

Book Review

INCLUSIVE FEMINIST ACTIVISM? YES, PLEASE!

by Lachrista Greco

Julia Serano, *EXCLUDED: MAKING FEMINIST AND QUEER MOVEMENTS MORE INCLUSIVE*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2013. 336p. pap., \$17.00, ISBN 978-1580055048.

Mainstream feminism has tended, historically, to exclude people of color and trans folk. Julia Serano's latest book asks why that is, particularly in the case of trans- and queer-identifying individuals. Serano seeks to answer two questions: (1) "Why do feminist and queer movements, which would so clearly benefit from strength in numbers, always seem to exclude certain people who are committed to our

overall goal of challenging sexism?" and (2) "[I]s there a way to eliminate, or at least mitigate, our tendency toward excluding people simply because they are different from us?" (p. 111).

Excluded is divided into two parts: first, a collection of essays chronicling instances of sexism-based exclusion within feminism and queer activism (often from Serano's personal experience), and then Serano's proposed solu-

tions to this exclusion.

Serano's inclusive version of feminism is a breath of fresh air. She advocates a *holistic* approach to feminist and queer movements, which she described in an interview with *Persephone Magazine* in 2013:

The holistic approach to feminism I forward is meant to be a contextual way of challeng-

ing sexism and marginalization, one that accommodates the fact that we all have different bodies, desires, experiences, and perspectives. Rather than flat-out condemning certain ways of being, it focuses more on challenging gender entitlement — when we non-consensually project our own assumptions, expectations, meanings, value judgments, and opinions about gender and sexuality onto other people.¹

Serano differentiates between a holistic and a *fixed* approach to feminist and queer activism, delving into the danger that a fixed approach poses for a movement. She contends that the primary problem with the fixed approach is that the activists fail to consider the double standards that remain outside of their personal scope, and that this has resulted in a multitude of recurring problems within the feminist movement. One such problem is that many marginalized individuals' experiences are theorized out of the movement. Serano calls on feminist and queer activists to “be on the lookout for novel, unarticulated, and underappreciated forms of sexism and marginalization,” and insists that feminist “theories and activism should be flexible enough to acclimate to these newer double standards” (pp. 218–219).

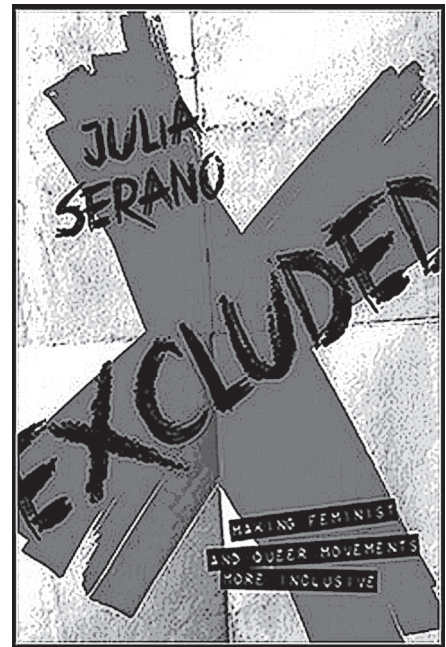
What does a holistic approach to feminist activism look like? It accommodates diversity, Serano says, rather than favoring a particular individual and/or their lived experience. It also recognizes many and varied double standards. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a holistic approach creates new strategies that confront *all* forms of marginalization and sexism, instead of just those we might personally experience.

In the last chapter, Serano lets activists know how we can help: “we must learn to accept the many gray areas that come with interacting with a heterogeneous group of individuals... As activists, we must allow for multiple (and sometimes seemingly contradictory) possibilities” (p. 284). After all, if we are seriously committed to ending

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sexism and marginalization, she asks, then shouldn't we be just as committed to ending these oppressions in our own movement and community? Let that question sink in; then commit to doing something about it.

Excluded: Making Feminist and Queer Movements More Inclusive is a much-needed addition to the growing canon of literature on feminist activism, and is the only book I'm aware of, so far, that addresses this activism in an intersectional, inclusive framework.



Note

1. “Persephone Pioneers: Welcome Back, Julia Serano!” <http://persephonemagazine.com/2013/10/persephone-pioneers-welcome-back-julia-serano/>.

[Lachrista Greco is the founder of the activist community *Guerrilla Feminism*, the author of *Olive Grrrls: Italian North American Women & the Search for Identity*, and the publications associate in the University of Wisconsin Office of the Gender & Women's Studies Librarian.]

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