

Engendered: A Treatise Against Gender

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ABSTRACT

As humans, we are enslaved by language. The kind of knowledge we hold is both created and limited by language. Gender is a category socially constructed in language that helps to determine our expression.

Today, however, we are living in a world where the meaning of the words ‘man’ and ‘woman’ in our language are far more blurred than they used to be. Gender and sex are no longer considered binary structures by many and this presents interesting philosophical discussions. In fact one might even say there are *1,000's of tiny sexes* (or genders)¹. So with the topic of gender (and sex) becoming a gray area what would a world completely devoid of gender terms look like? Are we constraining individuals by placing them within such a category as gender or are we taking something significant from them if we were to remove this label? Would we provide empowerment to oppressed genders by removing such labels or simply put them at further risk of domination by the oppressors?

In this thesis I would like to argue that the removal of gender terms would create more accurate self-identity by allowing for a broader spectrum of diversity and, as a result, further equity. Due to the strong bond between language and culture, my theory is that by slowly tweaking our language over time, while intermediately allowing for the resulting cultural changes, until gender terms are removed from our everyday lives we could develop a culture that has *no ability to discriminate* between what we currently consider different genders.

¹ Colebrook, 2004, p189.

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CHAPTER ONE

Definitions and Purpose

Today we are living in a world where the meaning of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ are far more blurred than they used to be. Gender and sex are no longer considered binary structures by many and this presents interesting philosophical discussions. In fact one might even say there are *1,000's of tiny sexes* (or genders) (Colebrook, 2004, p189).

Let's begin the exploration of our already non binary system with the question of biological sex as defined by chromosome pairs (this is the genotype and not the same as biological sex in terms of sex organs which is the phenotype). XY with 46 chromosomes is of course what we consider the most common male form and XX with 46 chromosomes the most common female form. However, according to research from the World Health Organization (WHO) a few per thousand individuals are born with alternative chromosome patterns:

Some individuals are born with only one sex chromosome resulting in either an X or a Y with only 45 chromosomes. Others are born with three *or more* sex chromosomes for example XXX, XYY, or XXY which result in 47 chromosomes. These examples all show genotypic differences and technically present different sexes, some fertile and others not. For example 45X has been labeled Turner syndrome and while they do not develop male genitalia they also don't have “prominent female secondary sexual characteristics” and are sterile. Meanwhile 47XXX individuals develop as fertile females. There are also phenotypic (appearance) differences to consider at birth which depend somewhat on the genotype. Typically the Y chromosome is dominant and therefore any individual with a Y chromosome (even if they were 49XXXXY as WHO provides as an example) would develop phenotypically as male biology because the Y chromosome influences testes development in the embryonic stage. However, even this is not

always accurate. If the testosterone either does not kick in correctly or the tissues of the individual do not accept the testosterone then the individual may be genetically male but phenotype female. This can happen even in cases of our typical 46XY individual and is called androgen insensitivity syndrome. Similarly there are cases where the individual may be genetically female but testosterone levels are high and therefore they develop a male phenotype. Other variations include individuals with both male and female genitalia (WHO).

Though we may not be aware of it because we cannot see the chromosomes when we look at a person it is likely that we have all interacted with numerous individuals who are not the typical 46XY or 46XX. WHO suggests it does not have complete data and has not shared all variations but below are some that WHO listed with how frequently they occur:

General Sex Chromosome Abnormalities

Aneuploidy² occurs in 5% of ALL pregnancies (5:100)

Sex Chromosome Aneuploidy (1:400)

Turner Syndrome³ (1:3000 live births)

XXX Females⁴ (1:1000 females)

Klinefelter⁵ Syndrome (1:600 males)

XYY Males⁶ (1:1000 males)

²“The condition of having less than (monosomy) or more than (polysomy) the normal diploid number of chromosomes.” World Health Organization (WHO)

³“Monosomy X (45X) occurs in individuals that have one X chromosome, no Y chromosome, and are phenotypically female. Affected individuals experience abnormal growth patterns, are short in stature, generally lack prominent female secondary sexual characteristics and are sterile.” WHO

⁴“Women with three X chromosomes (47XXX) experience normal development of sexual traits and are fertile. Affected individuals are usually taller than average and have slender builds.” WHO

⁵“Males with Klinefelter syndrome carry two or more X chromosomes which results in abnormal development of the testis, leading to hypogonadism and infertility. Affected individuals are often tall and produce relatively small amounts of testosterone. As a result of this hormone imbalance, affected males have incompletely developed secondary male sex characteristics.” WHO

⁶“Men inheriting an additional Y chromosome are usually taller than average and are prone to acne because they produce higher than average levels of testosterone. Affected males are typically fertile and many are unaware that they have a chromosomal abnormality.” WHO

Hermaphroditism⁷ (no published estimates)

Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia⁸ (1:5000)

Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome⁹ (no data presented)

These are not insignificant numbers.

Furthermore, all we have discussed thus far are genotypes and phenotypes related to biological sexes. We have not even begun to discuss gender identity (commonly defined as a sense of one's own gender) and gender expression (how a person expresses gender through behavior, appearance, personality etc. and not necessarily perfectly aligned with gender identity). This is where it gets really tricky. There are a lot of terms thrown around (e.g., cisgender, trans, transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, androgyny, gender neutral, non-binary, gender non-conforming, gender variant, gender fluid, pangender, drag king, drag queen, crossdressers etc.) and all of these mean different things, and most of them don't have commonly agreed upon definitions. Due to so many non-agreed upon definitions I am going to share with you just a few different types of experiences that individuals may have that are not considered to fall into the gender binary (46XY male genotype or 46XX female phenotype) while also identifying as and expressing the corresponding gender. My examples, however, should not be taken in any way to suggest a complete list but rather as the "tip of the iceberg," as it were, to show the possibility of just how many different variations there can be from our standard understanding.

So let's begin with an individual that does not have a gender identity that matches their biological phenotype (we are going to avoid genotypes in these examples because a lot of individuals do not know their genotype until medical testing or they find themselves infertile etc.). One example of this could be an individual that identifies as a woman but has a male body. The gender identity, as mentioned above, does not have to match up with gender expression so

⁷“True' hermaphroditism is a genetic condition in which affected individuals have both mature ovarian and testicular tissue.” WHO

⁸“Inherited autosomal recessive condition that can affect both boys and girls. It is the most common cause of intersexuality in females with 46XX, where untreated girls develop an outwardly male appearance. This disorder, also called adrenogenital syndrome (AGS), results from a genetically caused deficiency of cortisol, a steroid hormone produced by the adrenal cortex.” WHO

⁹“Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS) is an X-linked recessive disorder in which affected individuals have external female genitalia and breast development despite being genetically male (46XY). Tissues of affected individuals are unresponsive to male hormones (androgens) yet respond to estrogens.” WHO

this individual may express themselves as what is socially construed as a “man” or as a “woman” or something else entirely. But for this example let’s assume their identity matches with their expression and therefore they express themselves as a “woman.” This expression and identity may lead the individual to wanting surgery in order to change their phenotypic biology to match. But it may not. The individual may elect not to have surgery for a variety of different reasons ranging from cost to simply being satisfied in their body. Or the individual may not feel right with particular parts of their anatomy and have those parts changed but still feel comfortable with other parts.

