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## Part Two

# Articulating Trans–Misogyny

At the end of the previous chapter, I mentioned a series of trans woman-centric writings that I was beginning to work on, one that would draw connections between the various forms of sexism that I personally faced as a queer-identified transsexual woman. While I assumed that this book project would “take some time to finish,” a serendipitous turn of events resulted in that collection (which ultimately became *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*) coming to fruition far sooner than I had expected. Since all the chapters in this section were either written concurrently with, or are related in some way to, *Whipping Girl*, I figured that I would briefly describe how that book (and some of the ideas contained therein) came to be.

In December 2004, I was invited to read at Michelle Tea’s Radar Reading Series in San Francisco. After the event, Brooke Warner introduced herself to me and mentioned that she was an editor at Seal Press. She said that she missed my reading (a set of performance poetry), but liked what I had to say during the question and answer session. I thanked her and gave her a copy of my chapbook *Draw Blood*. I didn’t think too much about it at the time, as Seal

Press was not actively publishing poetry. But then a few months later, in April 2005, Brooke contacted me out of the blue and asked if I had ever considered writing a book of personal essays. And it turns out that I was already in the early stages of working on one.

While performance poetry is a powerful medium for expressing personal stories and opinions, its time constraints often make it too limiting for taking on more complex topics or rolling out long and involved arguments, which is what I now wanted to do. While in my poetry, I regularly described the transphobia that I faced as a trans person and the misogyny that I faced since transitioning to female, I now wanted to explore how these phenomena intersected in my life, and for others on the trans female/feminine spectrum. The first of such essays was “Skirt Chasers: Why the Media Depicts the Trans Revolution in Lipstick and Heels,” which first appeared in *Bitch Magazine* in the Fall of 2004.<sup>1</sup> Then in June 2005, I released a chapbook entitled *On the Outside Looking In: a trans woman’s perspective on feminism and the exclusion of trans women from lesbian and women-only spaces*, which included three additional essays on this topic (which were later re-worked for *Whipping Girl* and *Excluded*).<sup>2</sup>

To the best of my knowledge, *On the Outside Looking In* was the first publication to contain the word “trans-misogyny”—a term I used to refer to the intersection of transphobia and misogyny, and which has since caught on, at least within transgender and activist circles. I believe that I coined the term, although I cannot rule out the possibility that it arose elsewhere independently, as during that time I had had conversations with a number of trans women about how much of the transphobia we face might be better described as expressions of misogyny.

In the years since *Whipping Girl* was published, the term “trans-misogyny” has taken on a life of its own, and people now use it in ways that I never intended. Specifically, I used the term to describe how the existence of societal misogyny/traditional sexism greatly informs how people perceive, interpret, or treat gender-variant people who seemingly “want to be female” or “want to be feminine” (regardless of their actual identity). However, many people nowadays use the word “trans-misogyny” in an identity-based manner to refer to any and all forms of discrimination targeting trans women. According to this latter usage, some would argue that people who identify as men, or male crossdressers, or drag queens, cannot possibly experience trans-misogyny—a close reading of *Whipping Girl* will reveal that I very much disagree with this premise. (See Chapter 48 of this book for a detailed explanation regarding why

identity-based views of marginalization tend to be inaccurate and exclusive.)

Along similar lines, I have observed people using “trans-misogyny” as shorthand to suggest that “trans men are privileged, and trans women oppressed, end of story.” I reject such oversimplifications for the very same reasons that I rejected earlier reciprocal claims (which were quite prevalent back when I was writing *Whipping Girl*) that “trans women experience male privilege, whereas trans men do not.” Male and masculine privileges can provide very real advantages to those who are granted them. But this does not mean that those who experience said privileges automatically have it easy, are fully accepted by society, and/or are immune from other forms of marginalization (e.g., transphobia).

It should also be said that trans-misogyny (in my original conceptualization of the term) was not intended to suggest that trans female/feminine folks experience misogyny whereas trans male/masculine folks do not. Obviously, trans male/masculine individuals may experience misogyny at various points throughout their lives, including post-transition (e.g., if their trans status is discovered). Once again, what I was trying to convey with “trans-misogyny” is how the widespread presumption that femaleness and femininity are inferior to, or less legitimate than, maleness and masculinity, creates assumptions, stereotypes, and obstacles for trans female/feminine people that are not generally experienced by those on the trans male/masculine spectrum (unless, of course, post-transition they are read by others as a man who wants, or is trying, to be female and/or feminine).

