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While many feminist and queer movements are designed to challenge sexism, they often simultaneously police gender and sexuality—sometimes just as fiercely as the straight, male-centric mainstream does. Among LGBTQ activists, there is a long history of lesbians and gay men dismissing bisexuals, transgender people, and other gender and sexual minorities. In each case, exclusion is based on the premise that certain ways of being gendered or sexual are more legitimate, natural, or righteous than others.

As a trans woman, bisexual, and femme activist, Julia Serano has spent much of the last ten years challenging various forms of exclusion within feminist and queer/LGBTQ movements. In *Excluded*, she chronicles many of these instances of exclusion and argues that marginalizing others often stems from a handful of assumptions that are routinely made about gender and sexuality. These false assumptions infect theories, activism, organizations, and communities—and worse, they enable people to vigorously protest certain forms of sexism while simultaneously ignoring and even perpetuating others. Serano advocates for a new approach to fighting sexism that avoids these pitfalls and offers new ways of thinking about gender, sexuality, and sexism that foster inclusivity rather than exclusivity.

Excluded: Making Feminist and Queer Movements More Inclusive Details

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Julie Ehlers says

I'm really glad I read this--it turns out I'm not as up on current (or semi-current) thinking on gender, sex, and sexuality as I assumed I was. Some of the ideas expressed here, and the ways they were expressed, made for absolutely exhilarating reading. Unfortunately, those moments were overshadowed by a writing style that was frequently dry and unbelievably repetitive. This book could've easily been 50-100 pages shorter. After a while I started editing it in my head, condensing and combining paragraphs and rewriting transitions, so I could pretend I wasn't reading the same thing over and over. (The copy editing wasn't very good either--Seal Press, you can do better than this.) There's also more generalizing going on here than is probably wise; Serano's portrayals of feminists didn't resemble me or anyone else I know. Of course, this may just mean that I move in small circles (which I do), so I won't hold that against her. Basically *Excluded* was good enough to make me want to read Serano's earlier book, *Whipping Girl*, but I can't help but feel it could have been so much better.

TJ says

I am NOT giving this book a low rating because it has harsh words for trans men and cis queers, and I'm rolling my eyes forever at "what about the trans men?" comments. I have a million and one critiques of current queer communities, different critiques than Serano has, so I don't really *care*, but I think it's at least worth noting that Serano's characterization feels off, feels a little dated -- I don't think radical queers are really that hellbent on deconstructing gender out of existence anymore, aren't really "gender artifactualists," in Serano's words, and are at least somewhat aware of all the flaws of "call-out culture." Queers are moving in this direction already, I mean -- I think, I hope, so I'm not sure how groundbreaking she is here.

But, I don't care and I'm not interested in protecting queer communities from misinterpretations or critique or whatever. I just think Serano is a little behind, with this, and generally. I don't think she's really saying anything new or saying anything better than anyone else has. The whole nature/nurture debate has already been ripped to shreds, most beautifully and thoroughly by Anne Fausto-Sterling, but by many others as well, and all Serano really has to add is the term "gender artifactualist," which is clunky and confusing and unnecessary, like most of the terms and concepts she's trying to invent. Many many trans women have done her critiques of queer culture much, much better, they just didn't get a book deal!! & The double standards she writes about later have all also long been articulated in feminist theory. It's such basic 101 shit?

But, okay, she's trying to get us to think about these double standards in a different way, as some kind of larger framework for understanding marginalization (marginalization = her word, not mine). I get that. But it's confusing as hell! I don't understand why she wants to replace concepts like patriarchy and "the gender system" (???) with these sets of double standards. What does Serano think the concept of patriarchy... is? Does it not *encompass* sexist double standards? I think she thinks patriarchy is too "single-issue," or something, but she... tailors her concept of double standards to a feminist standpoint so, what's different here? I mean she flippantly, often questionably tries to make them apply to race, class, etc., but it just isn't working. AND when she's trying to articulate these double-standards in feminist terms, she has basically NO understanding of how white women and women of color, ESPECIALLY Black women, are held to completely different standards. None! She literally discusses the "whore/virgin" double-bind (p. 190) without bringing race in, which is fucking inexcusable, because the sexist luxury of being seen as a virgin is one virtually only given to white women. And she doesn't MENTION that this "double-standard" has historically

been used to justify the lynching of Black men and you GOTTA *at least* mention this shit, you gotta. Serano needs Black Feminism 101 SO BAD. SO. BAD.

