

BOUND GALLEY
NOT FOR SALE

JULIA
SERANO

WHY
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MAKING FEMINIST
AND QUEER MOVEMENTS
MORE INCLUSIVE

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AND QUEER MOVEMENTS
MORE INCLUSIVE

Julia Serano



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Making Feminism and Queer Movements Inclusive

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DEDICATION

*In loving memory of my mother,
Kathleen Bernadette Regan Serano.
I miss your love and friendship.
I miss our long conversations on the phone
or up late at night keeping everyone else
in the house awake. As you always used to
say to me, "I miss your face."*

get over my internalized homophobia the first time I sexually experimented with a man, and just as I had to overcome my own fatphobia the first time I dated a differently-sized woman.

Sexual attraction is a complex phenomenon, and of course there is lots of individual variation. I certainly do not expect every cis queer woman to swoon over me. And if it were only a small percentage of cis dykes who were not interested in trans women at all, I would write it off as simply a matter of personal preference. But this not a minor problem—it is systemic; it is a predominant sentiment in queer women's communities. And when the overwhelming majority of cis dykes date and fuck cis women, but are not open to, or are even turned off by, the idea of dating or fucking trans women, how is that not transphobic? And to those cis women who claim a dyke identity, yet consider trans men, but not trans women, to be a part of your dating pool, let me ask you this: How are you not a hypocrite?

I did not write this piece to vent about my dating life. I go out on plenty of dates, and I'm having lots of super-fucking-awesome sex, just not with cis women at the moment. My purpose in writing this piece is to highlight how cis dykes' unwillingness to consider trans women as legitimate partners translates directly into a lack of community for queer-identified trans women. After all, queer women's communities serve several purposes. They are places where we can build alliances to fight for our rights. They are places where we can find friendship and chosen family. But one of the most critical functions that queer women's communities serve is in providing a safe space outside of the heterocentric mainstream where women can express interest, attraction, and affection toward other women. In other words, queer women's spaces fulfill our need for sexual validation. Unless, of course, you are a trans woman. And personally, with each passing year, it becomes harder and harder for me to continue to take part in a community in which I am not seen as a legitimate object of desire.

BISEXUALITY AND BINARIES REVISITED

CHAPTER NINE

Over the last several years, it has become increasingly common to hear people in queer communities claim that the word bisexual "reinforces the gender binary." In October 2010, I wrote an Internet article (which I'll refer to here as the "reinforcing" essay) challenging these claims.¹ Specifically, the article illustrated how *the reinforcing trope* (i.e., the notion that certain genders, sexualities, or identities "reinforce" the gender binary, or heteronormativity, or the patriarchy, or the hegemonic-gender-system-of-your-choice) is selectively doled out in queer and feminist communities in order to police their borders. Since queer communities are dominated by non-feminine, cisgender, and exclusively gay and lesbian folks, these individuals are almost never accused of "reinforcing the gender binary." In contrast, more marginalized identities (e.g., bisexual, transgender, femme) are routinely subjected to the reinforcing trope. While my "reinforcing" essay received many positive responses, it

also garnered some harsh criticism, particularly from within certain segments of transgender and gender variant communities. All of the critiques that I heard or read pretty much ignored my primary point—namely, there are underlying forms of sexism that determine who gets accused of “reinforcing” shit and who does not—and instead focused solely on the rote assertion that the word “bisexual” (and, by association, anyone who identifies as bisexual) really does “reinforce the gender binary.”

Since then, I have been considering writing a follow-up piece to discuss the numerous problems with such claims (aside from the obvious fact that they single out bisexuals for being attracted to “two” sexes, but not the overwhelming majority of gays and lesbians who view themselves as attracted to the “same” sex, but not to the “opposite” sex—a notion that appears to be just as binary). In addition, since my piece was published, I became aware of an excellent blog post by Shiri Eisner called, “Words, binary and biphobia, or: why ‘bi’ is binary but ‘FTM’ is not.”² Eisner’s piece made a number of points similar to my own, but it also forwarded new arguments that had not occurred to me before and which led me to think about this debate in new ways. For all of these reasons, I felt that it would be worthwhile to pen a new essay (this very one here!) to revisit this subject.

Before delving into this topic, let me state for the record that I am writing this piece from the perspective of a bisexual-identified transsexual woman. Since some people paint bisexual-identified folks out to be “binarist” in our partner preferences, I will mention for the record that I date and am sexual with folks who are female and male, trans and cis, and non-binary- and binary-identified. I most certainly do not speak for all bisexual, or all transgender people. My views on this subject are my own, and if you disagree with what I have to say, please consider the possibility that our disagreements may stem from our differing vantage points. Finally, over the course of this chapter, I will sometimes use the word “we” to refer to transgender folks, and other times to refer to

bisexual folks. Perhaps some may find this a bit confusing, but it is an unavoidable consequence when one straddles multiple identities.