There are also individuals who portray themselves as one gender for parts of their lives and for a separate part of their lives portray themselves as a different gender. This could happen for a number of reasons for example they could be protecting themselves for violence and thus in a public part of their lives portraying themselves as what is socially acceptable in that community or another example is they could simply they could legitimately enjoy and feel comfortable with both aspects. Some individuals may merely take the time to dress themselves in the attire socially deemed a different gender while others may completely change their voice, movements, personality, etc. when portraying themselves as another gender. They may maintain that they are the same person or they may feel as though this is another identity altogether that they are expressing.

There are individuals who do not identify with a particular gender. As mentioned before, they may express in the same way as their identification or not. Their not identifying with a particular gender may mean that they identify with more than one gender, with none, or find themselves somewhere else on the spectrum other than the binaries. Similarly, there are individuals who do identify as a particular gender but don’t express a particular gender. They may express as no gender, more than one gender, or somewhere else on the spectrum other than the binaries. Another option would be similar situations to the above but where the gender identity and expression match. Then there are also individuals we simply consider “feminine” men and “masculine” women.

Again the examples I have given are not meant to be all inclusive, however, even with how few were providing I think they show what a wide and numerous variety is out there. So with the topic of gender (and sex) becoming a gray area what would a world completely devoid of gender terms look like? Are we constraining individuals by placing them within such a

category as gender or are we taking something significant from them if we were to remove this label? Would we provide empowerment to oppressed genders by removing such labels or simply put them at further risk of domination by the oppressors? **In this thesis I would like to argue that the removal of gender terms would create more accurate self-identity by allowing for a broader spectrum of diversity and, as a result, further equity.**

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CHAPTER TWO

Introduction to Literature

However, there are many schools of thought that have considered similar ideals and they have done so with mixed perspectives. It has come to the attention of many political theorists that, because of inequalities among the genders, special aid and attention is required in both foreign and domestic policies in order to improve the conditions for oppressed genders. Under current conditions some genders do not have the voice to speak out against the injustices they face. For example, as Hansen explains, the current system is structured to benefit the men in charge and thus also works to silence women (Hansen, 2000, p285). Feminist policies have become an entire sector of interest and explore the ways in which we can engage societies to solve specifically women's issues—which are different than those facing men (i.e., Tickner, 2004). Additionally, specialists are beginning to emerge who look at non-binary gender injustice, though currently their research is not as extensive compared to analysis on injustices done to women.

Some trains of thought say we should ignore the genders. They claim that by stopping our constant highlighting of the differences equality will slowly but surely arise. Though, this thought seems to be less prevalent in the literature I have reviewed as it does not seem to be a particularly moving argument to simply allow things to play out. Even when logical arguments are opposed to some kinds of humanitarian aid it is difficult for the heart to say “we should not provide aid.” The idea however, even among advocates of humanitarian aid in general, is that by focusing on the gender specific aid attention is diverted from larger problems. Political theorist Miriam Ticktin speaks specifically about sexual violence within wars and suggests that one problem with paying so much attention to gender-based violence is that it stops us from

addressing the issue of the violence in general.¹⁰ In fact, what occurs from this type of attention is negative backlash against those who receive specialized aid and further discrimination as they are treated as though they should be particularly wounded and *shamed* for this occurring to them, more so than for any other type of violence (Ticktin, 2011, pp260-261). Furthermore, Ticktin expresses that having a gendered tactic places the focus on women as being in need of protection and therefore creates a vicious cycle of continued inequality for women (Ticktin, 2011, p261; see also Maxwell, 2010, pp109-110).

Another argument that has appeared which points out the difficulty with attention to gender, though it does not offer a solution in any way, concerns the problem of “essential commonality.” This argument says that as we produce categories within language we make assumptions about a common thread that runs through all the things that fit into said category—thus by being called a “woman” for example you are automatically assumed to have some fundamental commonalities that all women share (Smith, 2005, see also Colebrook, 2004, pp12-14, 150). However, the problem with this category, i.e., “woman”, unlike perhaps the category of a profession for example, is that the individual does not necessarily get to choose being placed into that category by others. Ultimately, because of the lack of choice, this removes the individuality of the Self.

On this note I would like to point out that we do make these categorizations about *all* things. I do not argue in this paper that categorizations as a whole are inherently “bad”. It is clear that categorizations help us to get through our daily lives efficiently—for example spending an inordinate amount of time describing every aspect of a particular tree, especially if in the context of the conversation the particularity of the tree is irrelevant, is simply a waste of time. Instead we would apply the broader category of “tree” to quickly get the job done and the thought across. However, I do assert that, in the case of our fellow humans, taking the time to identify them as individuals rather than assuming traits based on the category of gender is a socially and ethically valuable endeavor. My assertion of this as socially and ethically valuable is of course based upon

¹⁰ The idea is basically that by spending our energy and efforts on gender specific aid—for example medical aid to rape victims in war (which primarily becomes aid for women due to a lack of men coming forward about being raped and the aid required for abortion for female victims)—we miss the big picture. So we spend money to help rape victims for example but fail to attend to the many other violences and grievances that occur with the war in general.

my cultural beliefs in the importance of all person's individuality and autonomy. As such, this argument may not apply to those who do not value these as important premises.

Assuming these premises, though, the struggle we would face here in removing attention to gender is as Linda Alcoff puts it:

If gender is simply a social construct, the need and even possibility of feminist politics becomes problematic. What can we demand in the name of women if 'women' do not exist and demands in their name simply reinforce the myth that they do? How can we speak out against sexism as detrimental to the interests of women if the category is a fiction? How can we demand legal abortions, adequate child care, or wages based on comparable worth without invoking a concept of 'woman'?

(Quoted and explained in Code, 1991, p82 and Beckman, 1994, p82 from Alcoff).

Ultimately she is asking a question about how to demand equity. If women are already treated with less equity and we were to remove attention to gender (in the hopes of creating equal treatment by not making such categories) how would we address the issues of inequity in relation to "her" that *already* exist when we cannot point them out by use of a term to describe "her"? This is a paradox, of course, for, as Alcoff points out, this attention to fixing "her" inequities keeps us in the mode of dividing the genders and therefore perpetuating said inequities.

Moving our focus back to Ticktin's theory, we can look at another theorist, Caitlin Maxwell, who agrees to some extent but claims that it is not that providing gender specific aid to women is bad *per se*. Rather, *only* providing gender specific aid to women is bad because this leaves them as objects needing protection. Maxwell's solution instead calls for the inclusion of women in policy making procedures to provide empowerment (Maxwell, 2010, pp109-110). This is echoed in a call for even greater division of the genders in order to pursue equity and individuality. The hope is that, with the creation of a more prominent feminine "language" and discourse, women would no longer have to speak the "language" of men¹¹ (Smith 2005, see also

¹¹ Typically what is referenced by "language of men" in feminist works is the idea that our language favors men in the sense that most of the commonly used words and phrases comes from the typical experience of a man whereas we seem to have had to add on additional words to describe specifically woman related activities. There is also a lot of discussion, which I will provide examples on later in the paper, of the comparatively low number of derogatory terms used for men compared to the very high number used for women. Other commentary I have seen on this has to do with even a historical pattern of objects and actions being masculine terms if

Code, 1991, p59). Working with an understanding that language determines the knowledge we may have and therefore determines a lifestyle or worldview (Gadamer, 2013, p459, see also pp455-472) The idea is to create more language (or at least reclaim language) to help describe the trials of women and allow them to “speak” as equally valuable human beings rather than as only “lesser men” (Smith, 2005). (This concept could be similarly applied to other oppressed genders.) The overall goal of this is to project a stronger identity by emphasizing the unique qualities of the woman. Thus leading us hopefully to a position where we can reduce Hansen’s concerns in international human rights (i.e., rampant rates of the rape of women, high death rates of women in arranged marriages, unequal education opportunities, unequal pay, unequal political representation, and so on).

