# **Critical Analysis of J.K. Rowling’s Trans-Activism Essay**

J.K. Rowling is a rather good writer, and thus has a rather wide audience to speak to regarding any major issue. Lately, she’s come under fire for her beliefs related to transgender activism. As can be expected, she wove together a well-written story explaining her position [1].

This article aims to provide a factual and critical analysis of her essay, based on the evidence she provides. To that end, the following considerations are made:

* Anecdotes are removed.
* Appeals to emotion are removed (Logical Fallacy)
* Appeals to Authority (including to the author herself) are removed (Logical Fallacy)
* Corrections to inaccurate text are made
* Rhetoric without supporting evidence is removed
* Information from research sources was evaluated for citations to primary research and removed if none were found
* Removals denoted in the common manner (ellipsis, “…”), and updates similarly, in brackets: “[updated text]”

*Of the two research sources cited, one was a reference to an opinion piece with no evidence or research provided, and the second was taken out of context and substantially weakens her argument after the corrections were published, which will be detailed further.*

## **Opening**

The opening structure is fairly straightforward — J.K. begins by asserting her difficulty in approaching this topic.

*This isn’t an easy piece to write, for reasons that will shortly become clear, but I know it’s time to explain myself on an issue surrounded by toxicity. I write this without any desire to add to that toxicity.*

*…*

*My interest in trans issues pre-dated Maya’s case by almost two years, during which I followed the debate around the concept of gender identity*

*…*

*On one level, my interest in this issue has been professional, because I’m writing a crime series, set in the present day, and my fictional female detective is of an age to be interested in, and affected by, these issues herself, but on another, it’s intensely personal,*

*…*

*So why am I doing this? Why speak up? Why not quietly do my research and keep my head down?*

*Well, I’ve got five reasons for being worried about the new trans activism, and deciding I need to speak up.*

She continues the opening by asserting her generalized purpose — primarily that she has *personal reasons* for being concerned with trans-activism.

## **Reasoning**

J.K. than continues detailing out each individual specific reason.

*Firstly, I have a charitable trust that focuses on alleviating social deprivation in Scotland, with a particular emphasis on women and children. Among other things, my trust supports projects for female prisoners and for survivors of domestic and sexual abuse. I also fund medical research into MS, a disease that behaves very differently in men and women.*

*…*

It isn’t clear why trans activism is a major concern here. Having both biological sex and gender on medical research forms isn’t typically difficult or complicated and is, in fact, quite common. Why would having social projects related to women and children be cause for concern?

*The second reason is that I’m an ex-teacher and the founder of a children’s charity, which gives me an interest in both education and safeguarding.*

*…*

Again, while a reason to be concerned about *something*, no evidence is provided that links this concern to transgender individuals or trans-activism.

*The third is that, as a much-banned author, I’m interested in freedom of speech and have publicly defended it, …*

A reasonable concern, but again it is not linked to the premise. Thus far, she’s presented three general concerns, all of which *are valid on their own*. However, she has provided no reasoning or evidence as to how these factors are related to transgender individuals or trans-activism.

*The fourth is where things start to get truly personal. …[Lisa Littman’s] paper caused a furore. She was accused of bias and of spreading misinformation about transgender people,…The journal took the paper offline and re-reviewed it before [issuing a correction where data bias statements were included to clarify that the results did not generalize to any larger population and should not be used to draw conclusions on their own]…*

The original text downplayed and twisted the reality of what happened to Littman’s research. The corrections published were *major* changes [2], particularly emphasizing that people should **not** draw the types of conclusions from her research that J.K. did. The population selected for the study were second-hand accounts from parents engaged in transphobic social media — in no way a representative sample. This does not invalidate Littman’s research, but it does raise ethical questions regarding the researcher.

*I want to be very clear here: I know transition will be a solution for some gender dysphoric people, although I’m also aware through extensive research that studies have consistently shown that between 60–90% of gender dysphoric [prepubescent children] will grow out of their dysphoria. …*

Here, J.K. claimed this research was about *teens*. It is not. The statistics for desisting gender dysphoria in older age groups are significantly different (and lower). There are *many* studies showing this. Likewise, while gender dysphoric young children should be treated with the utmost care, allowing them fluid gender expression has not been show to cause any harm. They are not making permanent physical changes, taking medications, etc. They are free to persist or desist without much direct repercussion or risk.