Oh my god, where was I? This book is such a mess that I'm a mess trying to review it. My eyes were constantly glazing over while I was reading because her style is sooo dry -- just because it's non-fiction doesn't mean it has to lack imagery or basic literary devices. I'm also confused about this book's intended audience, but maybe Serano is confused about it, too. Is it for "general audiences" or is it for feminist and queer communities? I don't know! I think this really hurts the book, because it's trying to sort of appeal to both at once and would be stronger without trying to make all the concessions necessary for more general audiences. And is this book *really* going to appeal to general audiences, even if you're writing it so as to be accessible to them? I doubt it. And is this an academic work, or not? Do I hold it to academic standards? I don't know!

I'm giving this book 2 stars because... I do agree with Serano about maybe 50% of her work here on a pretty basic level -- I think that basically, essentially she's arguing for nuanced approaches to politics, which I can get behind forever -- I just think she shoots herself in the foot over and over again with her piss-poor race and class analysis, and I'm constantly annoyed with both her shoddy methodologies (quit playing devil's advocate! don't critique queer theory from the 80's and 90's and pretend like queer theory hasn't evolved since Janice Raymond [does she even count as a queer theorist?!]) and the self-righteous contempt oozing off the pages (not that I'm against self-righteous contempt, but damn you gotta be ON POINT if you're gonna do it, and she's not).

I'll return to her piss-poor class analysis, because I'm the most annoyed with it, out of everything, and then I'll end. Serano is, at best, as a middle-class white woman, naive as hell about class. I think she really thinks that if we all just change our attitudes we will END MARGINALIZATION. She says, on page 256, "I believe that we could bring an end to most, if not all, forms of marginalization if we were willing to forgo [gender] entitlement more generally -- this is, if we all stopped nonconsensually projecting the double standards that we hold to be true, or are personally invested in, onto other people," and really proves that she has no understanding of how rooted "marginalization"/the existence of marginalized classes are in economic forces, in capitalism. Read your John D'Emilio and your Silvia Federici and get back to me. Thanks.

Lio says

All in all I liked reading this book, it came at the right time for me and my activism.

Throughout all the book she makes sound analysis for every point she is trying to make why exclusion in the movements are often sexist and wrong (granted her view is pretty white and you don't read a lot about race, as others have stated before), but what I missed was her reasoning for including kink and BDSM as "progressive".

There just was **NO analysis** of the movement at all, or how it came to be part of queer movements, or about all the abuse and negative effect it also has (esp on trans women, WOC, survivors and/or sex workers) besides being "empowering" to some. She just listed it as 'off limits' as reason for exclusion and I can't co-sign this.

Especially cause at one point I felt like her constant 'and BDSM' comments without any substance to them was her whispering in my ear "don't be like that" each time I got uncomfy with her just claiming BDSM is all fine and dandy and I had to stop reading several times to relax from that.

Max says

I hate this book

Julie says

Serrano has a great analysis in this book of calling for a holistic feminism and queer movement that celebrates heterogeneity and restructures how we think about gender, sex, and sexuality. Excluded is productively in conversation with feminist thinking about gender and sex, challenging many ideas and positing new ones. The first half of the book is a gathering of her writings; the second half is the more sustained analysis. I highly recommend this book for people who think, write, and talk about gender, sex, and sexuality,

Nicole says

As someone who came a little late to feminism and QUILTBAG+ activism and general awareness (some college classes, but mostly after-college reading the internet and learning about privilege, etc.), I'm always looking for books like this, meaning from a perspective that is not my own (i.e., not a white lesbian). And since I haven't been in these spaces long, I liked the first part of the book with all of Serano's personal essays and whatnot because it gave me a good context and some slices of history of the movement that I wasn't aware of/didn't experience. It all also provides a good foundation for the second half of the book.

I kind of wish the two parts of the book hadn't been so starkly separated, though. I think the second half would have benefited from having more personal examples/stories sprinkled throughout. Serano is great at making a solid case for her suggestions on how to make these movements more inclusive, and she's very thorough, but at times the second half started to feel repetitive, almost as if she expected people to read one chapter without having read the previous chapters. I think if there had been some more personal anecdotes/examples in the second half it would have helped mitigate the feeling of repetition.