An important follow-up question about this idea, however, is whether gender terms increase or decrease diversity and self-consciousness among individuals. The reason I pose this question is because the potential for diversity among self-understanding is important in ensuring that individuals are able to fully express themselves and therefore come to the full potential they have as individuals. My feeling according to the proposition above is that diversity among individuals would actually be reduced during the process of trying to emphasize what a woman is even though it would be done in a positive light. However, pushback that supporters of more emphasis on the woman would pose to those in favor of removing emphasis on gender would be the question of whether removing gender emphasis would equate to removing something vital from an individual’s identity (and therefore reducing their ability to express themselves). The opposing ideas stand as follows: the gendered terms allow for a knowledgeable exploration of a particular aspect of the Self (rather than all individuals being streamlined into masculine discourse) versus the notion that gender terms create an “essential commonality” which hinders the expression of the many unique and individual experiences of persons within a particular gender category.

If we had to choose between a society that creates more gender discourse or living in the current state of inequity, then surely it is easy to see that opting to give a voice to those that do not have one is the better of the two options. What I am arguing for here is not the dismissal of attention to a particular gender nor just the removal of attention to gender in general; instead I

they are active (and/or dominant) forces while those that are considered to be passive (and/or submissive) are considered feminine terms.

call for a complete overhaul of the system such that it will no longer create a need for special attention to oppressed genders. I want to remove gender terms and their accompanying essential imagery, thereby opening a space for individuals to find their true Selves. This will not, of course, be something to occur overnight as it would not be possible for individuals in our current society to suddenly switch to no gender terms and still function well. The goal is therefore to transition into such a mindset where gender terms become unnecessary and irrelevant in the common experience (no drastic book burnings from our historical documents needed!). **Due to the strong bond between language and culture, my theory is that by slowly tweaking our language over time, while intermediately allowing for the resulting cultural changes, until gender terms are removed from our everyday lives we could develop a culture that has *no ability to discriminate* between what we currently consider different genders.** Unfortunately, this is a view that will likely receive additional skepticism from at least some readers who, having lived their entire lives surrounded by gender terms, find it difficult to imagine cleansing society of such terms. As such, it is only if I can prove this theory makes sense *and* show that it is possible to remove gender terms that this theory would be of value.

To support this argument I proceed in four parts: First I explain the connection between language and societal knowledge in order to provide background knowledge for the propositions I later make in the final proposal; second, I explore the relationship between the Self and the Other in terms of gender—specifically, I explicate why the individual is hindered by gender and why the proposal of creating further gender division would be more destructive than beneficial; third I address how our Self identity and confidence (and by extension equity) is affected by gender language or likewise would be by the absence of gender language; and lastly, I issue a call to action and offer a sample proposal of how we could go about removing gender terms along with the implications of this move.

Before beginning, however, I would like to note that because there is variation in the way gender is treated in different cultures, and thus inequalities occur in different forms (some may favor men, others may favor women, and some may simply treat the two differently but not necessarily in better or worse ways), the examples I will be working with will come from cultural norms within the United States as I believe these will be more familiar to my audience. (Though hopefully it will become clear that a removal of gender terms could be a positive step forward in almost any culture.) As such there are two things to keep in mind so far as the

examples presented: First I will be briefly present visual experiments throughout the paper to lay out some of the differences we see between the “man” and “woman” within the American culture in order to support the text. Second due to the focus that other literature on gender equality in the western culture has thus far placed on the inequalities of ‘women’ most of the quotations provided revolve around ‘women.’ This, however, I do not want to be taken to suggest that this thesis is in any way a call for “women’s rights.” Though these are of course important, my thesis aims to discuss how *all* individuals, no matter which of the genders they happen to be categorized as currently, are hindered by the gender categories during attempts to define their Self.

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CHAPTER THREE

*Enslaved by Language**(What is Said—and Seen—Becomes “Truth”)*

The “mother¹² tongue pre-empts an individual’s thinking,” says Elias (Elias, 1991, p517). Or, in other words, the language you speak does not simply predispose you to think in a particular manner but it may actually restrict you to a certain kind of thinking. One does not simply speak a language, one lives it. For gender this means that because we have binary gender terms in our language we *live* in binary gender terms so it is very difficult to conceive of our Self without thinking of ourselves as one of the binary genders. Today in American culture we obviously have individuals who claim to have a gender not found on the binary, which suggests two things to me: first the binary does not accurately fit reality and second our language and culture is open to change in terms of moving away from the gender binary. Still, however, I believe these individuals not expressing as part of the binary system are hindered in explaining their identity to others due to our history of restrictive gender terms. I hold that, because of this, the process of full expression of their Self is made much more difficult than it need be. Furthermore I would argue that even those identifying in the binary genders are hindered in self-expression by stereotypes they are expected to uphold in order to prove their identity within that

¹² Even here we see an interesting example of gendered language that we almost subconsciously choose at this point! It likely would not have occurred to Elias, or anyone else, coming up with the term to have instead said “father tongue” because we have so stereotyped individuals by gender that we believe the mother must be the one who raises the “children” teaching them how to speak. This leads to another fascinating note in that though we do commonly rely, historically at least, on the mother to teach raise the children and teach them to speak, somehow we still managed to develop a language that today more and more commonly people find to be suppressing women (although I think all genders are suppressed).

binary. Based on Elias' thought that our language predisposes our thinking, I would argue had we never developed these gender terms there would not be such a divide culturally among the genders. More specifically, we would not find such great differences in treatment and the hindering of full Self-expression for those that do not fall into one category or another if we did not have these gender terms. There is a bright side, of course, in that languages are constantly transforming and the power to change them is in our own hands (Elias, 1991, p. 380). Our relative knowledge and truth can change even with the aforementioned difficulties. We just need to figure out how to do so successfully.

To understand how to change the language, we first need to understand why we would have adapted such terms and how we continue to perpetuate both them and the cultural contexts that come with them. Wilfrid Sellars theorizes that we first stumbled upon language in a realization of separation between humans and other creatures (Sellars, 1991, p2). Similarly we would continue to develop our language in opposing terms so as to divide one from another like man and woman. Assigning these roles of opposites seems to come naturally in English as we hope to define the separation between the Self and the Other (the reason we make this particular divide will be discussed more in depth in the following section). Sellars explains "It is no accident that one learns to think in the very process of learning to speak" (Sellars, 1991, p32). Language is not private; the sole reason for its development was to satisfy social needs. So, as we are creating a language we are simultaneously creating a thought pattern that allows us to get through the day to day struggles of life as we navigate the world. We both develop and learn a language in order to communicate our needs, thoughts, and desires and fit into and understand the community around us better. Through socialization and various identity markers, we come to develop a community based on the language that we use. Language and socialization inform one another simultaneously and cannot easily be separated (see also Elias, 1991, pp516-518, Gadamer, 2013, pp455-472, Sellars, 1991, pp38-40). It just so happens that at one point in our particular culture gendered language became one of those ways in which we thought about the world. For Americans, this phenomenon developed into a white, western European, patriarchal society with some negative effects that we are currently struggling to eliminate.

