

# Debarring the Trans Women: A Thematic Study on Julia Serano's *Excluded*

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## ABSTRACT:

Despite national and international protections, transgender people have remained a marginalized group across the world. With the exception of a few countries, they are denied acknowledgement of their rights and are sometimes compelled to live a beastly existence. Such stigmatization may jeopardize transgender people's mental health, potentially leading to a variety of mental health problems. Anthropologists and sociologists have studied the socio-cultural elements of transgender people on several occasions. Transgender people are subjected to a variety of forms of discrimination. This study uses Julia Serano's work *Excluded: Making Feminist and Queer Movements More Inclusive* to summarize the different challenges experienced by trans women utilizing the socio-cultural dimensions and social exclusion framework, as well as to illustrate their current posture.

**KEYWORDS:** Transgender, Exclusion, Discrimination, Challenges, Equality

At some point in our lives, we've all been shut out. Maybe it's because of the appearance, status, color, ethnicity, religion, education, passions, or competence. And, of course, many are marginalized due to various forms of sexism. That is, discrimination based on one's gender, sexuality, or sex. The culture's male or masculine centrism, which assumes that male people's opinions are more genuine than, and take precedence over, female and feminine ones, undermines and excludes many of us. Our culture's assumption that only normal bodies and straight expression of gender and sexuality are acceptable stigmatizes and excludes those of us who are gender and sexual minorities. As a result of this exclusion, Many of us are drawn to feminism and LGBTQ activism.

Exclusion is predicated on the assumption that some gender or sexual identities are more genuine, natural, or righteous than others. The unfortunate reality is that we constantly seem to develop feminist and queer movements to combat sexism on the one hand, while safeguard gender and sexuality on the other. In an attempt to move away from infighting over identity labels, more inclusive umbrella terminology such as queer and transgender have become popular. People who are more masculine in gender presentation are almost always considered as more valid and attractive than their feminine counterparts in most LGBT societies, regardless of sex or identity. There are continual charges that certain persons do not qualify

as 'real' members of the transgender and bisexual communities, or that their identities or activities somehow reinforce 'the gender binary'.

Julia Serano is an American writer, LGBTQ activist, and biologist who shares her personal experience as a transgender bisexual woman. She was born male, but at the age of eleven, she began to sense feminine aspects within herself. She underwent some medical treatments including taking hormone tablets to transition in 2001. As a trans woman, she combines feminism and other gender issues with her personal experience to exhibit the pain and suffering underwent by the people of her community. Serano is a transgender, bisexual, and femme activist whose work focuses on addressing various types of sexism-based exclusion in feminist and queer contexts. She feels that sexism-based exclusion in feminist and queer groups derives mostly from a few basic, albeit incorrect, assumptions about gender and sexuality, as well as sexism and marginalization. Our theories, activity, organizations, and communities are all infected with these false notions. They also allow us to vehemently oppose certain forms of sexism while ignoring and/or promoting others.

The formation of a strong LGBTQ collective identity is hindered by the types of groups it attempts to combine. Although all are considered sexual minorities, the nature of their minority status is dissimilar. Identification as gay, lesbian, or bisexual is based on an individual's sexual orientation; identification as transgender is based on an individual's gender identity. Both groups undergo significantly different life experiences. If building a collective identity relies on shared experiences, the grouping of these two communities is not an organic combination. Individuals who lack a strong collective identity are less likely to advocate for one another, posing one possible explanation to the trans exclusion from meaningful participation in the LGBTQ movement. (Jazayeri 6-7)

In acts of sexuality, several components of physical sex play a significant part. Similarly, certain forms of feminine or masculine attire can be thought to be highly stimulating. Gender expression can have a role in sexual attraction in general, as seen by typically straight persons who prefer feminine female or masculine male partners, or queer people who prefer butch, femme, or androgynous relationships. Serano says, "Some people try to make a sharp distinction between sex and gender by claiming that the former is exclusively biological in origin while the latter is exclusively social" (Serano 9).

When it comes to categories that people regard to be "natural," or those that develop independently of any social context or influence, individuals frequently turn to essentialist thinking. Persons who believe that sex, gender, and sexuality are totally "natural" characteristics will frequently attempt to characterize distinctions between people in essentialist ways. Because they are viewed as being different from the majority, society habitually delegitimizes LGBT individuals. As a result, identity labels are a highly personal means of expressing how we see ourselves fitting into the world to others.

Gender and sexuality are socially created, the result of socialization and societal norms, according to feminist and queer studies. They discuss how gender and sexuality categories and ideologies differ significantly across cultures and over time. They utilize the examples of transgender and intersex people to show that our culture's binary conception of gender is neither natural nor accurate. They emphasize that gender and sexuality are not something that trans people 'do' or 'perform,' but rather something that they actively 'do' or 'perform.'

In terms of sex, gender, and sexuality, society as a whole distinguishes between individuals who are judged 'normal' and those who are deemed 'abnormal.' Straight people are seen as more natural and legitimate than LGBT people. This sexism is a sort of sexism that marginalizes and harms LGBT people. As

a result, the lack of a term such as "queer" to characterize those who are excluded by the double standard makes it difficult, if not impossible, for sexual and gender minorities to organize and carry out activity to oppose the double standard.