In the last chapter, she talks about the practice of calling people out on their behavior, and how it can be useful but it is often mishandled and used to delegitimize people who are genuine allies but just made an honest mistake. I appreciated this (because no one is perfect), but I actually wish she had devoted an entire chapter to this idea. It seemed kind of crammed in there right at the end, and yet I think it's an important aspect of this whole conversation—there's really no more thorough way to ostracize someone than to publicly shame them, which is what calling out can do when it's not done right. I think she could have cut some of the repetitive parts of some of the chapters out and then would have had time to talk more about this aspect of exclusion.

But overall I like the proposals Serano makes in this book about holistic activism and trying to fight the true root causes that lead myriad groups of people to be deemed second-class in some way. Instead of focusing just on fighting on one front (which then pits the groups against each other as each group tries to claim they are MORE oppressed than the other), those seeking change should focus on the common denominator, the us vs. them mentality at large. Serano's much better at breaking this down and being more granular in her explanation in the book, but that's the gist of it. And that's an idea I can get behind.

M. says

While Whipping Girl continues to be a hugely important book for me, I was disappointed in many of the essays in Excluded, which come across as outdated and condescending in tone. The last essay, "Balancing Acts," is GREAT, and there are lots of hardhitting, important points delivered throughout the book. Overall, though, I found a lot of Serano's ideas about shifting activist ground to be missing the point -- for instance, the idea of resituating social justice activism around double standards as an inclusive tactic -- I guess I don't know why we should lose oppression as a framework. I also would argue that the notion of a holistic approach to feminism, which Serano puts forth as if it is new, is already operational in many corners of the queer/trans/feminist movement. Still, much of this would be useful as teaching material, as it's clear and incisive and articulates quite accessibly a lot of ideas that have been percolating (and articulated by others) in queer/feminist/trans discourse for the past several years.

Thomas Hale says

As the title implies, this book is about the many ways in which feminist and queer activism, as it stands now, often fails to represent and include certain factions of society. Arguing for an intersectional and (as she describes) "holistic" approach, Serano details the many pitfalls and double-binds of prejudice, and details how these can be reinforced - consciously or unconsciously. Beginning with a collection of autobiographical articles from the last ten years, she then moves on to discuss how activist movements should embrace heterogeneity - how each individual is affected by societal double standards in different ways and to different extents - instead of blanket us-versus-them sentiments.

I do have a few disagreements with her, though: early on she rejects "kyriarchy" as just another top-down power-structure viewpoint, which I think is a little dismissive. And I'm not entirely sure, but she does seem to say that "radical" and "reformist" approaches to activism can and should coexist without harming each other, which to my mind kind of elides the potential damage in reformist compromise.

Overall though, it was a good book, and interesting read, and one I'd recommend to anyone interested in activism, feminist or otherwise.

Kaarna says

Maybe 2,5/5. Or 2,75/5. I don't know, perhaps I'm harsh because I was a bit disappointed after "Whipping Girl". The queer community Serano talked about didn't feel like the community I'm in. Yes, I'm in a bubble, but I'm happy here and I don't think I have to risk my personal safety and mental health to force some kind of holistic feminist movement. I'm still scared, I'm still angry, and I will continue to call out those that marginalize me.

On the other hand, yes, good points. Perhaps the context is different in the US. Perhaps this would be the smart way to do things, but I'm too locked in my own opinions and views. And I did get some possible sources for my master's thesis, so that's really good.

I don't know.

Josie Boyce says

Lags a bit in the first half as JS sets up her thesis, with a lot of historical context and personal stories of being trans feminist, femme, bi, and the exclusion that often happens to trans folk in queer and/or feminist circles. The second half is a serious manifesto for inclusion in any minority movements. Work together, all gender identities and sexualities. Say no to being diminished. It is a really idealistic but wonderful goal she espouses, for all of us under the so called umbrellas work in equality in our own circles if we want the hierarchies to also recognize us. Everyone should be heard. A must read for anyone interested in social justice in this century. Seriously. My words fail.

Emma says

Serano shows us a terrifying vision of a world absolutely alienated from any form of systemic framework. Nothing happens for a reason, individual acts of oppression just whiz around in a confusing morass and we have to fight each separately and this is supposed to help us.

She does away with the concepts of the patriarchy, the gender binary, and systemic racism and replaces them with "double standards" that act in the exact same way as patriarchy, the gender binary, and systemic racism only divorced from any material relations.