Once the initial categorical divisions were made in language the next key factor was that language, and therefore knowledge and stereotypes, be passed on from one generation to another. Elias explains that this "fantasy knowledge"—that which we do not have concrete evidence for

and is simply something created by the society and then perpetuated—can take hold just as well as “real knowledge”—knowledge we have tested and found to have substantial evidence for—does (Elias, 1991, pp209, 373). Part of why we take these “fantasy” truths to be real is that we see them believed over and over again from one generation to another and imagine that if even a child learns these truths then the truths are not just social constructs but rather reflect a concrete reality.

So then, how is it, if gender is part of the realm of “fantasy knowledge” that children learn these stereotypes? “When we picture a child...learning his first language, we, of course, locate the language learner in a structured logical space in which we are at home,” (Sellars, 1991, pp161-162). Ultimately, we take for granted the society that has already been built around the child. Thus we also take for granted the ease with which the child can be taught to differentiate things already built within the logical space of the language that we know and are teaching (Sellars, 1991, pp183-196, see also Elias, 1991, pp516-518). We need to stop believing that these categories necessarily exist prior to learning a language—language develops simultaneously with this community categorization process. And because these are created categories, it should be possible to stop believing they are necessary truths. As the child learns the language, in addition to gaining the capability to be taught knowledge based on tested evidence, they are already learning the categorizations that those around them place objects into, and thus they are already learning to place judgements, in this case gender, on those around them in a “fantasy” knowledge that is perpetuated from generation to generation. This is not to say, however, that all fantasy knowledge is inherently “bad.” Fantasy knowledge simply means that it is a set of knowledge not based on any actual facts but instead relies on the way we happen to categorize terms. In many instances this can be very useful to us for getting through our day to day activities. Instead of fantasy knowledge as a whole being bad, I believe that the particular category of gender in our culture is coming to a point where it is becoming more harmful to the Self-identity than useful to the society.

It also isn't just spoken language that we need to be concerned about; it is the visual language too. Hans-Georg Gadamer, explains that knowledge comes from our experiences and art itself, including the art we make of ourselves such as our attire, hair, makeup, general presentation (including the way we walk and talk) etc., is based on experiences and in turn an expression of experiences. “All the sacred games of art are only remote imitations of the infinite

play of the world, the eternally self creating work of art,” (Gadamer, 2013, p110). Here, he draws an interesting correlation between child’s play and the visual language, which explains very well how it is that we pass on “fantasy knowledge” such as gender even prior to a child learning to speak. Gadamer explains that child’s play is always play of something. They are always imitating something and that is how they learn to play and thus how play leads them to learn to interact in the world as they grow older (Gadamer, 2013, pp117-118). Art, which this thesis is using to refer to all visual language, similarly, in being based off of experiences, is as the quote above explains an imitation of the larger expression of the world.

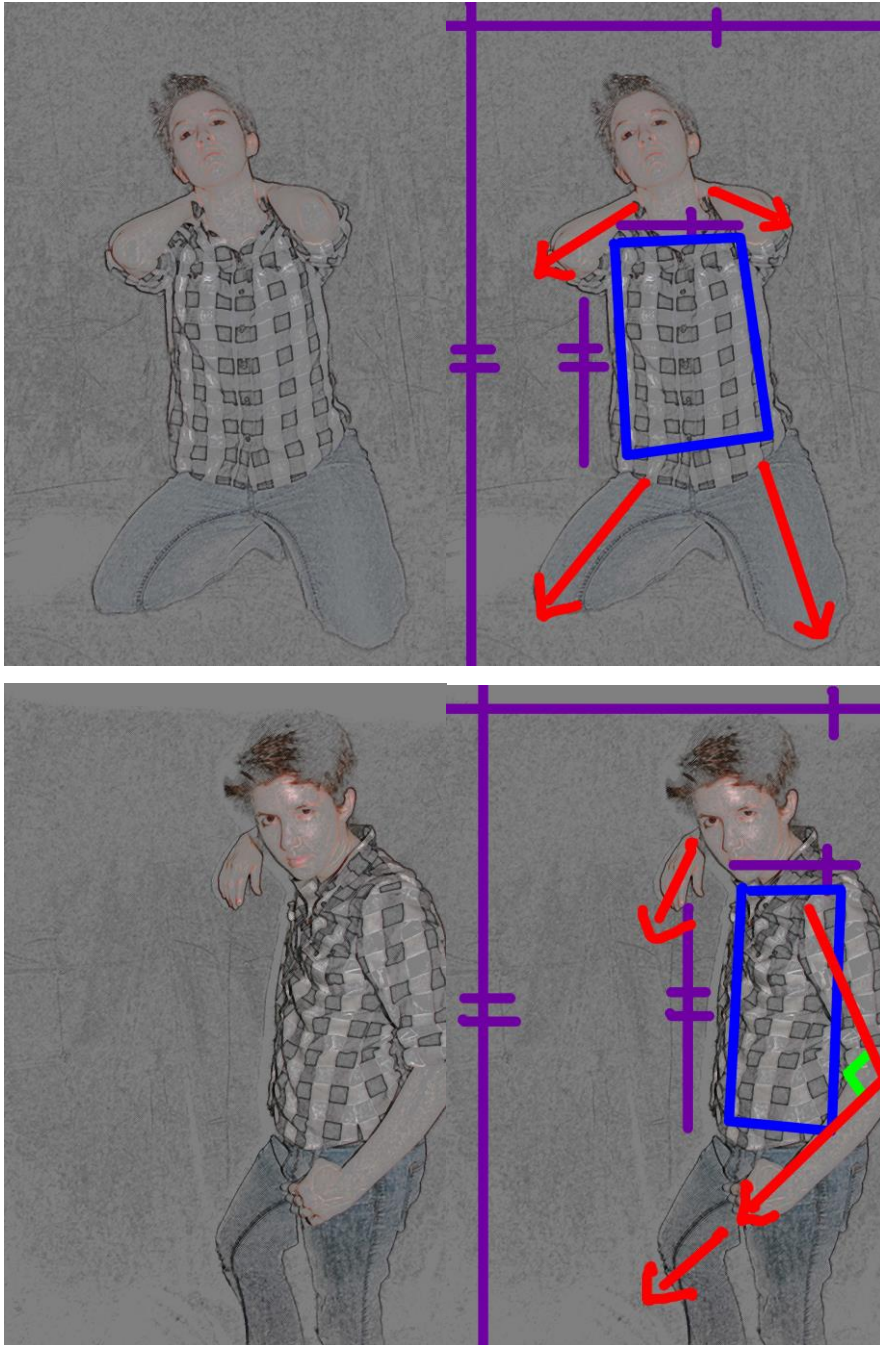
With this in mind I would like to begin with the visual experiment I foreshadowed in the introduction. This experiment will explore the binary gender system of stereotypes we have set in place. What we will be looking at are images of the same individual dressed as an easily recognized “man” and as a “woman” in our American culture as based upon common model poses used in advertising. In choosing the poses I opted for less sexualized images in order to find situations that would be more likely to happen in everyday life. The images are created from digital photographs then manipulated only in terms of lighting and contrast (aka no changing of the actual shape of the individual’s body) and run through a filter (the filter was applied to make later renditions easier to combine two images into one). You don’t just take an individual and dress them in “men’s” or “women’s” clothes, do their makeup, etc. and get a “man” or a “woman” respectively. We are additionally trained to hold ourselves and act in certain physical ways in order to portray one gender or another. The interesting thing is that any individual can, whether they maintain the physical body of one sex or another, portray themselves as either gender binary term (including the one(s) they do not identify with) by following these rules.

