

Cissexism & Trans Women's Denial of Subjectivity

By Carla Bullock, Dr. Johanna Luttrell, and The Department of Philosophy

UNIVERSITY of
HOUSTON

Introduction: In Martha Nussbaum's *Objectivity*, one way a woman experiences objectivity is through *The Denial of Subjectivity*. I theorize that trans women experience *Denial of Subjectivity* uniquely, oppressed by both men and cis women.

Discoveries: The *Denial of Subjectivity* is a theory defined by the mistreatment of women. It is "the treatment of a person as something whose experiences and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account." When defined by Nussbaum, her theory considers the dynamic between men and women in a patriarchal society. However, combining Nussbaum's theory with a lens of intersectionality, and I explore the mistreatment of trans women at the hands of men and cis women. Patriarchy is not only upheld by men, but by the cis women who benefit from it. I find that men objectify all women through *Denial of Subjectivity*, however trans women will experience *Denial of Subjectivity* through how men interpret their identity. The interpretation of a trans women's identity through a male lense is often skewed by sexualization of trans women's bodies, media portrayals of trans women, which is often stereotyped by the mainstream patriarchal society. However, cis women, which are also offended by the *Denial of Subjectivity* at the hands of men, will also oppress trans women through this "subject/object" dynamic. Rather than use sexualization as the driving force of *Denial of Subjectivity*, cis women deny the identities of trans women. Cis women will protect their identities as "women" because of the movement they have built off their definition. At the hands of cis women, trans women are denied subjectivity through the oppression of identity, rather than oppression through sexuality. Cis women live through *conditional cissexual privilege*, which drives the division of what is considered the "woman".

Methodology: Since *Trans Philosophy* is a relatively new field within philosophy, understanding the introductory pieces were vital to my research.

- "What is Trans Philosophy" by Talia Mae Bettcher and "Transgender Liberation" by Leslie Feinberg were two introductory pieces which taught me the writing and brief history on the trans community.
- Talia Mae Bettcher's "Trans Women & The Meaning of Women" was also vital to the understanding of how the noun "women" is defined between trans subcultures and mainstream society.
- "Whipping Girl" by Julia Serano is a memoir by a trans woman which I applaud for being too ahead of our time. Serano gave me the language to properly articulate the specific prejudices that cis women have against trans women, even if those cis women may not be consciously aware.

Acknowledgements: I would like to first thank The University of Houston's Mellon Scholar Scholarship for supporting my research! Thank you for recognizing my academic abilities, Dr. Long, Dr. Bettinger and Paulina Ezquerro. Of course, I would also like to thank my mentor, Dr. Luttrell for being so willing to guide me through my first research project, and to be learning the world of *trans philosophy* alongside me. I would also like to thank my 2021 Mellon Cohort; I have definitely met my lifelong humanities scholars. Honorable mentions: Dr. Quinn, Dr. De Los Reyes, and Dr. Nordmarken. Thank you for being so patient with me as I inquired your academic knowledge through many emails and zoom calls!

Bibliography:

- Bettcher, Talia Mae (2013). "Trans Women and The Meaning of Women."
- Beauvoir, Simone de (1949). "The Second Sex."
- Nussbaum, Martha (1995). "Objectification."
- Serano, Julia (2007). "Whipping Girl."