Every single argument made in the book can be summed up with "the truth is somewhere in the middle." The first half of the book tries to convince us of her in-the-middle view of gender, while the second half tells us that anybody preaching their view of gender is being "gender entitled". She accuses gender "artifactualists" of misreading Butler and implies that she has renounced the idea that gender is a social construct, when actually Butler just said "performing" wasn't the best choice of words.

The writing is just as messy as the theory. Serano really needed an editor. The book is filled with useless parentheticals defining things she defined two paragraphs earlier, and then five paragraphs later she defines it again.

As a trans woman, I often complain about how few trans women get published for anything other than memoirs, and it annoys me to no end that Serano is one of the biggest names in modern trans theory.

Jennifer Stoy says

Serano does an excellent job with 201-level feminism and trans work. She is really thinking through how, for example, cis lesbians can be oppressed by homophobia and sexism but still be transphobic and to use her term, "monosexist" toward, say, a bi trans woman. Some of her analysis is brilliant, especially about how biology and culture are just too intertwined in a human personality. I am not 100% with her on solutions just because I think the systemic aspect of traditional sexism goes beyond individuals confronting their gender entitlement. Which is not to say I don't think that's a worthy pursuit; it definitely is, but getting rid of my gender entitlement ain't gonna fix the Texas legislature. (Serano seems aware of this. I think it's more that she's trying to look at gender/sex/sexuality-related isms and those are particularly prone to intersectional

levels of privilege and oppression)

In general, this is a book I've been looking for; something for people who are in for feminism but don't know too much about it. Worth your time.

Devon says

Julia Serano's definitely one of my top intellectual idols. Whipping Girl was one of the most influential books in shaping my life, convincing me that feminism and other anti-oppression work was valuable, important work, and that unapologetic visibility could go a long way in challenging bias. Largely because of that book, I majored in sociology, involved myself in feminist and other social justice groups, and thought critically about everything I read that covered gender issues, especially trans issues.

Excluded is full of more whip-sharp rhetoric and incisive critiques of the inconsistencies in progressive movements. The book's divided into two sections: the first is a collection of essays she wrote over a period of six years, all devoted in some way to exposing the ways progressive groups and liberal thinkers still serve to exclude plenty of people. The second section advances her theory of an alternate model of thinking about oppression: a series of double-standards that advance unmarked groups (men, cisgender people, white people, able-bodied people, etc.) while holding back marked groups (women, trans people, POC, etc.).

If there's any issue I have with the book, it's that I didn't find it as revelatory as Whipping Girl. Serano's more interested, I feel, in refining the theories she put forth in that book, so the ideas in this book don't feel as fresh and transformative as the ideas in Whipping Girl, and some of the chapters did feel like they were mostly reiterating ideas she'd written before. Still, I think Serano gets a lot of mileage out of using the response to Whipping Girl to further refine her theories - my favorite chapter in this book was the one where she advanced a holistic theory of gender, which came as a welcome surprise since I've spent way too much time recently reading debates online about which trans identities are legitimate, and way too much bad science to justify those arguments. (Serano's takedown of pure biological determinism is one of the best pieces of science writing I've read this year.)

All in all, it's another fantastic work from one of the cleverest writers about gender, and I hope that the groups she discusses in the book take the time to read Serano's ideas and think about what they mean for a reasonable philosophy of inclusive justice.

Alice says

If you find yourself looking at the state of modern feminist activism and banging your head against the wall because "choice feminism" is a dangerous illusion and single issue reformists strive to make a tiny bit of change before our great-great-granddaughters die and radical feminism is equal parts passionate and frighteningly narrow minded, YOU SHOULD READ THIS BOOK.

To distill it into a Goodreads-review-length statement, Serano is basically saying that the world is incredibly complicated (imagine that!) and we need to simultaneously embrace the ambiguity and try to find systems of change that operate at a level that crosses the boundaries of all different kinds of marginalization. YES. THIS.

I don't want to say any more, because I think you should read it. So... go. Now. Good job.

Jarrah says

I received a review copy of Julia Serano's newest book *Excluded: Making Feminist and Queer Movements More Inclusive* last fall, and I knew it was going to be particularly important. Serano's last book *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Feminism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* has been a hugely impactful book for many trans* people and feminists and was even named the 16th most important feminist book of all time by Ms. Magazine.

