

# Transfeminism's place in feminism



## Transfeminism's place in Feminism

Activists have struggled to fully incorporate sex and gender into the intersectional definition of feminism. This has polarized some feminists who do not entirely understand that being a woman regardless of your biological sex comes with its own struggles. Julia Serano, a transfeminist activist and writer, has brought awareness to the importance of this cause along with her own personal battles. In order to be truly intersectional, there needs to be an understanding of how gender and race function in society.

Serano's views align completely with those of modern feminists.

Transgender women face more stigmatism and violence than heteronormative women. Hate crimes towards non-white trans women are extremely prevalent. Hooks definition of feminism, a fight against "sexism, sexual exploitation and sexual oppression" (Hooks, p. 8) are all characteristics of issues within transfeminism. Transsexual women, especially in media, are portrayed as sex workers, sexual predators and sexual deviants. Misrepresentation of this community in media targets trans women and assumes femininity and promiscuity go hand in hand. Part of third wave/ new wave feminism adopts the idea of intersectionality within its community. The idea being that a woman also inhabits other characteristics such as race, gender, and class. As time has progressed, research on gender and queer theory has made its way into current feminist ideology. To fully understand oppression and subjectivity to societal stereotypes one should study who is creating these skewed and unreliable views of women. Serano states that "theories and diagnoses do not occur in a vacuum, but rather they take place in a world where trans people cannot socially or legally take

our genders for granted". Arguments against trans women invalidate their cause and their struggles. Julia Serano uses her blog to participate in these arguments in order to promote the normalization of transfeminism in society/feminism.

Many anti-trans feminists believe that biology determines the sex and that representation of transgender women threatens the very foundation or goals of cisgender women. Feminist writers have failed to "analyze the nature and consequences of the continuum of gender" (Doan, p. 648). Within society of gendered spaces, it is important to understand how space and gender create preconceived expectations and rules for how gender needs to be portrayed. Heteronormativity thrives on insufficiently understanding the consequences and oppression faced within society. Transgender ideals emphasize that "there is no natural process by which anyone becomes a woman... gender is made" (Enke, p. 1) With that in mind, both feminists and trans women alike experience certain forms of expectations in these gendered spaces, and in order to promote intersectionality, should promote the ending of these ideals. Transfeminism relies on a deeper view of what gender is in order to fully understand oppression.

Serano uses her platform to share writings and songs on the oppression of the transgender community as well as herself. She has used her work to spread awareness about the struggles trans women face in all aspects of society. Within the patriarchy, these gendered spaces often are expressed in the medical community. Serano's activism and writings have challenged the fundamentality that revolves around the diagnosis of trans men and women. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and its

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diagnostic criteria can be used to repel gender expression as being portrayed as mental illness. These revisions helped recreate proposed expansions to the DSM for transvestic disorder and paraphilia. For example, transvestic disorder was introduced as a disorder for heterosexual men who feel the urge to cross-dress. (Serano, ) This would then associate mental illness with the freedom of gender expression. The lack of understanding of gender variance, without Sernao's critique and appeal for revision, could have created a misinterpretation of this expression as mental illness and could "justify continued social prejudices and discrimination against trans people." (Yost & Smith, 2014, p. 147)

Equating sexualization and femininity together creates an expectation of what transgender women are supposed to represent. In today's society, women are already overly sexualized and fetichized, with these assumptions bring about a skewed view of gender. Serano argues that this, "might impact the way in which transgender individuals come to make sense of their own cross gender identities and experiences."(Serano, )The misunderstanding of how a woman should act can severely impact young children and adults experimenting with their own gender identity.

Oversexualization and the promotion of dialogues about these subjects are seen throughout Serano's spoken word series, Girl Talk. Girl talk is a series that discusses gender issues and promotes creating a dialogue that can be understood by all members of society.

Modern feminists have been more open to the intersectional views of feminism which have allowed different gender identities to find solace within a movement. Serano's writings and activism have brought a new meaning to

what we equate to mental illness and gender. By challenging additions to the DSM, she was able to bring attention to the institutionalized sexism and anti-trans rhetoric that would only cause the exploitation of women and trans individuals. Her individual actions and the understanding of feminist theory allow her to develop strong arguments toward the acceptance of trans women in the feminist community. In order to be an affirmative inclusive transfeminist one has to challenge the preconceptions related to gender.

- Yost, Megan R., and T. Evan Smith. "Transfeminist Psychology." *Feminism & Psychology*, vol. 24, no. 2, May 2014, pp. 145-156, doi: 10.1177/0959353514529392.
- Enke, Finn, ed. *Transfeminist perspectives in and beyond transgender and gender studies*. Temple University Press, 2012.