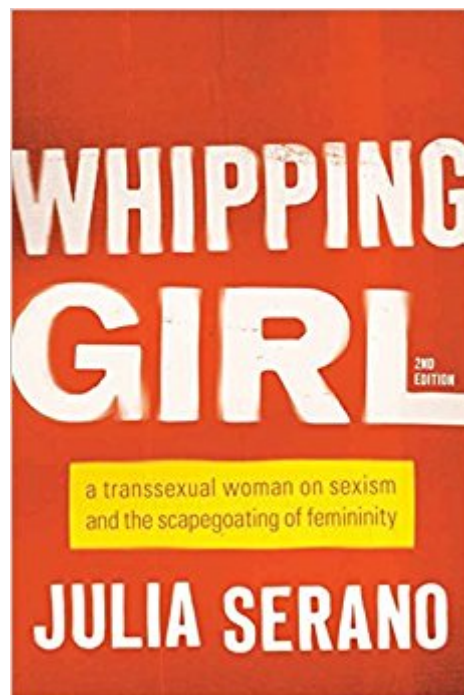




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# Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman On Sexism And The Scapegoating Of Femininity



## Synopsis

In the updated second edition of *Whipping Girl*, Julia Serano, a transsexual woman whose supremely intelligent writing reflects her diverse background as a lesbian transgender activist and professional biologist, shares her powerful experiences and observations—both pre- and post-transition—to reveal the ways in which fear, suspicion, and dismissiveness toward femininity shape our societal attitudes toward trans women, as well as gender and sexuality as a whole. Serano's well-honed arguments stem from her ability to bridge the gap between the often-disparate biological and social perspectives on gender. In this provocative manifesto, she exposes how deep-rooted the cultural belief is that femininity is frivolous, weak, and passive, and how this “feminine weakness” exists only to attract and appease male desire. In addition to debunking popular misconceptions about transsexuality, Serano makes the case that today's feminists and transgender activists must work to embrace and empower femininity in all of its wondrous forms.

## Book Information

Paperback: 424 pages

Publisher: Seal Press; 2nd ed. edition (March 8, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1580056229

ISBN-13: 978-1580056229

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.2 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 95 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #30,527 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #14 in Books > Gay & Lesbian > Nonfiction > Transgender #32 in Books > Gay & Lesbian > Nonfiction > LGBT Studies #54 in Books > Medical Books > Psychology > Sexuality

## Customer Reviews

With her first full-length book, biologist, writer and musician Serano positions herself as a Betty Friedan of the transsexual community. Making a case that trans discrimination is steeped in sexism and that trans activism is a feminist movement, Serano delivers a series of articulate, compelling and provocative essays that unmask many of the misconceptions surrounding transsexualism, gender and feminism. Where most books on the topic focus either on first-person accounts or clinical observations, Serano approaches her topic from multiple angles. Tempering her own

experience as a transsexual woman with psychological documentation, historical research and sociological data, she explores the debate on biology versus socialization; the media's "lurid," "superficial" and "contrived" depictions of trans women; the psychology of transitioning; "boygasms" versus "girlgasms"

"Julia Serano is the wise, acerbic brain at the center of the transgender movement. The original edition of *Whipping Girl* forever connected trans theory to feminism and queer studies; this new edition updates that work as well as providing a compelling new preface that reflects the movement's enormous progress as well as the progress that remains to be made. Julia Serano is more than a brilliant writer and theorist; she's also a tremendously compassionate, humane woman whose work has enlarged the lives of all her readers. Urgent, contentious, generous, and brilliant." —Jennifer Finney Boylan, Author of *She's Not There*, and Writer in Residence at Barnard College of Columbia University

Julia Serano did not invent transfeminism, but she's done more to promote its ideas and demonstrate its necessity than any other writer. Her analysis of the misogyny at the root of transphobia is vital. This book should be taught in every introduction to gender and women's studies class in the country; read it, teach it, learn from it, and act on it." —Susan Stryker, author of *Transgender History* and Director, University of Arizona Institute for LGBT Studies

—Praise for the first edition: "Seminal." —Variety

Advance praise for the second edition of *Whipping Girl*: "It's official: *Whipping Girl* is a 21st century feminist classic. It's also a gift to a culture (still) struggling to face its own misogyny. Serano's writing is clear, gracious, and incredibly illuminating." —Jennifer Baumgardner

"Serano's thinking continues to challenge and delight." —*Whipping Girl* is a foundational text that will prove to be timeless." —Jessica Valenti