Moving into 2014, it's clear this book – and the discussions it provokes – are more necessary than ever. The first part of *Excluded* is a collection of Serano's essays since *Whipping Girl*, outlining exclusion within feminist and queer movements, including femme and bisexual communities, and at events like the Michigan Womyn's Music Fest:

“I realized right there at the lake what a mistake many women from Michigan make when they insist that trans women would threaten their safe space, destroying a rare place where they feel comfortable revealing their own bodies. Because there is never any safety in the erasing of difference, and no protection in the expectation that all women live up to certain physical criteria. The only truly safe space is one that respects each woman for her own individual uniqueness.”

The essays are particularly helpful for understanding the big picture if you haven't read *Whipping Girl* or experienced the kind of discrimination she talks about first-hand.

The second part is new material introducing Serano's proposals for creating inclusion. Serano states:

“One-size-fits-all approaches to gender and sexuality – whether they occur in straight male-centric mainstream, or within feminist and queer subcultures – inevitably result in double standards, where bodies and behaviors can only ever be viewed as either right or wrong, natural or unnatural, normal or abnormal, righteous or immoral...we should distance ourselves from these one-size-fits-all models, and instead embrace an alternative approach – what I call a holistic approach to feminism.”

Serano's “holistic approach” involves moving away from the “nature-versus-nurture” debate to acknowledge the complex interrelationships between biology, culture and environment. It also urges us to recognize our own specific, limited standpoints and therefore recognize the only way to truly understand gender and sexuality is through allowing for multiple perspectives. Finally, Serano suggests her framework would allow feminists and queer activists to challenge all forms of sexism and marginalization rather than just the ones we are most familiar with personally.

For the rest of my review and suggested areas for discussion visit my blog.

Alexa says

This is an excellent mix of impassioned advocacy with scientific analysis. In many ways this works out to be a great little handbook on "how to be a decent person." As such, it may need to be regularly re-read, in order to catch ourselves from straying off the path and to reignite ourselves to follow our "true" way. The essay style makes it quite readable. I enjoyed the way each particular point got its thorough treatment and therefore a more thoughtful response from me.

Her points about ways to foster inclusivity rather than exclusivity apply across the board. She makes one point (in a footnote!) that I find so applicable to the question of acceptance. She's talking about when people make decisions that we disagree with: "consider the following three possibilities: 1) Perhaps they have made the choice they've made because they lack information or experiences that we possess; 2) Perhaps they've made that choice because they have information or experiences that we are not privy to; or 3) Sometimes people with similar information or experiences nevertheless make different choices."

Some great rules for life here!

michelle says

"Instead of trying to fictionalize gender, let's talk about all of the moments in life when gender feels all too real. Because gender doesn't feel like drag when you're a young trans child begging your parents not to cut your hair or not to force you to wear that dress. And gender doesn't feel like a performance when, for the first time in your life, you feel safe and empowered enough to express yourself in ways that resonate with you, rather than remaining closeted for the benefit of others. And gender doesn't feel like a construct when you finally find that special person whose body, personality, identity, and energy feels like a perfect fit with yours. Let's stop trying to deconstruct gender into non-existence and instead start celebrating it as inexplicable, varied, profound, and intricate."

Morgan Dhu says

I have not read much on trans history, theory and activism. I've read Feinberg and Bornstein, but in general, this is an area where I feel a real need to learn more, to widen my perspectives and understanding. I approach the topic from an absolute conviction that trans men are men, trans women are women, trans non-binary folk are non-binary folk, and that in everyday circumstances, the question of one's being trans or cis is relevant for health and medical issues and otherwise is no one's damn business. But it's important to me to learn from trans folk what they want me, as a cis person, to know, and so I'm reading more theory and lived experience by trans folk.

Julia Serano's book, *Excluded: Making Feminism and Queer Movements More Inclusive*, seemed an obvious place to start. I'm a feminist, and queer, and have long been aware that trans folk have not been fully included in these activist spaces. And as a feminist and a queer person who has cis privilege, it's my responsibility to understand why that's happening and how to change it.

In her Introduction to the book, Serano briefly discusses the ways that transgender folk are excluded, noting that "... they are all steeped in sexism—in each case, exclusion is based on the premise that certain ways of being gendered or sexual are more legitimate, natural, or righteous than others." She goes on to state: "... I

believe that sexism-based exclusion within feminist and queer circles stems primarily from a handful of foundational, albeit incorrect, assumptions that we routinely make about gender and sexuality, and about sexism and marginalization. These false assumptions infect our theories, our activism, our organizations, and our communities. And they enable us to vigorously protest certain forms of sexism (especially sexisms that we personally face!) while simultaneously ignoring and/or perpetuating other forms of sexism. In short, the way we describe and set out to challenge sexism is irreparably broken. My main purpose in writing this book is to highlight these fallacies in our theory and activism, and to offer new and more accurate ways of thinking about gender and sexism that will avoid the pitfalls of the past.”