SOME PRELIMINARIES: MONOSEXISM, BI-INVISIBILITY, AND BISEXUAL COMMUNITIES (OR THE LACK THEREOF)

In my previous essay, I used the word “bisexual” because (both historically and currently) it is the term most commonly used and understood to denote people who do not limit their sexual experiences to members of a single sex or gender. Of course, bisexual is not a perfect word, but then again, neither is gay, lesbian, dyke, homosexual, heterosexual, straight, queer, asexual, or any other sexuality-related label. However, perhaps more so than with any of the other aforementioned labels, people who are bisexual in experience often fiercely disavow the “bisexual” label. For instance, many prefer the labels queer, pansexual, omnisexual, polysexual, multisexual, or even no label at all, over the term bisexual. Sometimes I use the phrase experientially bisexual to refer to people who, regardless of label choice, do not limit their sexual experiences to members of a single sex or gender. But alas, some folks may also reject experientially bisexual because it contains the word bisexual. So an alternative solution, taking a page from the LGBTQIA+ acronym, is to describe experientially bisexual folks as BMNOPPPQ folks, where B = bisexual, M = multisexual, N = no label, O = omnisexual, P = pansexual, P = polysexual, and Q = experientially bisexual folks who primarily identify as queer (arranged alphabetically).

Am I advocating BMNOPPPQ terminology? Not necessarily. I think that it is rather clunky and confusing. Personally, I would prefer it if we all simply accepted bisexual as an imperfect, albeit easily understood, umbrella term for people who share our experience. But since I don’t expect that to happen any time soon, I will instead use BMNOPPPQ here in the hopes that we can put aside the issue of label preference for

a moment, and instead focus on what the bisexual-reinforces-the-binary accusation means for BMNOPPO people.

Important disclaimer: Above, when I used the phrase "share our experience," I am not in any way insinuating that BMNOPPO folks all share the same sexual histories, or experience their sexualities in the exact same way. We do not. We are all different. We are all attracted to different types of people, different types of bodies, different types of gender expressions. We all fall at somewhat different positions along the dreaded "Kinsey scale."³ Some of us are more immersed in queer communities, while some of us primarily exist in straight communities, and many (if not most) of us find ourselves constantly navigating our way within (and between) both queer and straight communities.

So if we are all so different, then why even bother to try to label or lump together BMNOPPO people? Well, because the one thing we *do* share is that we all face societal *monosexism*—i.e., the assumption that being exclusively attracted to members of a single sex or gender is somehow more natural, real, or legitimate than being attracted to members of more than one sex or gender.⁴ Monosexism is also sometimes referred to as *biphobia*. While biphobia is clearly the more common term, I will use monosexism here, both because I am not a big fan of the use of the suffix "phobia" when discussing forms of sexism (as it seems to stress "fear" over marginalization), and also because monosexism avoids the pesky prefix "bi" that some BMNOPPO folks seem to find objectionable (more on that in a minute).

Monosexism exists because most people, whether in the straight mainstream or in gay and lesbian communities, view sexual orientation as a rigid binary, where people can only ever be heterosexual or homosexual in orientation. This hetero/homo binary directly leads to *monosexual assumption*—that is, the assumption that all individuals are exclusively attracted to members of a single sex. (Note: The hetero/homo binary also assumes that all people are sexually attracted to *somebody*—an assumption

that marginalizes asexual folks.) Because of monosexual assumption, most people automatically assume that BMNOPPO folks must be heterosexual if they perceive us to be in an "opposite"-sex pairing, or that we must be homosexual (i.e., lesbian or gay) if they perceive us to be in a same-sex pairing. This is a foundational predicament experienced by BMNOPPO individuals.

If we BMNOPPO folks outwardly claim to be bisexual (or pansexual, or polysexual, etc.), monosexual assumption leads many people to doubt the validity of our identities, and to project ulterior motives onto us. This is why people will often say, "You're not really bisexual (or pansexual, or polysexual, etc.), you're just confused about your sexuality," or "... it's just a phase," or "... you still have one foot in the closet," or "... you're *really* gay/lesbian, but seeking out heterosexual privilege," or "... you're *really* straight, but just sexually experimenting, or perhaps overly promiscuous," and/or "... you're just a fence sitter. Choose a side already!"

In other words, monosexual assumption leads to what has historically been called *bi-invisibility*: We are presumed not to exist, and any attempt to assert our existence is immediately thwarted by accusations that we are hiding, faking, or simply confused about our sexualities. Bi-invisibility is what leads many of us to simply blend into existing monosexual communities (whether straight, gay, or lesbian) rather than seek out or create BMNOPPO communities. This lack of community has had a devastating effect on BMNOPPO folks. For instance, even though we outnumber exclusively homosexual people, we have poorer health outcomes and higher poverty rates than gays and lesbians, and we are generally not acknowledged or served by LGBTQIA+ organizations, even the ones that have "B" in the name.⁵ Our invisibility is what allows straight, gay, and lesbian folks to regularly get away with forwarding stereotypes about us—that we are mentally deranged, predatory, hypersexual, promiscuous, deceptive, and/or fickle—without being called out

or challenged. But most poignantly, bi-invisibility leads many of us to identify more with the straight, lesbian, or gay communities we exist in (and rely upon) than with other BMNOPPO folks. This lack of identification with other BMNOPPO folks, in combination with the external pressure placed on us to blend in with the monosexual communities we exist in, is a major reason why BMNOPPO folks have historically tended to avoid calling ourselves "bisexual," often by refusing to label our sexualities at all. In stark contrast, exclusively homosexual people do not tend to outright disavow the labels "lesbian" and "gay," nor do they tend to get bogged down in philosophical battles over whether or not they should label their sexualities at all, to nearly the same degree that BMNOPPO folks do.