I was interested in articulating trans-misogyny because it both accounted for how people on the trans female/feminine spectrum tend to face the lion’s share of sensationalization, consternation, and demonization in mainstream considerations of trans people, and also helped to make sense of the disparities in acceptance of trans men versus trans women that existed within my own queer women’s community during the time (as I alluded to at the end of the last chapter). To be clear, I don’t think that this disparity was solely due to trans-misogyny, but it most certainly was a contributing factor.<sup>3</sup>

Over the years, I have occasionally come across people who will protest that lesbians in their community don’t accept trans men at all, or that trans women are accepted in their own queer women’s community to the same extent as (or perhaps even more so than) trans men. I don’t doubt that these configurations exist—in fact, in my mind they seem to form a continuum over time, with the former being extremely common during the ’80s and ’90s, and

the latter resembling where we may slowly be heading. But throughout most of the '00s, especially in U.S. urban queer women's communities, the disparity that I describe in these pieces was extremely commonplace, if not ubiquitous.

I am perfectly fine with the idea of trans male/masculine people participating in (what are ostensibly) queer women's communities. What I was primarily objecting to in some of the chapters that follow is how that participation tended to be *practiced*—for instance, how some trans men's emphasis of their former status (e.g., as “girls” or “lesbians”) encouraged others to continue using trans women's former “male” status against us; or how lesbians who excluded trans women would so frequently point to trans men in the space in order to make the claim that they couldn't possibly be “transphobic.” It is this latter claim (which I heard scores upon scores of times back then) that seemed to necessitate the coining of an entirely new trans female/feminine-specific term. To be honest, I am not sure that I would have gravitated toward the neologism “trans-misogyny” if it were not for my activist work challenging this particular disparity.

Anyway, once my *On the Outside Looking In* chapbook was complete, I passed it along to Seal Press, and they liked it. So I followed that up with a book proposal, which they accepted. I was thrilled by the possibility of having a book published, especially with Seal Press, as their history of publishing books “by women, for women” would likely help the book garner some legitimacy and attention among feminists who might not be especially familiar with transgender people and issues.

I was also highly aware of how lucky I was: While Bitesize had been playing out for eight years, and many people had expressed excitement and appreciation for our music, none of them worked for a record company that had the means to release our music to a wider audience. And yet, here I was—a relatively unknown writer with three chapbooks and a handful of magazine articles to my name—who just so happened to be at the right place at the right time to get noticed by someone who expressed interest in publishing my book.

While I was excited about the opportunity, I was also naturally quite nervous, never having written a full-length book before. I had a handful of essays and spoken word pieces in hand, but I still needed to write the bulk of the book. Seal Press gave me a year and a half to work on it before the entire manuscript would be due. And that was pretty much all I did for that year and a half of my life. I was working full-time as a biologist at UC Berkeley, so I got up every morning and wrote from 5 to 8 a.m. And when I got home from work,

I read voraciously for my book research.

I have learned a lot about writing from reading authors of various genres and styles. But during the time that I was working on *Whipping Girl*, I remember being influenced by four authors in particular: Audre Lorde, Riki Wilchins, Patrick Califia, and bell hooks. While these writers are admittedly quite different from one another in content and style, all four had penned collections of essays that I found to be powerful and uncompromising, yet simultaneously accessible, easily discernable, and highly persuasive. These authors seemed to use fierce combinations of logic, passion, personal experience, and humor to win over readers to their point of view—and this is precisely what I was striving to do in my book. Audre Lorde’s style of poetic prose especially resonated with me as a “recovering slam poet” (as I sometimes half-jokingly refer to myself now). While I am incapable of writing prose as beautiful as hers, I try (in my own way) to incorporate some of what I’ve learned from writing performance poetry and song lyrics into my essays. Rather than just stringing words together, I am always thinking about the cadence of a sentence or paragraph, and I often purposefully try to arrange words and phrases so that they internally rhyme and/or flow into one another. Even when I am writing for the page, I am always considering how the piece in question would sound if it were to be spoken aloud. I’m sure that most readers never consciously pick up on this, but I’m inclined to believe that it likely makes the book a more pleasant and compelling read.

The most difficult decision that I faced while working on the book was whether or not to use the then relatively unknown “cis terminology” (in which the prefix “cis” is used to refer to the non-trans majority); I discuss my reasons for choosing to do so in Chapter 25. I had discovered this language online, but it was not yet widely in use within trans communities (or at least the ones that I was involved in), and I had never before seen it in print.<sup>4</sup> So I very much worried that including this new language—in addition to several other new terms that I was introducing (e.g., trans-misogyny, effemimania, subversivism, subconscious sex, gender entitlement)—might make the book seem alien or unintelligible for some readers. But thankfully, rather than driving readers away, cis terminology eventually caught on, and is probably one of the main concepts (along with trans-misogyny) that people most commonly associate with *Whipping Girl*.