A general observation is that “men” in America are to stand and move in far more square and “mechanical” or “man-made” (as art classes may describe the imagery) forms. What this equates to is straight lines and right angles. In the example image below of a reclining figure we can see that the torso is rather squared off (denoted by the color blue)—“he” is laid out such that “his” back is straight so the left and right hand sides of the torso become parallel to one another with no intervening angles to interrupt the lines. (There is an additional aid here in outfit choice as the plaid shirt made of smaller squares was chosen to specifically emphasize the “squareness” of the torso region.)



In this image we also find that the direction of eye flow within the image (denoted by red) moves outward and away from the “man’s” body. This speaks to a culture that pictures men as creatures of external exertion and movement. Furthermore, if we trace closely located lines of eye flow we find that these lines intersect in a 90 degree angle (denoted by green). The angle of change for a “man’s” pose is often 90 degrees or less creating a feeling of sharp change which enhances that sense of movement we obtained from the direction of eye flow.

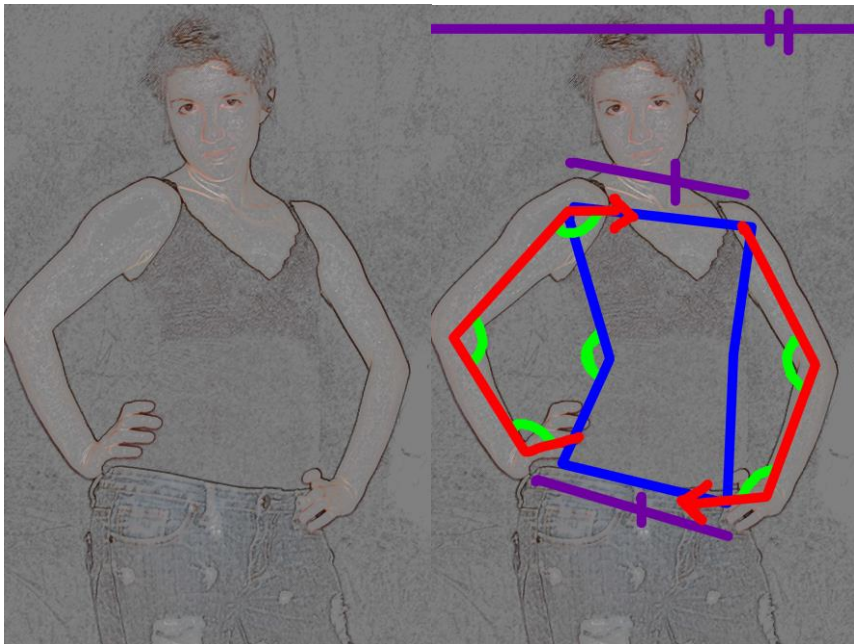
In the next two examples of the “man” we similarly find these squared off torsos, outward moving eye flow, and angles of 90 degrees or less. An addition we find in more vertical poses, however, is the inclusion of parallel stances to the frame of the image. What this means is that the torso is often pictured as parallel to the vertical axis of the image and the shoulders are parallel to the horizontal. This works to enhance the squared off “strong and masculine” nature of the torso.



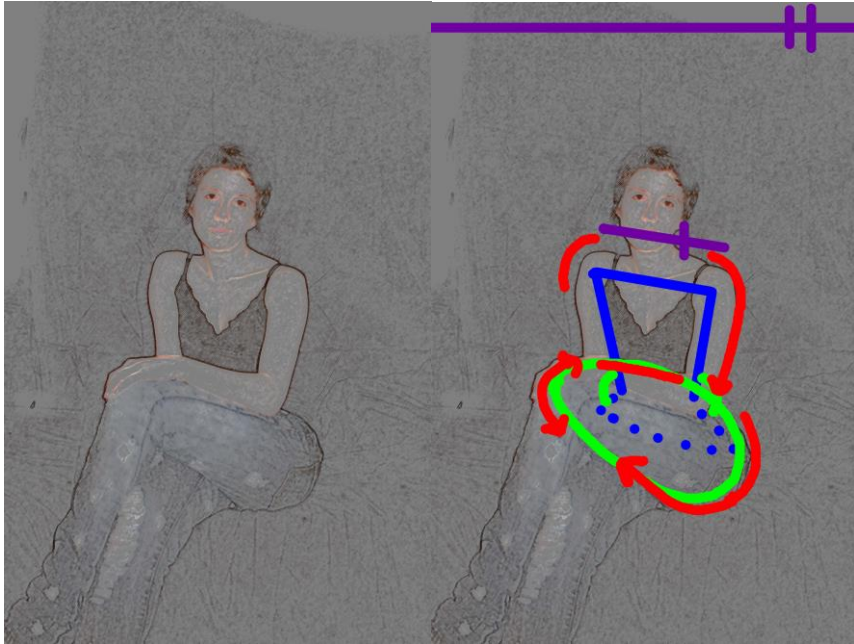
Overall the image of the “man” tends to have hard start and finish lines (it has non-circular direction) which create a strong sense of movement within a sturdy body frame.

On the other hand women are to stand and move in far more curved and “organic” forms. Ultimately, “she” is made of gently curving lines and small angle changes. The “woman” is supposed to pose in a way such that our eye flows through the image multiple times. In our first “feminine” image below I would like us to compare the shape of the torso and the associated

angles with those of our “masculine” images. The torso for the “woman” should have at least one side indented such that it presents a concave angle greater than 90 degrees (the concave angle on the shirt also helps to emphasize this). In this particular image we can also see that the angles created by the eye flow (which happens to be very circular rather than outward moving) around the upper body are also greater than 90 degrees. This creates a gentler change and coupled with the circular eye flow makes us feel as though the “woman” is more internal and has less outward expenditure of energy.



In the second image I wanted to emphasize a common lack of angles and instead complete replacement with curves. The figure is positioned such that almost all outer edges are rounded and instead of drawing angles within the image we can draw complete ovals in multiple areas. This would happen very rarely if ever in a “masculine” figure as there are almost always limbs leading out and away from the core figure. At the same time, though we cannot see the bottom part of the torso, we still infer the hour glass shape with concave angles over 90 degrees.



Lastly looking at all of these images we may also note that the shoulders and torso are distinctly *not* made parallel with the frame of the image as a whole. This again emphasizes the decidedly non-square and therefore organic nature of the “woman.” Though contrapposto (a shift of weight to one foot and hip) is common in imagery of both “men” and “women” as it makes either seem more natural, it appears to be emphasized to a greater extent for “feminine poses.”