I have heard countless BMNOPPO people ask, "Why do we have to label our sexualities?" I do agree that we should not be forced to reduce our complex sexual attractions and orientations down to a simple moniker. But as an activist, I would argue that the most persuasive argument for why BMNOPPO folks should unite around some kind of umbrella label (whether "bisexual" or otherwise) is to challenge monosexism and bi-invisibility. In this scenario, said label would not blithely detail who we are sexual with, nor claim that we are somehow inherently different from hetero- or homo- or asexual folks (because I do not think we are), but rather point out that we (and we alone) are targeted by a particular sexist double standard, namely, monosexism. Doing this would enable us to raise awareness about, and to challenge, monosexism in our culture.

Given that I am more well known for my trans activism than my bisexual/BMNOPPO activism, I should point out that the case that I am making here is identical in form and structure to the case I make in *Whipping Girl* regarding cissexism.⁶ That argument goes as follows: We live in a world where trans people are unfairly targeted by a sexist double standard (i.e., cissexism, analogous with monosexism) where one group (i.e., trans people, analogous with BMNOPPO people) is assumed to be

less natural, real, or legitimate than a majority group that does not share that experience (i.e., cis people, analogous with monosexual people). As I once wrote in a blog post called "Whipping Girl FAQ on cissexual, cisgender, and cis privilege":

When I use the terms cis/trans, it is not to talk about "actual" differences between cis and trans bodies/identities/genders/people, but rather "perceived" differences. In other words, while I don't think that my gender is inherently different from that of a cis woman, I am aware that most people tend to "view" my gender differently (i.e., as less natural/valid/authentic) than cis women's genders?

I would argue that the above paragraph also holds true if you were to substitute "mono" for "cis," "bisexual/BMNOPPO" for "trans," and "sexual orientation" for "gender."

So to sum up, from this activist perspective, the primary reason why I call myself trans or bisexual is *not* to communicate things that I have done (e.g., aspects of my gender transition, people I sexually partner with). After all, it should not be incumbent upon me to have to reduce the complexities of my gender and sexuality down to a one-word label and provide it for other people at the drop of a hat. Nor am I insisting that I am "just like" other trans or BMNOPPO people when I call myself "trans" or "bisexual," respectively. After all, it goes without saying that all trans people and all BMNOPPO people are different from one another. Rather, I embrace these labels in order to be visible in a world where trans and BMNOPPO people are constantly erased by the male/female and hetero/homo binaries, respectively, and to build alliances with people who are similarly marginalized in order to challenge societal cissexism and monosexism, respectively.

HOW MIGHT RELINQUISHING THE TERM "BISEXUAL" IMPACT BISEXUAL/BMNOPPO PEOPLE?

With this background in mind, let's go back to the recurring claims that calling oneself bisexual "reinforces the gender binary." Mind you, this claim is not typically made against people who gravitate toward sexual identity labels such as gay, lesbian, dyke, homosexual, heterosexual, straight, queer, asexual, and so on. Just bisexual folks. And it puts us in the unenviable position of constantly having to defend our label choice.

For example, even though my "reinforcing" essay was focused on how the reinforcing trope has been used to delegitimize both trans and bisexual communities, I still felt compelled to begin the piece with an explanation as to why I call myself bisexual. To this end, I offered both a personal and political justification. The personal explanation related to the fact that, while I am sexual with both female- and male-bodied/identified people, I tend to be more attracted to the former than the latter, and perhaps for this reason, being sexual with a woman feels very different to me on a visceral level than being with a man. For this reason, labels like pansexual and omnisexual (which imply attraction to everyone) do not personally resonate with me, because they seem to erase a difference that I experience. While this continues to be an accurate description of how I experience sexual attraction, I now realize that this comment is somewhat superfluous. After all, all BMNOPPO folks experience our sexualities somewhat differently, and if we each had a unique word to precisely describe our internal experiences of attraction, that wouldn't necessarily help us challenge monosexism and bi-invisibility. So if I were writing the "reinforcing" essay today, I probably would have left that personal tidbit out.

It is worth noting that (perhaps unsurprisingly) a few people took this personal comment as evidence that I must hold essentialist and rigidly binarist views of gender, even though earlier in the essay I stressed

that there is lots of variation among, and overlap between, female and male bodies (this includes the existence of intersex people, and trans people who physically transition). Elsewhere, I have made the case that one can acknowledge differences between female and male bodies without necessarily engaging in essentialism or binarism, so I won't bother to rehash that argument here.⁸ Suffice it to say, if simply recognizing differences between female and male bodies is tantamount to essentialism and binarism, then that means that *all* heterosexual and homosexual people are essentialist and binarist, because they are sexually attracted to one sex but not the other. It also means that *all* transsexuals who physically transition are essentialist and binarist, on the basis that we choose to be one sex rather than the other. Once again, calling out a bisexual person's experience of sex differences as "essentialist" and "binarist," while paying no heed to gay, lesbian, and trans people's experiences of sex differences, can only be viewed as monosexist.