The book underwent a number of title changes while it was a work in progress. The tentative title in my book proposal was *Hot Tranny Action*, but

as I discuss in Chapter 45, we decided that that would create too many misconceptions about what the book was about. In the book contract, the tentative title was listed as *Feminine Wiles*, which I liked, but it ultimately was deemed too old-fashioned sounding. My publisher and I went back and forth with alternate titles for quite a while. In an interview I gave in August 2006, I referred to the tentative title as *Who's Deceiving Who?: Transsexual Women, Sexism and the Future of Feminism* (which I had completely forgotten about until I stumbled upon that article last year).<sup>5</sup> Then one day, after Brooke had emailed me a list of potential titles, we were talking on the phone and she asked me what I thought about her suggestion of “Whipping Girl.” I replied that I was confused by that one (honestly, the first thing that popped into my head upon seeing that title was BDSM!), until she pointed out that the phrase was intended to be the feminine version of “whipping boy”—this seemed to fit perfectly with the book’s discussions of the societal scapegoating of femininity, so we eventually settled on it.

While the book touches upon a number of topics related to gender and gender-variant people, it is primarily focused on challenging societal critiques of three particular subgroups—transsexuals, trans female/feminine-spectrum individuals, and people who are feminine in gender expression—as I found that these three aspects of my own person were rarely defended at the time, both in mainstream society and within many strands of feminism, queer, and transgender activism. Since these three subgroups were routinely maligned within activism and academia, I spent a significant chunk of the book debunking or re-thinking certain entrenched beliefs within feminism, gender studies, queer theory, and transgender activism. This (unsurprisingly, I suppose) led to a few sensationalistic synopses of the book (such as a *San Francisco Chronicle* book review headlined “Transsexual finds sexism in feminism”<sup>6</sup>), and I have since encountered a few claims that I was somehow disproportionately blaming feminists and queer activists for the marginalization of these three subgroups. That was not my intention—I was simply working to make these movements more aware and inclusive of transsexuals, trans women, and feminine people, as I believe that we have a stake in these movements as well.

Upon its completion, I was pretty sure that the book would be well received among trans women and other trans-spectrum people, as I was writing from that particular standpoint. I also hoped that it would resonate with many femmes, and perhaps even garner some attention within queer and feminist circles more generally. So I was really excited to find that, soon after the book

was released in June 2007, it seemed to make an impact outside of the trans and femme bubbles. But I had no idea that, in subsequent years, some would consider it to be an important feminist text, or that it would eventually be used as teaching materials in gender and queer studies, sociology, psychology, and other college courses. While I was writing it, I very much saw myself as an outsider challenging the feminist and academic orthodoxy, so it was somewhat surreal to witness the book become accepted in many (albeit most certainly not all) corners of activism and academia.

*Whipping Girl* was originally intended to be a book of personal essays, and as such, it is replete with my own personal stories and perspectives on the world. Of course, these particular anecdotes and interpretations stem in part from me being socially situated as a white, middle-class, able-bodied, “generation X,” out, queer-identified transsexual woman living in a major city in the U.S in the early 2000s. But now that it is often presented in classrooms and other settings as an “authoritative” or “definitive” book about trans people and issues, its rather specific focus unfortunately results in a number of other important topics getting relatively less consideration. *Whipping Girl* offers little discussion about the issues and experiences of non-binary-identified people, intersex people, trans male/masculine-spectrum people, straight-identified trans people, trans people of color and other cultures, and so forth. Over the years, numerous people have expressed to me their disappointment in these omissions. Had I known at the time that the book would one day be viewed as an authoritative or definitive “transgender book,” I probably would have written it very differently: less personal and transsexual-focused, and more general and intersectional. But, for better or worse, it is what it is: the perspective of one individual trans woman situated in a particular time and place.

I’d like to think that *Whipping Girl* makes numerous points that remain insightful or useful. But I will be the first to admit that it is far from the whole story, and I am grateful for the many other gender-variant writers of various identities, backgrounds, generations, and geographies that are filling in the many gaps that the book overlooks.

*Postscript added June 2016:* A Second Edition of *Whipping Girl* was recently published—it is pretty much the same book, albeit with a new Preface that places the book in historical context, clarifies several arguments I made over the course of the book, and discusses the many changes in transgender activism since the book’s initial release.<sup>7</sup> I further expound on some of the ideas that I

first presented in *Whipping Girl* (e.g., gender entitlement, subversivism and the “reinforcing” trope, subconscious sex and my “intrinsic inclinations” model) throughout *Excluded*. On my blog, I penned several responses to frequently asked questions about the book regarding terminology, the original book cover (which depicts a woman putting on a necklace), and the chapter “Submissive Streak.”<sup>8</sup> Finally, I update my thoughts about media depictions of trans people in the recent article “Expanding Trans Media Representation: Why Transgender Actors Should Be Cast in Cisgender Roles.”<sup>9</sup>