The fact that the same individual, and therefore the same body, can portray both these roles simply by changing one’s movement and the way one holds oneself suggests that it is not

just the shape of the body that determines whether it comes off as “feminine” or “masculine.” And let me emphasize once more that these physical descriptors are not representative of “men” and “women” in all cultures; these poses show a common formula we identify with in the United States. Actually, the fact that “men” and “women” may have different poses in different cultures strengthens the argument that gender is a social construct as it shows that the two bodies do not move in different ways because of some biological tendency towards one movement or another. Instead it emphasizes that this must be something learned, likely starting in childhood.

So when children play “house” and the “girl” takes on the role of the “mother” that cooks, cleans, and cares for the baby and the “boy” takes on the role of the “father” who goes to work, manages the bills, and does none of the work at home, this begins to set in the children’s minds stereotypes that they will continue to perpetuate as they grow older. But, they develop this play not because they are necessarily *told* specifically how to play “house” but from watching the cultural norms already in place around them. Even colors and manners of dress are established at a young age as the cultural market place adapts certain designs for one gender or another and the child begins to associate such with their own gender and perpetuate the further cultural norms that are associated with the color itself—for example pinks and purples as bright, cute, cheery colors and reds and blues as powerful and hardworking ones. Girls of course wearing the pinks and purples are meant to take on those colors’ characteristics and boys the latter. Even as we begin in a revolution of “blue is for girls, too” girls are often found wearing paler, softer, pastel blues during younger years while boys blues can wear more solid darker blues. But even this color association happened under 100 years ago. Prior to this shift pink had been a “boy’s” color and pink a “girl’s” color. At other points either gender binary child had been dressed in more neutral clothes (Maglaty, 2011). These shifts show both the way in which fantasy knowledge can be perpetuation *and* that the fantasy knowledge can be ended.

What is spoken, *and seen* and repeated, therefore, becomes the truth. Somehow by using a particular word or visual it cements that idea in your mind and that is what continues to foster a sense of community. So, when we say it, and we live it, we come to believe it and this causes our community to grow in that direction (whether positive or negative). Furthermore it defines those individuals living in the community: “Language allows humans to create their own world and identity to become... self transcending... referring and relating to a person in a certain way undoubtedly determines that person’s being,” (Colebrook, 2004, p14). This is a rather optimistic

quote, suggesting that because language influences our worldview we can use language to overcome the current world by shaping it to our will. This idea provides hope for the purpose of this paper and we will return to the positive repercussions of alternative language use later. However, for the moment we need to first turn to the negative side of this sentiment. The truth is what you speak not because that is the reality you are articulating but because what is articulated becomes reality both from habit and from the *limitations of language and thus of thought* based on the structure and content of the language being used. And of course depending on what habits have already been developed this can be a hindrance to equity as expressed by examples in the introduction.

In terms of gender this results in: “Linguistically it is a man’s world where women’s place is defined and maintained by ‘man made language’ in innumerable subtle ways. Hence women must learn to speak a language that does not, in effect, speak of ‘their own’ experiences,” (Code, p59). Though again in our examples we are primarily speaking to an American culture, any gender in any culture can easily become oppressed by a language that does not appropriately express their experiences. This is because a failure to allow for such expression within the structure of the language suggests in and of itself some level of inferiority and insignificance of said experience. This is easily realized when we recognize the fact that in our culture we do not write explicitly in our culture about the white middle or upper-class heterosexual male’s experience. We do not write about this because we are *already* writing in terms of this “individual” in all the language that we use. Both the way that our society has developed has framed language in this way and because our language is framed this way our society has thus developed. Instead, however, it does occur to us to write about women’s experiences, for example, because our language does *not* accommodate them and their lives in their terms. Thus to write of her experiences provides a different perspective than the norm. Likewise we also think to speak to the stories of non-binary conforming individuals. I am, however, under the impression that the men’s experiences are also lessened by the existence of gender terms, so we shall return to this thought as well.

Language is built with the purpose of maintaining social constructs and learned in the context of such constructs:

Even such ‘simple’ concepts as those of colours are the fruit of a long process of publicly reinforced responses to public objects... in public situations... to have the

ability to notice a sort of thing is already to have the concept of that sort of thing, and cannot account for it, (Sellars, 1991, p176).

What this means is a sort of holism between language and society such that one cannot have command of language without having command of the *entire* language in the sense that the individual can connect different concepts together (so they are not limited to just a small sector of the language) and also have the ability to correct someone else for improper use of the language. The theory is tied to the observational--one obtains concepts by defining--but the meaning of the word comes from the role it plays in a language and in the society itself. So both these processes of the concept and of the definition happen simultaneously. Ultimately this leads to the idea that the development of the society and the development of the language are intertwined such that “When a person lives in a language he is filled with the sense of the unsurpassable appropriateness of the word he uses for the subject matter he is talking about,” (Gadamer, 2013, p420). In other words, we use the words we do because we feel comfortable with them. And we feel comfortable with them because they are what we think of as the *right* words to describe the particular situation or thing.

We do not, however, identify necessarily what is actually there in front of us but rather what we interpret. This is because these concepts and definitions are determined by society (Chanter, 2006, p117). For example, there is nothing inherently red about “red”, nothing that scientifically makes it so the only reason red is “red” is because we all agree to call it “red.” Red does not exist outside of the community and language as it is only as much as the community agrees on (Sellars, 1991, p176). Similarly there is nothing inherently “she” about her or “he” about him. Clearly the connotation of words and sentences depends on the experiences one has had in a particular community and culture. “We see human beings as male or female because of the language we speak and beliefs we inhabit,” (Colebrook, 2004, p12).^{13*} The “truth” of the word comes from the ability of one individual to understand what another is saying within that cultural context.

Gadamer explains:

¹³For ease of argument, recognize that here we are discussing gender and not “sex” or biological differences. The biological differences will be discussed in the final section on potential problems for the argument.

The articulation of words... exclusively follows the human aspect of things, the system of man's needs and interests. What a linguistic community regards as important about a thing can be given the same name as other things that are perhaps of a quite different nature in other respects, so long as they all have the same quality that is important to the community, (Gadamer, 2013, p452).

In terms of gender this means that if it is convenient for the society we will divide into gender categories. But, though we put individuals into each of these categories that does not necessarily mean that the individuals within one category are all that similar. Namely one man can have vastly different characteristics (beliefs, interests, experiences etc.) than another, and likewise one woman from another, but still be placed in the same respective categories because that is what works for the particular society. While this paper is speaking specifically to the experience that occurs from such forms of even unintended or subconscious "sexism" as some may name this kind of categorization, we also see similarities in struggles with subconscious "racism," "homophobia," and other social problems where individuals, though perhaps not in an intentionally menacing way, make assumptions on the character, abilities, or intentions of others simply based the category they see these individuals fall into. I think it is important to note that not only does trying to remove categories in the case of gender stop intentional oppression, but it also, perhaps even more importantly, helps individuals with implicit bias who have only positive intentions to avoid unintentional oppression. I believe this latter part is important because it seems unethical to leave these individuals in a situation where they have no choice in their unconscious judgements when a. it could be avoided and b. these individuals themselves have no desire to make such judgements. In other words, oppression affects us all—both those being oppressed and those doing the oppressing—and as such the removal of an oppressive system would serve to benefit both sets of individuals.