*Which brings me to the fifth reason I’m deeply concerned about the consequences of the current trans activism.*

*I’ve been in the public eye now for over twenty years and have never talked publicly about being a domestic abuse and sexual assault survivor. This isn’t because I’m ashamed those things happened to me, but because they’re traumatic to revisit and remember. I also feel protective of my daughter from my first marriage. I didn’t want to claim sole ownership of a story that belongs to her, too.*

*…*

*I managed to escape my first violent marriage with some difficulty, but I’m now married to a truly good and principled man, safe and secure in ways I never in a million years expected to be. However, the scars left by violence and sexual assault don’t disappear, no matter how loved you are, and no matter how much money you’ve made. My perennial jumpiness is a family joke — and even I know it’s funny — but I pray my daughters never have the same reasons I do for hating sudden loud noises, or finding people behind me when I haven’t heard them approaching.*

*If you could come inside my head and understand what I feel when I read about a trans woman dying at the hands of a violent man, you’d find solidarity and kinship. I have a visceral sense of the terror in which those trans women will have spent their last seconds on earth, because I too have known moments of blind fear when I realised that the only thing keeping me alive was the shaky self-restraint of my attacker.*

Her final line of reasoning is the only one with any substance. In short — she’s the victim of abuse, causing an intense fear of men.

While her personal trauma deserves empathy and sympathy, it does not add support to any of her arguments. Quite the contrary, it provides evidence that she may be *unable* to evaluate her sources objectively and without severe bias.

This evidence is supported by her misrepresenting research in multiple places throughout her essay.

## **Analysis**

After the removals and updates only about 1,200 words remained from 3,700. That is, roughly 2/3rds of her essay was rhetoric, embellishment, or anecdotes rather than reasoning or argument.

Three of the five reasons she cites contain no supporting evidence linking them to her premise or reasoning. The fourth reason misrepresented (or misinterpreted) regarding the results of scientific research and contained significant errors in statistics provided.

Eliminating those four leaves only the fifth and final reason — she is a survivor of domestic abuse, resulting in a lifelong fear of men. It is certainly admirable that she has turned her traumatic past into motivation towards philanthropic causes protecting women and children.

However, since she provides no evidence to the contrary, it seems she is projecting that fear of men onto trans-women as a group (regardless of her insistence that this is not the case). She claims to empathize with them, and understand them on a deep, personal level, *but her arguments do not support these assertions*.

Her conclusion highlights her subjectivity on the issue:

*…I’m a survivor, certainly not a victim. I’ve only mentioned my past because, like every other human being on this planet, I have a complex backstory, which shapes my fears, my interests and my opinions. I never forget that inner complexity when I’m creating a fictional character and I certainly never forget it when it comes to trans people.*

This is an admission that she lacks objectivity in her analysis of the issue† — that she’s applying her trauma to how she evaluates trans-women. And to be fair, she likely meant this as a means to show she sympathizes with their experiences, but her poorly supported reasoning and highly subjective reading of research indicates the opposite. It’s possible that her experiences have caused her to become a victim to the [risk outlined here](https://medium.com/@eziana/rule-one-social-toxicity-check-e6ee8fbde6b), but that isn’t an excuse in her position.

Her experiences, rather than leading her to *pursue facts*, have lead her to *confirm beliefs*. This doesn’t invalidate her feelings or right to free speech, and neither does it justify attacks and threats targeting her.

What it means, however, is that she’s *wrong*.

Until she’s able to step back from her fears, evaluating information objectively (see [this comic, YET AGAIN](https://theoatmeal.com/comics/believe)), and reasoning in a rational way, she will likely remain wrong.

And while freedom of speech is certainly important, *it* ***stops being a right*** *when it endangers the lives of others*.

As much as she claims to sympathize, those are only words. Until she acts upon them, that’s all they are — empty promises (for more information [read this](https://medium.com/@eziana/rule-1-corollary-a-how-to-spot-media-manipulation-fakenews-e0b567f65202)).

Given her beliefs, her background, and her broad public platform, it’s unclear exactly what she *should do*. However, it *is clear* that her current trajectory endangers others.

And *that*, “is the simple truth”.

1. Rowling, J.K., “J.K. Rowling Writes about Her Reasons for Speaking out on Sex and Gender Issues”, <https://www.jkrowling.com/opinions/j-k-rowling-writes-about-her-reasons-for-speaking-out-on-sex-and-gender-issues/>
2. Littman, L., “Correction: Parent reports of adolescents and young adults perceived to show signs of a rapid onset of gender dysphoria”, <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0214157>