

## **Trans-misogyny primer** by Julia Serano

The words *transgender* and *gender-variant* are typically used as catch-all terms to denote all people who defy cultural ideals, expectations, assumptions, and norms regarding gender. While all people who fall under the transgender umbrella potentially face social stigma for transgressing gender norms, those on the *male-to-female (MTF) or trans female/feminine (TF) spectrum* generally receive the overwhelming majority of societal fascination, consternation and demonization. In contrast, those on the *female-to-male (FTM) or trans male/masculine (TM) spectrum* have until very recently remained largely invisible and under-theorized. This disparity in attention suggests that individuals on the trans female/feminine spectrum are culturally marked, not for failing to conform to gender norms per se, but because of the specific direction of their gender transgression—that is, because of their feminine gender expression and/or their female gender identities. Thus, the marginalization of trans female/feminine spectrum people is not merely a result of *transphobia*, but is better described as *trans-misogyny*.

Trans-misogyny is steeped in the assumption that femaleness and femininity are inferior to, and exist primarily for the benefit of, maleness and masculinity. This phenomenon manifests itself in numerous ways:

- Studies have shown that feminine boys are viewed far more negatively, and brought in for psychotherapy far more often, than masculine girls.
- Psychiatric diagnoses directed against the transgender population often either focus solely on trans female/feminine individuals, or are written in such a way that trans female/feminine people are more easily and frequently pathologized than their trans male/masculine counterparts.
- The majority of violence committed against gender-variant individuals targets individuals on the trans female/feminine spectrum.
- In the media, jokes and demeaning depictions of gender-variant people primarily focus on trans female/feminine spectrum people. Often in these cases, it is their desire to be female and/or feminine that is especially ridiculed. While trans male/masculine individuals are often subjects of derision, their desire to be male and/or masculine is generally not ridiculed—to do so would bring the supposed supremacy of maleness/masculinity into question.

Perhaps the most visible example of trans-misogyny is the way in which trans women and others on the trans female/feminine spectrum are routinely sexualized in the media, within psychological, social science and feminist discourses, and in society at large. For example, the media not only regularly depict trans women's bodies and experiences in a titillating and lurid fashion, but they also sexualize trans women's motives for transitioning—e.g., by portraying them as either sex workers, sexual deceivers who prey on unsuspecting heterosexual men, or as male “perverts” who transition to female in order to fulfill some kind of bizarre sexual fantasy. While trans men may face a certain degree of media objectification, their motives for transitioning are not typically sexualized in the same manner. If anything, those who project ulterior motives onto trans men generally presume that they transition in order to obtain male privilege rather than for sexual reasons. Thus, the presumption that trans women (but not trans men) are sexually motivated in their transitions appears to reflect the cultural assumption that a woman's power and worth stems primarily from her ability to be sexualized by others.

for more about trans-misogyny, see Serano, J. (2007) *Whipping girl: A transsexual woman on sexism and the scapegoating of femininity*. Emeryville, CA: Seal Press.