Because language is based on necessity, there are communities that lack words for things that our community defines, and likewise there are communities that apply 200+ words to a camel depending on its circumstance. These 200+ words, however, do not exist simply for the sake of existing, but rather because the nuances of the camel's state of existence are important to the survival of the community. Language presents a worldview (Gadamer, 2013, p459). This is what I mean when I say that we are enslaved by language; language is a communal activity and as such it molds and restricts thinking, but at the same time our cultural needs and views bend

and develop our language. For gender, this means that if we are able to come to a point without gender terms it will be a point at which *gender is no longer relevant to the society*—and, therefore, we can assume would not present inequalities in the name of gender. Returning to the inspiration of Colebrook’s quote “Language allows humans to create their own world and identity to become... self transcending...” it sounds possible (Colebrook, 2004, p14). It seems as though if we can change our language in the right way we can create the kind of world we would like to see. The question of course, is how to get to that point. The next section, therefore, will delve a little deeper into the gender relation of the Self and the Other in terms of gender identity.

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CHAPTER FOUR

The Self and the Other

Gender differences become a quick solution for identity because, judging from Sellars' analysis, if the factor that set humans apart from animals was our recognition of our difference from them, then similarly the factor that would set men apart from women would be a desire to differentiate between the two in order to obtain a better self-identity. Due to the fact that at the time of this separation a shift was made in favor of men, this would explain why the Self identity that was most focused on was the male, while the woman became this sort of Other... And this is the most basic category, according to Simone de Beauvoir—the Self and the Other. We need this notion of Other 'against which' the Self can be defined (Colebrook, 2004, p3). So when a group of individuals, for example 'men,' in society find themselves similar to one another, yet different in some visible way from other individuals, like 'women,' it provides an easy way in which to define their Selves against these Others. Likewise, the same would be true for 'women' who then see 'men' as Others.

Another aspect of this is that language is necessary as a reporting tool to those around us (Sellars, 1991, pp9-13, 189). We are social beings. One cannot think of one's self as being a person all by one's self. Instead one must think of one's Self in relation to Others--or in other words as part of a community of persons (Sellars, 1991, p40). So, we make deliberate actions, in the case of our visual or art language, and report verbally based on our needs for interactions within our community. To better describe that community Sellars states:

[We have] a network of rights and duties... each member of which thinks of itself as a member of a [community]... the most embracing community to which he belongs

consists of those with whom he can enter into meaningful discourse, (Sellars, 1991, p39).

The phrase “meaningful discourse” is vital to this definition. It points more clearly than anything else to the fact that language is necessary for and developed to be sufficient for a community. Language helps us to create duties, rights, and obligations (Sellars, 1991, pp39-40). In other words, it creates a role that each individual is expected to play within the society. These social expectations are not scientific but rather conceptual by nature and they are the very basis upon which our society is founded.

In this understanding of the development of language and therefore gender terms there is no innate difference between men and women to be found. Arguably, “if gender were essential then we would say that there was not one essence--humanity--that then presented itself in two kinds, but two distinct essences--maleness and femaleness,” (Colebrook, 2004, p12). As such, it makes far more sense to say that rather than a de facto or ‘found’ community, gender was chosen by humans in order to fulfill some insecurities of how to position one another in society and insofar as it created the “us vs. them” mentality by way of “Other-ing” those around them (Code, 1991, p277).

So far as building a community structure, by creating such a category as gender we allow for the creation of an authoritative gender that can wield influence both mentally and emotionally over an oppressed gender. What I mean by this is a situation in which the oppressed gender becomes dependent on the authoritative gender in order to obtain both its definition and usefulness. In order to be recognized an oppressed gender must conform to the rules and expectations set forth by the ruling regime. One example from American culture that has hit home for me is the kind of propaganda we use in order to deter sexual violence and abuse. In many of these ads against sexual violence we are reminded she’s “someone’s sister,” “someone’s mother,” “someone’s daughter,” “someone’s wife,” etc. While these statements are true it removes emphasis from the fact that she “is someone” and therefore should not be abused or violated. It is not because she is a human herself that the ads suggestion she should not be harmed but because she belongs to others. Furthermore, by making the entire ad about women it denies the fact that men too can be victims of sexual violence and abuse, thereby also devaluing the experiences of men. This is only one example of many but it shows us how easy it is for the Other-ing created by gender terms is used to establish a power structure. What this also shows us

is how difficult it is to maintain personhood in our current culture without applying both a gender and sense of belonging to someone as this advertisement is the one that works best. It seems to move individuals who do not care much about the issue more than simply pointing out that she “is someone” would. This only provides more reason as to why we should work to remove gender from our language.

The ads themselves, of course, are created with positive intent—trying to show that we should be protecting these individuals from harm because they somehow belong to us and therefore are our responsibility. However, no matter how common a gender differential may be or how logical some may believe it seems it does not follow that a particular gender somehow needs to belong to another in order to obtain protection. Again, we should provide protection to one another but the reasons should be due to our compassion for each other not because we find an individual to be under our responsibility due to relations to us nor because we find a particular gender in need of protecting by a stronger one. The idea of a gender needing or belonging to another in order to obtain protection would be a “fantasy knowledge” that developed after the culture was being structured. The need for protection developed because of the way that we categorized gender. I would agree with Colebrook: “the feminine cannot be described as that which exists before difference, structure, and culture, for the idea of the feminine is always already cultural, already differentiated,” (Colebrook, 2004, p177).

I believe, continuing with the sexual violence example as a way in which our language controls us, we place women at risk of violence, and men at risk of committing violence, because of the way in which we talk about them. To explore this link I believe we can look to the fact that there are over 220 derogatory terms in the English language to describe a sexually promiscuous woman while only about 20 exist to describe promiscuous men (Buchwald, 2005, p125). In addition to the problem of having so many sexual derogatory terms for women there is the problem that many of the general terms and phrases we use to degrade men are terms *about* women (e.g., man-whore, pussy, bitch, you boob, “I’m gonna make you my wife,” “thanks mom”). This suggests that the way to hurt a man then, is to compare him to a woman because there is something inherently less about “her”. Additionally many of those terms used against men that are not female descriptors are homosexual slurs (e.g., faggot, gay, pansy). With such an underlying tone of “her” as “less,” “she” is made into an easy target for victimization.

There are of course still scientific questions of difference between men and women which may lead to questions of the “female” thought process and therefore gendered culture being different from the “male” thought process and culture, thus leading to the language and knowledge being different regarding each (which leads to an entirely other question of whether the gender of the thinker is epistemologically relevant). However, the child’s brain at birth is shown to be no different based on its biological sex and so it cannot be ascertained at this point whether any later changes in the brain and brain activity are because of a gender (or sex) difference or because of socialization (Orr, 2015, and Sample, 2015).

Yet still within the American culture “women’s empowerment has been sacrificed to the smooth functioning of the whole, women have had to make do with amorphous identity, as woman, as [O]ther, as submerged in the species,” (Code, 1991, p275). Frankly, I would argue the “man” suffers here too. While the “woman” is forced into a place of submission (of belonging to someone else) as in the victims of sexual assault ads we discussed above, the “man” is also boxed in by an expectation of authority. By framing the problem with the idea that women need protection or need to proactively do things in order to protect themselves we reiterate that “men can’t help it,” that they have urges that they cannot overcome and therefore rape. I believe this is offensive to men and that it suggests they can do no better. A further complication of this is that because we assume men to be “the powerful” and the women to be “the helpless” our society has a difficult time accepting that men can also be victims.