The political explanation that I gave for why I choose the bisexual label stems from the fact that societal monosexism invisibilizes bisexuality and ensures that we can only ever be read in one of two ways, namely, as homosexual or heterosexual:

The "bi" in bisexual does not merely refer to the types of people that I am sexual with, but to the fact that both the straight and queer worlds view me in two very different ways depending upon who I happen to be partnered with at any given moment.⁹

I admit that this is a relatively novel way of viewing the word bisexual, but it is one that I personally fancy, and it is consistent with the theme of challenging monosexism, bi-invisibility, and the hetero/homo binary. Here is another potential interpretation of the word bisexual: The prefix "bi" can mean "two," but it can also mean "twice" (e.g., as in bimonthly). So while monosexual people limit their potential partners to members

of only one sex, bisexual/BMNOPPO folks challenge the hetero/homo binary by not limiting our attraction in this way, and are thereby open to roughly twice as many potential partners. My main point here is that the prefix "bi" has more than one meaning, and can have more than one referent. So claiming that people who use the term bisexual must be touting a rigid binary view of gender, or denying the existence of gender variant people, is as presumptuous as assuming that people who use the term "bicoastal" must be claiming that a continent can only ever have two coasts, or that they are somehow denying the existence of all interior, landlocked regions of that continent.

The truth is that there are many different ways one can interpret the word bisexual (or other sexuality labels, for that matter). The bisexual-reinforces-the-binary accusation is an attempt to fix bisexual to a single meaning, one that is an affront to how many bisexual-identified people understand and use that label. As an analogy, what if cis people suddenly started claiming that they do not like the label transgender because (in their minds) it seems to imply that all people should change their gender. (I actually have heard someone make this bizarre claim once before.) How would we, as transgender people, react to that accusation? Personally, I would respond by saying that transgender is *our* word: it's about transgender-identified people's experiences with gender and gender-based oppression, and it makes absolutely no claims at all about what other people are, or how they should be gendered. Similarly, my response to the bisexual-reinforces-the-binary accusation is that bisexual is *our* word (in this case, bisexual-identified people): it is about our experiences with sexuality and sexuality-based oppression, and it makes no claims whatsoever about what other people are, or how they should be sexual or gendered.

But upon looking back on my "reinforcing" essay, my main regret is that I failed to explicitly mention what is perhaps the most important political reason behind why I call myself bisexual. Namely, the

word bisexual has a long history, and it was the word that the original BMNOPPO activists embraced several decades ago when they fought for visibility and inclusion within (and beyond) lesbian, gay, and queer communities. This activism spurred the creation of now common terms such as "biphobia" and "bi-invisibility" that have played a crucial role in challenging societal monosexism since their inception. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the word bisexual is familiar to most people, both in the straight mainstream and within LGBTQIA+ communities. Having a familiar umbrella term is critically important given that one of the biggest challenges that BMNOPPO folks face is invisibility and societal erasure.

I appreciate the sentiments behind alternative labels such as pansexual, omnisequal, polysexual, and multisexual, and I respect the right of BMNOPPO folks to choose any of these (or other) labels over bisexual. But from an activist standpoint, the notion that we should completely abandon the word bisexual in favor of some alternative label that is unfamiliar to most people does not seem to be a wise political move. Indeed, such a move would make it significantly harder for us to come out and gain visibility in our communities, and we would need to start from scratch with new activist terminology (panphobia? poly-invisibility?) to describe how we are marginalized.

Along similar lines, I respect the right of BMNOPPO folks to choose to identify as queer rather than bisexual. (For the record, I identify as both bisexual and queer.) However, queer is a much broader umbrella term meant to include all LGBTQIA+ people, and as such, it does not seem to be the best position from which to challenge monosexism and bi-invisibility.

Now of course, language is constantly evolving. And if this mass fleeing from the word bisexual toward alternate identity labels was simply part of a natural progression—such as the historically recent shifts from the label "homosexual" to "gay," or from "lesbian" to "dyke"—then

I would not have any problem with it. However, it seems to me that the primary force driving these alternate label choices is not coming from within the BMNOPPO community itself, but rather from external pressure exerted on us by other queer subgroups. As I've already discussed, there has always been pressure on BMNOPPO folks to hide or subsume our identities in order to fit into existing gay, lesbian, and queer communities. But these days, there is additional pressure placed on us by certain transgender voices that insist that we must stop using the term bisexual because it supposedly "reinforces the gender binary."