The book takes the form of a series of essays in two sections, the first dealing with exclusion, particularly from the author’s perspective as a trans, bisexual, femme woman. The second section consists of essays “... that forward a new framework for thinking about gender, sexuality, sexism, and marginalization.”

Serano begins with the observation that transexualism and transgenderism are often critiqued in feminist theory because they, as some feminists argue, “reinforce the gender binary.” A significant body of feminist work sees the source of sexism in the existence of a ‘gender system’ and posits that the way to end sexism is by ‘moving beyond gender’ - these theorists see gender as wholly socially constructed. Serano calls this approach gender artifactualism, and identifies it as a perversion of the famous statement that the personal is political.

Gender artifactualism may be seen as a response to gender determinism, the belief that women and men are born with predetermined sex-specific behaviors and desires. The argument that gender roles are ‘programmed’ by one’s biology implies that the observed differences between men and women are both natural and immutable, and this is frequently used as a justification for a vast range of sexist attitudes and behaviours.

Serano sees both gender artifactualism and gender determinism as ‘homogenising’ - either one assumes that there can be little to no individual variation in gender and sexuality, because in either case, behaviours are programmed, either by biology or by socialisation. In truth, however, variety is widespread in these areas - there is a wide range of gender identifications, ways being gendered (or not), and ways of being sexual (or not). Looking at this variety, Serano argues instead that a theory that matches this reality must be holistic, and include multiple factors in understanding the genesis and nature of gender, including factors associated with biology, environment, and socialisation.

“The holistic model that I am forwarding here begins with the recognition that while we may be biologically similar to one another in many ways, we are also the products of biological variation—nobody shares our unique genetic and physiological makeup. And while we may share the same culture, or may be subjected to the same social expectations and norms, we are also each uniquely socially situated—nobody shares our specific set of life experiences or environment. Therefore, while our shared biology and culture may create certain trends (e.g., a preponderance of typical genders and sexualities), we should also expect the variation in our biology and life experiences to help generate diversity in our genders and sexualities.”

She goes on to say that “Because gender and sexuality have many biological, social, and environmental inputs, they are not particularly malleable—in other words, changing one or a couple inputs would not likely result in a huge overall effect. This explains why most of us find that we cannot easily or purposefully change our genders and sexualities at the drop of a hat (despite some people’s claims that “gender is just performance” or that one can simply “pray away the gay”). Like our tastes in food, most of us experience our genders and sexualities to be profound, deeply felt, and resistant to change. Sure, sometimes people experience shifts in their gender or sexuality, just as our taste for certain foods may change over time. But when these shifts do occur, they are almost always inexplicable, unexpected, and sometimes even downright unwanted (at least at first). Such shifts might occur as a result of changes in some combination of our physiology, environment, and/or life experiences.”

Serano argues that, rather than locating the source of sexism and cissexism (and other forms of oppression based on identity) in a monolithic gender system, we need to see this too as a complex set of interactions derived from the existence of multiple marked states - that is to say, characteristics or behaviours which are noticed because they differ from what is assumed or expected.

“... unmarked/marked distinctions may arise from our own personal biases and expectations, or they may be culturally ordained. In either case, the process of marking a person or trait often occurs on an unconscious level, and therefore takes on an air of common sense: It just seems “natural” for us to focus our attention on people who we view as exceptional or different from us in some significant way.”

As Serano points out, reactions to marked states can be positive, negative, or neutral, but they define the marked state as both remarkable and questionable, in that we feel entitled to notice and comment on the marked state, and to ask questions about someone exhibiting a marked status. Marked traits which are seen negatively, or stigmatised, are often thought of as being suspicious, artificial, dubious, inauthentic, invalid, unnatural, exotic, or alien. The effect is often to dehumanise the people possessing the marked trait. For Serrano, the importance of understanding the distinctions between marked and unmarked states is that “... it appears to underlie all forms of sexism, as well as marginalization more generally. This is not to say that being marked is the same thing as, or necessarily leads to, being marginalized—as I alluded to in previous examples, we are just as capable of being indifferent to, or even impressed by, someone who is deemed marked as we are of invalidating them. But what is true is that the act of marking automatically creates a double standard, where certain traits are viewed and treated differently than others. This act of marking essentially divides the world up into two classes: those who have the trait in question (for whom meanings and value judgments will tend to “stick”), and those who do not (and who are therefore beyond reproach). These double standards provide the underlying architecture that enables sexism and marginalization.”