"Having only just come out as Transgender, I was taken by a friend to a bookstore and told to buy *Whipping Girl* immediately. As I read, the revelation dawned on me that experiencing my gender could be full of self-empowerment and liberation as opposed to the fear and shame I had already spent a lifetime living with. Not only was this book a light in the dark for someone jumping head-first into transition, it also served as an essential tool to pass on to family and friends to help them to better understand what it means to be Trans. I'm forever thankful for this book and its author." —Laura Jane Grace

"Serano takes to task those who categorize 'femininity' as artificial rather than a natural gender expression. Her convincing analysis and personal revelations challenge us to recognize our own sexist notions." —Ms. Magazine

"Julia Serano offers a perspective sorely needed, but up until now rarely heard." —Bitch Magazine

"An absorbing

and essential achievement in both theory and biography. — Washington City Paper "Whipping Girl critiques media depictions of trans people, dismantles science's longtime characterization of transsexuality as pathology, and offers a whip-smart vision of a world that celebrates sexual difference. — AlterNet" Julia Serano is a careful and astute critic of the ways that trans women have been stereotyped and dismissed in popular culture, feminism, and psychology, and she repeatedly surprised me with her razor-sharp observations of the pervasive hatred of trans women and all differently gendered people. This is an important text for gender studies classes, as well as for therapists, journalists, and anybody who'd like to keep updated as a sex radical. — Patrick Califia, author of Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism

I wish I had read this book 10 years ago. Nothing I've ever read has come even close to Whipping Girl in its articulation of how I feel about my sex/gender. It's like everything I've always known to be true painted to make the most beautiful painting in the world. Julia Serano is so on point all the time. This is the book I'm going to recommend to friends and family or anyone who truly wants to understand the transsexual/transgender experience and who really wants to be an "ally". I also think this book should be required reading in academic settings. Definitely anyone who considers themselves a feminist should also read.

Julia Serano's Whipping Girl details the author's perspectives on gender. Serano describes her journey from awkward teenage boy, through crossdresser, and through her transition to a transgender woman. She discusses what gender means to her personally and her experiences in society. She discusses gender roles, myths about trans people, and the role of trans people in the feminist movement. WHY THIS BOOK? Transgender lives are political. 2016 saw the passage of North Carolina's HB2, the "bathroom bill"; 2017 started with 5 more states proposing similar legislature. These bills say that individuals born with male genitalia endanger people in the women's restroom. I never believed that, but discussions of trans people made me realize how little I knew. With Whipping Girl, I sought the transgender story. THE GOOD Whipping Girl is a fabulous book. I read Whipping Girl because I wanted to better understand life as a trans person, but it makes so many great points about gender for the rest of us. Part of the strength of Serano's narrative is the fact that she has lived on both sides of our gender divide. Sometimes the success of Jewish entertainers has been attributed to their ability to be both insiders and outsiders; perhaps

transgender women like Serano have an analogous experience with womanhood. I can't possibly cover all the things I liked about this book. It's the rare book that makes me consider my own life differently. Serano asserts the societal belief: most believe that men and women are equal, but many do not believe that masculinity and femininity are equal. We consider masculinity strong, natural, and unpretentious. Because masculine and feminine are opposites, we believe femininity to be weak, artificial, and pretentious. It's a restatement of familiar arguments; masculine women are penalized for failing to fit the model of a woman, and feminine women are penalized for being feminine. I realized that I hold some of these beliefs. I have congratulated myself for rarely wearing make-up; I have sneered at female friends that dress up. I heard these messages growing up a lot. They are rooted in seeing femininity as a failing. Serano describes how these societal beliefs complicate gender transition. She describes how mtf transgender people are viewed with suspicion. If masculinity is superior, someone who "trades down" voluntarily must have suspicious motivations. She describes how media shows many more mtf people than ftm. I hadn't noticed, but it is true. Many of the roles with mtf people show them either as succubi seeking to entrap and damage men or as pitiful, funny failures. She cites a bunch of examples that I don't know. My media experiences are with *Orange Is the New Black* and *Transparent*. Hopefully that's a sign of progress in the decade since this book's publication. Serano discusses nature versus nurture. Some believe that men are born masculine and women are born feminine (and thus, gender is nature). Some believe that we only exhibit gendered behaviors due to societal influences (and thus, gender is nurture). Serano argues that women are more likely to be feminine and men more likely to be masculine, but with a distribution of traits. In her model, gender expression is like height; on average, men are taller than women, but many individual women are taller than many individual men. Women, on average, gravitate towards stereotypically feminine behaviors like chattiness, but many individual men are more naturally chatty than many women. Femininity feels natural to most women, and masculinity feels natural to most men, but not all. Serano talks about the process of seeing herself as transgender. Since childhood, she had experienced feelings that she was a girl. She calls it gender dissonance. She experimented with a lot of different gender expressions, eventually leading her to the trans identity. When she started taking hormones, that felt right. She describes it as her brain believing her body to be female. We don't fully understand the relationship between brain and body, but to me, this seems similar to the so called "sixth sense" of proprioception, the awareness of one's body in space. Serano also discusses the