Lots of folks these days (both transgender and BMNOPPO) seem to be buying into this "reinforcing" allegation, which essentially accuses bisexual-identified people (such as myself) of propagating cissexism/transphobia. And yet, virtually no one is asking what should be a rather obvious question: Isn't this argument quite one-sided? Shouldn't we also be considering what affect relinquishing the label "bisexual" would have for BMNOPPO folks and our efforts to challenge monosexism and bi-invisibility? Genderqueer-identified bisexual activist Shiri Eisner (in the aforementioned blog post) was the first person I heard make this crucial point:

A discussion focusing around bisexuality solely in relation to transgender politics performs structural bisexual erasure, as it prioritizes transgender politics over bisexual politics in a discussion about bisexual identity. [emphasis Eisner's]¹⁰

When put this way, it becomes clear just how brazen it is for transgender folks to claim that bisexuals should abandon an identity label that BMNOPPO folks have been using for decades simply because it is supposedly incompatible with transgender politics. Why stop there? While we are at it, why don't we tell lesbians that they have to stop using that word? After all, few ideologies have spouted as much cissexism over

the years as lesbian feminism has. Come to think of it, what about people who describe themselves as a "woman" or a "man"—those labels most certainly reinforce the binary! Shouldn't we be calling out anyone who uses those labels? Or what about trans people who self-identify as "MTF" and "FTM"—acronyms that imply that there are two sexes. Don't they reinforce the binary?

Or, what if we put the shoe on the other foot? Cisgender feminists have long argued that gender is a patriarchal invention designed to oppress women. Given this, what if cisgender feminists took a similar tactic and began accusing transgender people of "reinforcing the patriarchy" because the word "transgender" has the word "gender" in it? Isn't this argument structurally identical to the bisexual-reinforces-the-binary claim? If cisgender feminists made this claim, how might we react? Would we stop calling ourselves transgender (or genderqueer, or gender variant) as a result? What would that mean for us as a marginalized group that has only recently garnered visibility and a modicum of acceptance in our society? What would happen to all the policies that now include "transgender" people, or that prevent discrimination on the basis of "gender identity" (yes, that term also has that pesky word "gender" in it)? Would we, as a transgender community, really be willing to give up all that in order to accommodate cisgender feminist politics?

I didn't think so. So how can we, as a transgender community, expect bisexual/BMNOPPO folks to give up the same in order to accommodate our politics?

THERE IS MORE THAN JUST ONE BINARY!

Nothing demonstrates the fact that the bisexual-reinforces-the-binary claim prioritizes transgender politics over bisexual politics more than the assumption that the "bi" in bisexual must automatically be referring to "the gender binary." This is a bold assertion given that BMNOPPO folks have our own sexual orientation binary to contend with, and that

bisexual activists have long argued that being "bi" subverts the hetero/homo binary. So how is it that a debate about "bisexual" (a sexual orientation label) can wind up being solely centered on the gender binary, yet completely ignore the sexual orientation binary?

This seems to me to be a fairly new development. Back when bisexual and transgender activism were first gaining momentum in the 1990s, it was quite common for activists from both camps to point out the parallels between the way transgender folks challenge the male/female binary and how bisexuals challenge the hetero/homo binary. There was even an entire anthology (entitled *Bisexuality and Transgenderism: InterSEXions of the Others*) largely centered on this theme.¹¹ Around the time that I transitioned (back in 2001), trans people referred to "the male/female binary" (which seems to acknowledge the possibility that there are other binaries out there) about as frequently as they mentioned "the gender binary."

But over time, this perspective has shifted. These days, many transgender folks seem to be referring to an all "caps lock" version of THE GENDER BINARY, as if it were the one and only binary from which all gender and sexual oppression stems. This interpretation reminds me of the way many cisgender lesbian feminists talk about THE PATRIARCHY, using it as the single lens through which they view all aspects of gender and sexuality. Viewing all forms of sexism in terms of THE PATRIARCHY (i.e., men are the oppressors, women are the oppressed, end of story) is precisely what led many cisgender lesbian feminists to misinterpret trans men as "female" traitors who transition in order to obtain male privilege, and trans women as privileged "men" who attempt to appropriate women's oppressed status and/or to infiltrate women-only spaces.

When we view the world through any one single lens, we are bound to overlook many things. Viewing all aspects of gender and sexuality through the lens of THE PATRIARCHY has led many cisgender lesbian feminists to condemn not only transgender people, but

feminine and masculine gender expression, butch/femme relationships, BDSM, pornography, sex workers, sex toys that resemble phalluses, and so on. Similarly, viewing all gender and sexual oppression in terms of THE GENDER BINARY might seem to make sense to some transgender people, but it overlooks (and thus erases) numerous other gender and sexual hierarchies, such as trans-misogyny, masculine-centrism, subversivism, asexophobia, and of course, monosexism.¹²

So, in other words, if we are going to have a cross-community conversation between transgender and bisexual/BMNOPPOQ folks, then we have to talk about the male/female binary and cissexism, *as well as the hetero/homo binary and monosexism*. If we are not taking both communities' issues and interests into account, then we are not having a conversation, we are merely engaging in one-sided slander.