It is the existence of such double standards with respect to stigmatised marked traits that leads to marginalisation, as those exhibiting such traits are consistently seen and treated differently, in a multitude of ways. The fact that multiple double standards can be applied to a single marked trait, and that the same double standards can be applied to many different marked traits, results in the complex experiences of marginalisation reported by those exhibiting marked traits - being seen, for instance, as sometimes dangerous, sometimes exotic, sometimes ignored, sometimes to be pitied - but never to be seen as simply another individual human being.

“Thinking about sexism and marginalization in terms of myriad double standards implores us to challenge all double standards: those that are prevalent, and those that are rare; those that negatively impact us, and those that negatively impact others; those that we are currently aware of, as well as those that are currently unknown to us. Having such a mindset can make us more open to learning about new double standards when they are first described to us (rather than outright dismissing them because they do not fit into our worldview), and more mindful of the fact that we ourselves are fallible (as we may be unknowingly engaging in, or enforcing, certain double standards ourselves). Perhaps most importantly, thinking in terms of myriad double standards encourages humility, as it forces us to admit that there are many aspects of gender and sexism that we do not personally experience, and therefore cannot fully know about. For this reason, it would be conceited for us to project our fixed and limited perspective of the universe onto other people.”

Serano identifies three general types of double standards at work in marginalisation: universal assumptions, hierarchies, and stereotypes or attributions.

“When we talk about sexism and marginalization, we often talk about them in terms of some overarching ideology or ism that is prevalent in society. Isms are generally composed of the three types of double standards that I have discussed so far. For instance, traditional sexism (the overarching ideology) consists of a universal assumption (that maleness and masculinity are the norm), a hierarchy (that women are seen as less legitimate and important than men), and a slew of stereotypes and attributions.”

Having established the basic tenets of this theory of gender, and the processes of sexism and marginalisation, Serano goes on to propose a holistic approach to feminism as a means of combatting such marginalisation. She begins by defining holistic feminism as "...a wide-ranging movement to challenge all double standards based on sex, gender, and/or sexuality. Furthermore, this approach to feminism remains committed to intersectionality and working to challenge all forms of marginalization, rather than focusing solely on specific forms of sexism."

Some of the tools or methodologies of a holistic approach to feminism, in Serano's model, include:

Expecting heterogeneity - combatting the homogenising of marginalised groups that arises from stereotyping and universal assumptions by recognising that individuals within a marginalised group will differ in many ways;

Challenging gender entitlement - rejecting the societal expectation that people identify and express their genders in particular ways and the punitive response to those who do not follow social expectations, refusing to police the autonomous and consensual genders and sexualities of others; and

Self-examining desire and embracing ambivalence - examining our attractions (and lack of attractions) for indications of unacknowledged double standards, and understanding that sexual attractions and practices can have both empowering, positive, aspects, and disempowering, negative aspects.

Serano also stresses the importance of understanding the ways that invalidation is used as a technique against multiple marginalised groups - indeed, she notes that it is possible to identify a previously unrecognised marginalisation by observing that those who share in are invalidated in specific ways. There are many forms that invalidation can take, such as: suggesting mental incompetence; sexualising the marginalised group; attributions of immorality, danger, deceitful or manipulative behaviour; describing and treating the marginalised group as being unhealthy, sick, or diseased; seeing the marginalised group as anomalous, exotic, open to fetishisation or being an object of fascination or study; identification as unnatural, inauthentic, or fake.

This model of holistic feminism, and the theory of marked states and double standards that underlies it, appeals strongly to me. It recognises the multiplicity of marginalisations and invalidations that are at the root of any oppressive situation, and leaves room for differences and commonalities among marginalised groups to be acknowledged and incorporated into an ongoing life of activism. It allows for the identification of unacknowledged forms of marginalisation, and their inclusion in an activist framework. There's much to consider here, and I'm now looking forward to reading more of Serano's analysis and theoretical work, to see the development of this model.