Social exclusion is an accumulation of confluent processes with successive ruptures arising from the heart of economy, politics and society; gradually distances and places persons, groups, communities and territories in positions of inferiority in relation to centre powers, resources and prevailing values. Social Exclusion Context is increasingly used in highlighting the issues and problems faced by disadvantaged and disenfranchised groups. It provides a multidimensional and dynamic framework that focuses attention on both the causes and consequences of social disadvantage. (Gayathri 22)

The term 'transgender' is commonly used to refer to someone who defies traditional gender roles. In transgender category too, "people who are transsexual, cross-dressers, drag artists, androgynous, two-spirit, gender queer, agender, feminine men and/or masculine men" (Serano 18). Many persons, who come within the transgender umbrella terms, do not identify as such. Some individuals refer to those on the transgender spectrum as 'trans' or 'gender variant'. MTF refers to those who were born with a male gender identity but identify as female or trans women (male-to-female). FTM or trans men refers to those who were born with a feminine sex but later changed their gender expression to male or masculine (female-to-male).

As a trans woman, Serano faces a lot of issues especially the 'penis issue'. Many trans women either cannot afford or refuse to have sex reassignment surgery, making this a highly sensitive issue. Trans women's exclusionists frequently use this circumstance, claiming that having penises on the property would be a breach of women's space and exaggerating how unsafe and uncomfortable some women might feel if they happened to get a glimpse of one of the dreaded, oppressive organs. So, according to Serano, phalluses aren't necessarily harmful in and of themselves, as long as they're not attached to a transsexual woman.

Men would be forcing themselves upon trans women. For being women, trans women are also physically abused. There are no words to express how masculine culture has violated trans females who have been forced to become boys against their choice. Every woman is a survivor with triggers of her own. Pseudo-feminists, on the other hand, who disguise their prejudices under 'women born women only' euphemisms, are the source of the problem. Serano says, "What's between my legs is not a phallic symbol, nor a tool of rape and oppression; it is merely my genitals. My penis is a woman's penis and she is made of flesh and blood, nothing more. And we have a word to describe the act of reducing a woman to her body parts, to her genitals: It is called objectification" (Serano 31).

Trans women became enamored with the notion that women are unique due to our biology. We unwittingly engage in a deadly game of opposites when we take pride in how fundamentally different we are from males. Women must be little if men are big. Women must be soft if men are powerful. It's impossible to write about what it's like to be a woman without mocking males or pulling the pain out of their experiences. It's difficult enough to be a woman without also being a transgender and a dyke. On the one hand, there are lesbians who argue that trans women are still guys, as if being born male is some terrible disease that has permanently infected the blood and flesh. Some men, on the other hand, are bothered by trans women's sissy behaviour. All of this occurs because, if being a man is taking control of one's own situation, and being a woman entails living up to the expectations of others.

Although some feminists have historically characterized sexism in terms of patriarchy, early trans feminists advanced the gender binary as a tool to describe the many forms of sexism in our culture. Those assigned a male sex are expected to grow up to identify as a man, express masculinity in their gender

identification, and be exclusively attracted to women; those assigned a female sex are expected to grow up to identify as female, express femininity in their gender expression, and be exclusively attracted to men.

When you're a trans woman, you are made to walk this very fine line, where if you act feminine you are accused of being a parody, but if you act masculine, it is seen as a sign of your true male identity. And if you act sweet and demure, you're accused of reinforcing patriarchal ideals of female passivity, but if you stand up for your own rights and make your voice heard, then you are dismissed as wielding male privilege and entitlement. We trans women are made to teeter upon this tightrope, not because we are transsexuals, but because we are women. (Serano 28-29)

Trans feminists have focused on how institutionalized cissexism affects trans people's gender identities and expressions, which is a form of sexism that considers trans people's gender identities and expressions to be less genuine than cis people's. Trans people and women are frequently objectified and thought unfit to make informed choices about our own bodies, and our viewpoints and lived experiences are frequently dismissed by cis people and men.

The term 'trans misogyny' refers to dread or aversion toward transgender people was popularized by trans feminists. It illustrates why transgender people are targeted for fear, stigmatization, and sexualization. Transgender feminism isn't a conundrum. It's just one strategy for combating injustice and misogyny. The only thing that sets trans feminism apart is that it applies feminist theory to transgender concerns, which have hitherto been disregarded or misunderstood by feminists. In the past, Such feminists have previously condemned trans feminism, portraying trans men as 'female' traitors who transfer to gain male status and trans women as entitled as 'men' who transition to enter women's space.

The fact that in our culture, feminine appearances are more clearly and habitually judged by society than male appearances drives trans-misogyny. Trans women have a wide range of personal styles and gender expressions. Some women are more traditional in their femininity, while others are more subtle, and yet others seek to be fantastically feminine. Other trans women dress and express themselves in a very androgynous fashion, while others dress and identify as butch. Such representations promote the common cissexist belief that female gender identities are artificial or contrived in a world where femininity is often disparaged as manipulative and deceitful. The gender binary society views trans women as fake and artificial because they are transgenders and also because they are perceived to be feminine.

There is no safety in erasing differences, and there is no safety in expecting all women to meet certain physical standards. The only truly safe environment is one that acknowledges each woman's individuality. The trans community has its own set of issues, perspectives, and experiences. Non-trans queer people must understand that they cannot call themselves 'normal' unless they fully respect the trans people identities and are willing to call out other queers' anti-trans bigotry.

The one thing all the femme have in common, it's that they've had to learn to appreciate their own feminine expression while rejecting other people's expectations of them. The fact that femininity is queer, transgressive, sarcastic, performative, or the complement of butch is not what makes it 'femme.' But it is the fact that the trans women do it for themselves that makes trans femininity 'femme.' It is because of this that it is so empowering, and this is why trans women need to be so powerful.

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