One final note on this point: During the course of writing this piece, it struck me how strange it is that the bisexual-reinforces-the-binary debate, which prioritizes transgender politics over bisexual politics, has successfully proliferated for several years now, and has persuaded many BMNOPPOQ folks to disavow the word bisexual without that much of a pushback. And I find it alarming that, even though the word monosexism was coined and used by bisexual activists at least a decade before the word cissexism was by trans activists, these days I find myself having to explain what the former means far more so than the latter. In other words, while the bisexual movement gained initial momentum prior to the transgender movement (which is why the B typically precedes the T in most queer acronyms), the transgender movement seems to have leap-frogged over the bisexual movement, at least within the context of queer communities. To be clear, I am not in any way insinuating that BMNOPPOQ folks are "more oppressed" than transgender people (lord knows, there is nothing I loathe more than playing "oppression Olympics"). But I do think that transgender people have gelled more as a community than BMNOPPOQ folks have. And this lack of cohesion among

BMNOPPPQ folks (in combination with the single-minded THE GENDER BINARY perspective) has certainly contributed to the one-sided nature of the bisexual-reinforces-the-binary debate.

ONE FINAL OBSERVATION

Finally, it must be stressed that this bisexual-reinforces-the-binary debate is not raging uniformly throughout all LGBTQIA+ communities. It seems to be largely absent from gay men's communities, and among transgender and bisexual folks who spend most of their time in straight communities rather than queer ones. As far as I can tell, this debate is primarily occurring within queer women's communities and among trans folks who also inhabit those spaces. And I think this specificity offers some insight into why this debate has surfaced and gained traction at this particular place and time.

This connection occurred to me after, on a couple separate occasions, I heard trans men claim that, in their opinion, bisexuals (as a group) tend to be more transphobic than lesbians. Frankly, this claim astonished me. Historically, transgender and bisexual activists often saw themselves on the same side of challenging exclusion within greater gay and lesbian communities and organizations.¹³ And in my own personal experience, I have found that the self-identified bisexuals in my queer community tend to be far more supportive of me (as a trans woman) than exclusively lesbian and gay folks. And while cisgender lesbians typically do not view trans women such as myself to be legitimate romantic or sexual partners, cisgender bisexual women often do. As a testament to this, *all* of my queer female sexual and romantic partners have been either bisexual and/or gender variant in some way. While I am definitely open to the idea of having a cisgender lesbian lover or partner, I have never once had a cisgender lesbian express interest in me in that way. And this experience is not specific to me—it is pervasive enough that trans women and allies often refer to it as “the cotton ceiling.”¹⁴

Of course, things are different for trans men and trans masculine spectrum folks. They often feel relatively accepted (as both individuals and prospective lovers/partners) by cisgender lesbians these days. So it makes sense that, from their point of view, bisexuals might appear more transphobic than lesbians (indeed, Eisner makes this point as well).¹⁵ In stark contrast, from my perspective as a trans woman, I find that cisgender lesbians tend to be way more likely to be trans-misogynistic than cisgender bisexual women. These are generalizations, of course, but they seem to account for our greatly differing perspectives on this matter.

Ironically, while lesbian feminism is largely considered to be *passé* these days, its foundational premise—that cisgender men are inherently oppressive, and that women who partner with them are traitors to the cause—still lives on in today's queer women's communities. Elsewhere, I have referred to this mindset as *FAAB-mentality*, as it describes the presumption that the only truly valid relationships are those between individuals who are female-assigned-at-birth (whether they be cis women or trans male/masculine folks).¹⁶ Because of FAAB-mentality, trans women are seen as suspect because we are viewed as being “really cisgender men,” and femmes are dismissed for too closely resembling heterosexual women in their gender expression. And of course, bisexual women are viewed as suspect because some of us choose to partner with cisgender men.

I believe that this FAAB-mentality is at work behind the scenes when trans male/masculine folks stress how different they are from cisgender men in order to be accepted in queer women's spaces, and when queer women who partner with trans men (and who therefore fall under the BMNOPPPQ umbrella) go to great lengths to avoid identifying as bisexual. While I respect any person's right to choose pansexual, polysexual, queer, etc., over bisexual, I sometimes feel that these alternative labels function like code words in queer women's communities, as if to say, “I am sexual with everyone *except* cisgender men.” While

people are certainly free to choose not to partner with cisgender men, I am disturbed by a new binary that seems to be developing here, one that positions pansexual/polysexual/etc.-identified women as supposedly subversive and queer because they refuse to sleep with cisgender men, whereas bisexual-identified women are presumed to be conservative and straight-minded because they do sometimes partner with cisgender men. And it seems to me that the bisexual-reinforces-the-binary trope exacerbates this binary, which is probably why this accusation has become so prevalent in queer women's communities.

While it is true that some bisexuals are cissexist, it is also true that many lesbians and trans folks are monosexist.¹⁷ As a bisexual trans woman who is very active in queer women's communities, I would like to see us all stop pitting ourselves against one another, and instead work together to challenge all binaries and all forms of sexism.