COME_TO_THE_DARK_SIDE says

Es un libro fantástico. Serano dice muchas cosas que necesitan ser dichas y proporciona ciertas críticas muy útiles que, si se toman en serio, podrían cambiar nuestras vidas para mejor.

Los movimientos feministas y queer contemporáneos imponen ciertas orientaciones sexuales y expresiones de género (*gender policing*) con la misma frecuencia que la gente monosexista o cissexista contra la que protestan. Por ejemplo, mientras que muchas personas tratan la homosexualidad, bisexualidad, transexualidad y otras expresiones de la sexualidad o del género "anormales" como inferiores, las feministas tratan a menudo las expresiones "convencionales" (como las mujeres femeninas) como artificiales o

despreciables porque aparentemente refuerzan el binario de género. Lo que le explica sobre la exclusión dentro de los movimientos feministas y queer es especialmente importante porque es fácil caer en la trampa de privilegiar ciertos grupos marginados a expensas de los demás.

La primera mitad del libro es una colección de ensayos autobiográficos que documentan la dificultad de ser aceptada en espacios queer y feministas al ser una mujer transexual. La autora es a menudo juzgada como falsa o artificial por no ser una mujer cissexual. Algunos consideran el hecho de que sea transexual "sospechoso" porque consideran que nunca llegará a ser "realmente" una mujer. Y luego está el hecho de que Serano tiene una expresión femenina, cosa que a menudo es vista con recelo por aquellos que quieren desafiar las normas de género existentes (mujer-femenina / hombre-masculino). Demuestra de una forma bastante convincente el esencialismo de género oculto en muchos espacios feministas solo para mujeres, que con frecuencia acaba resultando en la exclusión de las mujeres trans, mientras que hipócritamente aceptan hombres trans.

La segunda mitad del libro es una explicación más teórica de lo que Serano piensa que está mal con el feminismo actual y lo que los grupos feministas podrían hacer para ser más inclusivos. Particularmente me han gustado los capítulos que Serano, como bióloga, dedica a refutar una teoría muy presente en el pensamiento feminista y queer que ve el género solamente como una actuación (*performance*) social sin influencia biológica (*gender artifactualism*). Serano defiende una visión más holística del construccionismo social (*social constructivism*) que ve la biología como un elemento que juega en la determinación de cuáles van a ser nuestras preferencias, pero señalando que la cultura, el entorno y las elecciones personales interactúan con la biología de forma que estas cuatro variables no pueden ser separadas. Su teoría de género incorpora las complejas relaciones entre las diferentes influencias que por lo general se pasan por alto en los estudios de género.

Finalmente, Serano revela cómo funcionan muchos de los mecanismos que sustentan la discriminación y la marginación exponiendo diversos dobles estándares. También aclara detalladamente cómo las mujeres transexuales son un objetivo específico de críticas y están doblemente discriminadas por ser mujeres y por ser trans. Ella denomina *trans-misogyny* a esta doble discriminación.

Ali says

I found this book fascinating, thought-provoking and very readable. It didn't come across to me as overly academic (although I am from an academic background and may not be the best judge), and I thought Serano did a great job of clearly explaining the concepts she was discussing and her reasons for choosing particular words over others.

I found her critique of the "gender artifactualist" perspective interesting, and her more nuanced approach to the role of biology in gender and sexuality was challenging. Sometimes I felt that she set up false dichotomies when characterising other viewpoints (e.g. between biological determinism and "free choice"), which may once have been relevant, but seemed to be less so now. Her arguments were nevertheless compelling - and much of what she said seemed so self-evident that I was surprised I hadn't considered it before (or, in fact, unsure whether it was something I already believed).

I also found her suggestion to look for invalidations helpful, as recognising the ways certain identities and behaviours are invalidated (e.g. through sexualisation, accusations of mental incompetence, immorality, illness, anomaly and inauthenticity) opens us up to recognising forms of marginalisation we may not be personally familiar with and which may not fit into the hierarchies we know.

Her commentary on "call-out culture", a phrase which had previously made me roll my eyes, was also striking for me. While not denying marginalised people's right to be angry and respond emotionally, a frequent problem with critiques of call-outs, she highlights the problems with attacking people and "piling on", especially when the person being called out is a fellow activist who may be new/learning.

I did find the book somewhat repetitive, as other reviewers have mentioned, but overall it was really interesting, challenging and memorable.