horrifying history of transgender people and medicine. It's full of icky stuff like doctors rating their patients' attractiveness, and seeing society's comfort, rather than their patient's, as the most important outcome of transition. Trans people were forced to leave home and assume a new life to make others comfortable, meaning that they were forced to leave their families and support networks.

Today's bathroom bills fall into that history of putting society's discomfort above the health of an individual. THE BAD The book is a decade old. Although mine is a 2016 second edition, the guts haven't changed much. Whipping Girl is still super informative, but a decade changes much. For example, DSM V was published in 2013; its treatment of transgender issues vary substantially from the DSM IV discussed in the book. The second half of the book discusses trans theory and feminist theory. Some other reviews of the book suggest that she is unfair to the feminist movement; I have no idea. Still, the first part had a real immediacy that the second part didn't. It probably would be well-suited to the classroom, but didn't add much for me as a reader just wanting to understand a different perspective better. OVERALL Whipping Girl is an essential read if you want to understand trans people better. It's also a great dissection of gender in society. I came away from the book wishing that people could be more supportive of one another. Trans people aren't bathroom predators, they're people in a tough spot. We are obsessed with men being men and women being women, and we mostly don't even notice. Trans people challenge that obsession, and we see that some people would rather punish others than question their assumptions.

Julia seems to pour every fiber of her being into this book. It can be somewhat "heady" at times. Her point of view is interesting, she makes some great observations about feminism, gender & their roles in society. There is nothing too big for her to tackle in this book. It is not for beginners or the faint of heart as it elucidates some very controversial & complex topics. As the title says, I think Julia amply covers the subject in depth and detail. When I finished the book I had to get a bucket of ice water and stick my head in it to shrink my brain back down. It is well written and will keep your attention. Transgendered people can sometimes be maligned and misunderstood, Ms. Serano puts it into perspective taking into account all aspect of feminism and the correlation of this to trans. She shows that trans women are "real women".

This is a book that has really changed me. Other reviewers have remarked on Serano's specific

discussions, so I'll be more general and personal. I am an 80-year-old lesbian feminist and I had a "liberal"/"accepting" attitude towards transgender/transsexuality. "Whipping Girl" rearranged my head and heart and sexual perspectives. (I now see gender/sexuality as immensely more fluid, at the same time that Serano helped me understand that our "intrinsic inclinations" of gender--our sense of who we are as gendered beings, unconscious in most of us, acutely dissonant in others--are essential aspects of our being quite apart from how we wish to exercise our sexuality. And I now see the issue of trans oppression as much more than how we should relate to a sexual minority--that there is a great deal to learn about all human gendering and sexism from an understanding of trans experience.) Serano responded with meticulous care and penetrating analysis to every media-induced or reflexly stereotypical assumption I had about trans experience. (I didn't realize I had so many!) She doesn't guilt-trip--instead she helped me to see all the elements in my world that--of course--prevent almost all of us from "getting it" about transgender/transsexuality. Rather than challenging my feminist perspective, her insights deepened it as she shows how powerful a factor sexism plays in transgender oppression. Serano writes with admirable clarity--still, even though I found an important insight on every page, "Whipping Girl" is undeniably a dense book to read through, and so it will not be as easily accessible as one would wish. Other books will be able to mine this one for a wider audience. (Alas, the title and cover--in-your-face ugly and suggesting S&M more than trans experience--would have turned me off if a trusted friend hadn't handed it to me. I would have missed a brilliant, powerful and important book.)

Serano provides a first-person insight into what it entails to transition from cis-M to trans-F. She engages in the contentious issues relating to sex/gender and transition. Takes up the TERF (Trans Exclusive Radical Feminist) issues -- that "Trans women are not women." Serano addresses sexual feelings and being trans. This is a sensitive area and sheds light on questions not generally allowed in discussions of what it means in terms of sexual orientation/behavior to be trans.

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