HOW TO BE AN ALLY TO TRANS WOMEN

CHAPTER TEN

For many years, a major focus of my activism has been challenging the way in which trans women are often excluded from, or made to feel irrelevant within, queer women's spaces. Because I have been so vocal about the subject, people sometimes ask me for advice on how they can make their space or organization more genuinely welcoming to trans women. Sometimes I'd offer suggestions that would pretty much apply to being a good ally to any minority or marginalized group: Educate yourself about trans women's issues, call out transphobic and trans-misogynistic attitudes in your community, allow trans women to have more than just a token voice in the space, don't project your assumptions onto us, listen to what we have to say about our own lives and perspectives even if it differs from yours, and so on. Of course, these are all helpful suggestions, but the more that I thought about it, the more I've come to realize that they don't quite get to the root of the problem. So lately

3. "Third-wave" feminisms refers to several strands of feminism that arose in the 1980s and 1990s, and which, in different ways, challenged beliefs that were prevalent during second-wave feminism.

4. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*.

5. Serano, *Whipping Girl*.

6. Gender Public Advocacy Coalition, "50 Under 30: Masculinity and the War on America's Youth, A Human Rights Report" (2006); Jaime M. Grant, Lisa A. Mortet, Justin Tanis, Jack Harrison, Jody L. Herman, and Mara Keisling, *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey* (Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011).

7. Serano, *Whipping Girl*.

8. Daisy Hernandez, "Becoming a Black Man," *ColorLines*, January 7, 2008, (http://colorlines.com/archives/2008/01/becoming_a_black_man.html); Chandra Thomas-Whitfield, "A Transgender Man of Color Shares his Story," *Juvenile Justice Information Exchange*, July 15, 2011 (<http://jjiie.org/transgender-man-of-color-shares-his-story>); Kortney Ryan Ziegler, "Uses of Black Trans Male Anger," *Huffington Post Gay Voices*, April 12, 2013 (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kortney-ryan-ziegler-phd/uses-of-black-trans-male-anger_b_3065450.html).

9. See Chapter 1, Note 3.

10. The phrase "oppression Olympics" refers to the tendency of people to argue that one group of people (typically a group they themselves belong to) is "more oppressed" than some other marginalized group, rather than acknowledging that both groups face different yet equally legitimate forms of marginalization, and that some people exist at the intersection of the two.

6 - Reclaiming Femininity

1. Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 319-343.

2. Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire*, 79; Morgan, *Going Too Far*, 180.

3. More information about *FtF: Female to Femme* can be found at www.imdb.com/title/tt0443515.

4. This chapter is actually a revised version of the keynote talk that I presented at Femme 2008.

5. Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 345-362.

6. Joan Nestle, "The Femme Question," in Joan Nestle (ed.), *The Persistent Desire: A Butch Femme Reader*, (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1992), 138-146. The specific "femme question" that I am referring to here (and one that Nestle discusses in her piece) is the tendency of both the straight mainstream, as well lesbian and feminist

communities, to construct the existence of femmes as a problem, and to project disparaging ulterior motives onto femmes.

7 - Three Strikes and I'm Out

1. For the record, some trans people experience shifts in their sexual orientation post-transition, whereas many trans people do not. By posing these questions, I am by no means suggesting that all trans people experience or react to our transitions in the same way, or that hormone therapy or social transition has some causal effect on sexual orientation that holds true for all people. Everybody's different.

2. I discuss this hardcore, hypersexualization of trans female/feminine folks (and why I think it happens) in Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 253-271.

8 - Dating

1. The Craigslist personal ad category "w4w" refers to "women seeking women."

2. This problem is so pervasive that (subsequent to my writing this piece in 2010), Drew DeVeaux coined the phrase "the cotton ceiling" to describe how many cis queer women who are fine with trans women in their communities nevertheless draw the line when it comes to dating or being sexual with us.

3. The word "squick" is used in BDSM communities to convey that you feel personally disturbed or grossed out by a particular act (usually a sexual one), yet recognize that others may find it legitimately enjoyable.

9 - Bisexuality and Binaries Revisited

1. Julia Serano, "Bisexuality does not reinforce the gender binary," October 10, 2010, *The Scavenger* (www.thescavenger.net/glb/bisexuality-does-not-reinforce-the-gender-binary-39675-467.html).

2. Shiri Eisner, "Words, binary and biphobia, or: why 'bi' is binary but 'FTM' is not." February 22, 2011, *Bi radical* (<http://radicalbi.wordpress.com/2011/02/22/words-binary-and-biphobia-or-why-bi-is-binary-but-ftm-is-not>). The contents of this post have been republished in Shiri Eisner, *Bi: Notes for a Bisexual Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2013).

3. Sexologist Alfred Kinsey developed this numeric scale to describe people's sexual orientations as being on a continuum, where a 0 denotes exclusive heterosexuality, and 6 denotes exclusive homosexuality. According to this scheme, anyone who scores between 0 and 6 would be considered (at least a little bit) bisexual/BMNOPPO.

4. I personally first saw the term *monosexual* in Loraine Hutchins and Lani Kaahumanu (eds.), *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1991). And I was introduced to *monosexism* upon reading Jonathan Alexander

and Karen Yescavage (eds.), *Bisexuality and Transgenderism: InterSEXions of the Others* (Binghamton, NY: Harrington Park Press, 2003); and Clare Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces: Geography of Sexuality and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

5. San Francisco Human Rights Commission, "Bisexual Invisibility: Impacts and Recommendations" (March 2011). See also Eisner, *Bi: Notes for a Bisexual Revolution*, 59-93; Massachusetts Department of Public Health, "The Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Persons in Massachusetts" (July 2009).

