comparable to the trans pronoun police” (p.17). She often refers to men as “trans-identified women.” Although she uses the word “women” in conjunction with the prefix “trans-identified,” the term “trans-identified women” conveys that there *is* some way that the men are adult human females. I kept thinking: Why not consistently just use the term “men who identify as women”? Moreover, the language became so confusing at times I slid to and fro between pages trying to figure out whether in particular contexts Raymond is referring to women or men. For example, she sometimes refers to “trans-identified women” (p. 49) as “trans-identified men” (p.51) whilst also calling women who identify as men “trans-identified men” (p.16). Such cognitive blurring is surely the very consequence and by-product of newspeak, and it should be avoided at all costs.

Secondly, *Doublethink* will be revelatory to those readers unfamiliar with trans ideology and politics. However, for readers already familiar, it did not live up to the potential of its title and I’m not sure it adds anything new to the emerging feminist canon. There is one caveat however, namely Raymond’s focus on the coercion of lesbians in LGBT+ circles at the hands of men (self-declared “trans women”). Transactivists and their allies portray to the general public that these circles are tolerant,

sparkly, happy rainbow spaces of gender freedom, but, in reality, they are as sexist and oppressive to women as other sectors of society. She asserts that this is “the grimy little secret ... where women’s testimonies are subject to the code of ... silence and secrecy that forbids members from betraying their ‘brothers’” (p. 15).

Raymond is clear that her second book *Doublethink* is not a sequel to *The Transsexual Empire*, and I tried hard not to compare them. I nevertheless found myself doing so. Her intellect and her historically consistent and unwavering courage seem somewhat dulled in this book. The resounding accolade I found myself wanting to give her is not for this book I’m afraid, but because Raymond has been a pioneer and was instrumental in building the intellectual and political foundations on which *Doublethink* can now stand and take up its place as one book among many.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Heather Brunskell-Evans, Ph.D., is a writer and retired professor of political philosophy and social theory. She has written extensively about pornography and prostitution as forms of sexual violence. Recently she has explored the ethics of postmodern 'gender identity' medicine and its deleterious impact on children and young people. Her most recent book is *Transgender Body Politics*: Spinifex Press.

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