6. Serano, *Whipping Girl*.

7. Serano, "Whipping Girl FAQ on cissexual, cisgender, and cis privilege."

8. Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 102-106. I also make a similar case in this book, specifically Chapter 13, "Homogenizing Versus Holistic Views of Gender and Sexuality."

9. Serano, "Bisexuality does not reinforce the gender binary."

10. Eisner, "Words, binary and biphobia, or: why 'bi' is binary but 'FTM' is not."

11. Alexander and Yescavage (eds.), *Bisexuality and Transgenderism: InterSEXions of the Others*.

12. Subversivism is the assumption that genders and sexualities that are deemed subversive or transgressive are inherently superior to those that are more conventional. While this form of sexism is not prevalent in mainstream culture, it does proliferate in feminist and queer circles. Asexophobia is the assumption that people who do not experience sexual attraction (i.e., asexuals) are less legitimate than people who do.

13. Jillian Todd Weiss, "GL vs. BT: The Archaeology of Biphobia and Transphobia Within the U.S. Gay and Lesbian Community," in Alexander and Yescavage (eds.), *Bisexuality and Transgenderism: InterSEXions of the Others*, 25-55.

14. As mentioned in Chapter 8, note 2, Drew DeVaux coined the phrase "the cotton ceiling." It has since garnered a lot of controversy, especially on the Internet, where some cis radical feminists who hold vehemently anti-trans views misinterpret it to portray trans women as potential rapists. See Tobi Hill-Meyer, "Ceiling Metaphors Are Used For Systemic Change" (<http://tobitastic.tumblr.com/post/19916145506/ceiling-metaphors-are-used-for-systemic-change>) and Natalie Reed, "Caught Up In Cotton," April 4, 2012 (<http://freethoughtblogs.com/nataliereed/2012/04/04/caught-up-in-cotton/>).

15. Shirri Eisner, "Words, binary and biphobia, or: why 'bi' is binary but 'FTM' is not."

16. Julia Serano, "Baby Talk," March, 2012 (<http://juliaserano.blogspot.com/2013/03/ab-mentality.html>).

17. Eisner, *Bi: Notes for a Bisexual Revolution*, 235-259.

10 - How to Be an Ally to Trans Women

1. "Gold star lesbian" is queer slang for a lesbian who has never once been sexual with a man. Within certain circles, "gold star" status is associated with being more "pure"

or authentically lesbian than those who have previously had sexual experiences with men. Needless to say, it is a highly monosexist concept.

11 - Performance Piece

1. The notion that "all gender is performance" or "all gender is drag" is frequently attributed to Judith Butler, and specifically to her book *Gender Trouble* (Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999)). However, on numerous occasions, Butler has argued that these catchphrases are gross misinterpretations of what she was actually trying to say; see *Gender Trouble*, xxi-xxiv; Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 125-126; "Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler," *Radiical Philosophy*, Vol. 67, Summer 1994, 32-39; see also Sara Salih, *Judith Butler* (London: Routledge, 2002), 62-71.

2. The slogans "all gender is performance" and "all gender is drag" are addressed in the previous note. "Gender is just a construct" is another common saying in feminist and queer circles—I debunk it more thoroughly in Chapters 12 and 13.

3. In his television show *The Colbert Report*, Stephen Colbert plays a fictional right-wing political pundit. Satirizing conservatives who insist that racism no longer exists in America, or that we are now living in a "post-racism" world, Stephen's character regularly claims that he doesn't see race, and that "People tell me I'm white, and I believe them..."

4. Ze and hir are gender-neutral pronouns favored by many genderqueer people as substitutes for she/he and her/him, respectively. I have nothing against ze and hir *per se*, but I do object to people using them nonconsensually to describe me (I prefer she/her). Indeed, people only seem to use ze/hir when discussing trans people, but never cis people—a tendency that I find to be cissexist.

12 - The Perversion of "The Personal Is Political"

1. A non-comprehensive list of examples: Alexander and Yescavage (eds.), *Bisexuality and Transgenderism*; Pavan Anara, "Feminism: still excluding working class women?" *The F-Word*, March 7, 2012 (www.thefword.org.uk/features/2012/03/feminism_still_); Califia, *Sex Changes*, 86-162; hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?*; bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984); Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 203-241; Sharin N. Elkholy, "Feminism and Race in the United States," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (www.iep.utm.edu/fem-race/); Hurchins and Kaahumanu (eds.), *Bi Any Other Name*; Emi Koyama, "Whose Feminism is it Anyway? The Unspoken Racism of the Trans Inclusion Debate," in Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 698-705; Lorde, *Sister Outsider*; Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Viviane Namaste, *Sex Change, Social Change: Reflections on Identity, Institutions, and Imperialism* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2005); Nestle (ed.), *The Persistent Desire*; Edward