The Self versus the Other survives here, with a negative effect on both gender binary categories, despite no real proof that these categories should exist aside from what has become the cultural norm. It seems that we live in a world of constant opposition where we need antonyms together in order to understand either term. So what we end up with is a drastic view of the categories with minimal overlap. When we create such categories we create stereotypes such that Others are seen as objects upon which we impress our own feelings, thoughts, and stereotypes (Colebrook, 2004, p153). Our understanding of this person then is not regulated necessarily by what is there but by what it is that is in our own minds. There is an existence beyond what we see that is what we interpret. Emotion is knowledge; Gadamer explains “...Only sympathy makes true understanding possible” and it is a form of relationship between the Self and the Other, “Certainly there is knowledge involved in this real moral relationship, and so it is that love gives insight... Droysen makes the profound remark: You must be like that, for that is

the way I love you,” (Gadamer, 2013, p235). This suggests that when we look at others we impress upon them a particular image that may or may not line up with their own self-image (Gadamer, 2013, p235). We are always projecting onto the Other from our own knowledge and understanding. Thus we are continuing to perpetuate this “fantasy knowledge” by placing stereotypes and false ideals on them for a category they did not get to choose. But this only teaches us more about ourselves and not the other person. Basically, we do not relate the Other’s opinion to them but to our own opinions and views.

In a sense, by becoming an Other to someone else the individual ceases to exist as the Self, or perhaps at all (in the sense that they are no longer themselves). This is because as all the definitions and descriptions placed on us by others begin to weigh down on *all* of us, making us an Other, they begin to blur with what Self definitions we had. The same way in which habits are formed by repeating the same action, if you live something often enough you begin to believe it. So when one spends day in and day out listening to what other individuals believe them to be this individual is at high risk to believe those things about themselves too.

From the perspective of the individual doing the Other-ing, when one has an emotional response to someone else this individual is not learning anything about the Other. Instead the individual is only reemphasizing something about their own already existent worldview. Unfortunately, because there are so many more individuals besides ourselves we have a rather large audience to constantly watch us and make judgments in opposition to our own Self-definition. Likewise, of course, we do the same to others. So while we would like to think of the body as for oneself, for our own consciousness, it seems that really we spend much of our time being a body for others, or some identified object of their claims and thoughts. We spend most of our time as an Other, when boxed into these categories including gender (Gonzalez-Arnal, 2012, pp87-90). This is the problem with a proposal emphasizing a clear division between genders, it would lead to further Other-ing.

Gadamer’s explanation of the Other-ing that can come from emotions is also a dangerous concept for attempts to change or remove gender terms and their stereotypes because it means that even forms of love, familial or otherwise, can work against such progress. To return to the example of children, loving parents may inadvertently (or consciously) impress upon the child

the goals and characteristics they would like to see in their child rather than the character traits and desires the child naturally would have.^{14*}

Ultimately, our entire existence is a set of relationships; the individual is more often defined as the Other and the Out There, not just the In Here and the Self—the inside is defined by the outside, or rather the private self becomes defined by the public self; We are relationships. “I” is a relationship. We think there is “I” as an individual part of the world but really there is only “I” as a plural—as completion with the world and inseparable from all else and all the ideas of others. This is because we cannot separate ourselves from being Other-ed. Hypothetically, we would like to act the way we are, but, in reality, it would seem that the way we act *becomes* who we are and, to some extent, because the way we are perceived affects the way we act the way our actions are *perceived* becomes who we are both to others and to ourselves.

However, a large part of this also comes from the significance the individual places on the opinions of others, for example,

I only feel looked at by people whom I am interested in... When I try to make someone like me [I] become less and less with each failure. When I try in this way I am looking outward at a wish or ideal, and so I am turned away from noticing me... the insanity in holding back my anger is that I am evidently more willing to risk destroying me than destroying a relationship, (Prather, 1972).

Following Prather’s explanation we are made into an Other by those around us because we care more about how we are perceived than we care about remaining the Self. Thus, the next section of this thesis turns to identity and self-confidence as a way to break from this cycle of the Self and Other relationship perpetuating gender terms and stereotypes.

¹⁴ If one can even have a “natural” development of personalities and characteristics aka if it is possible to have these things without some outside influence.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Identity and Self-Confidence

What we have learned from the split of the Self and the Other, can apply to a better understanding of self-identity and confidence, that is to say once the category of gender has been created it is perpetuated by a desire to fit in. We self-identify and justify our categories because by placing ourselves into them we feel less alone and scared. We maintain a sense of belonging with the use of these categories even if we ourselves are placed into an oppressed category over which another group of individuals will exert power. We want to find individuals like ourselves such that we can relate to them and be understood, and, so, gender is an example of a category that helps us feel as though we belong. But the reality of the situation is that we do not *need* gender in order to relate to others. If this category were removed, perhaps, we would find ourselves relating to others more often in general on the grounds of being fellow humans and with individuals on the grounds of the passions we share. Our differences, too, in interests can be a space in which we find ourselves engaging positively with one another—engaging with other perspectives and ideas is how we learn and develop. On the topic of differences, removing the broad category differences can often help facilitate interaction at the level of all the intricate little differences because it is easier to broach a topic this way

Furthermore, one of the negative results of division by gender is that all of those within a category become stereotyped and thus their thoughts and feelings as individuals may be subsumed by the expectations for that category. Rather than, for example, recognizing the intricacies and differences between individual women, women may become “unified” into a singular “women’s lived experience,” with an “essential commonality” (Smith, 2005). As the Davidson article continues, it is explained that Wittgenstein argues against this problem by

explaining that rather than an essential commonality we should consider our categories like a “family resemblance” that the people within any given category, in this case gender, share and that it is by this resemblance that they are thus categorized together. In concept this view of gender is much more along the lines of what we should hope for—one where it is not one single factor that all individuals of a gender share but that there may be many little factors that overlap here or there for the sake of community but are not common necessarily to all (Smith, 2005). This blurry image of what a woman is, for example, would allow for a great deal of individuality and therefore self-identity separate from a category. However, in practice this does not seem to be applicable.

Based on the reality in which we find gendered terms and come across largely stereotyped comments based upon the genders both in humor (e.g., “women jokes” about cooking, failure to drive, mood-swings, etc. or even “men jokes” about not asking for directions), common conversations and interactions (e.g., both offhand comments made about women and also physical expectations of how “she” should carry herself and interact), and even intellectual settings, I would argue this is not merely a “family resemblance” we have created and in fact a form of “essential commonality” among those within the scope of the term. Then, with this essential commonality, it becomes more difficult to actually get to know another individual, as it is far easier to look at just their surface—a person’s category. “Concentration on the [O]therness of other people has several consequences... [we become] not only different from one another but opaque to one another,” (Code, 1991, p80). The way that Code says this is a little strong (suggesting it is impossible to get to know others because of the categories) but the idea stands that we automatically make judgments based on that category even if we are carefully trying to avoid prejudices. Even individuals that claim to not “see” gender still are affected subconsciously to some extent because we have been raised with these categories. In other cases trying to actively make sure as to not discriminate may cause an individual to over compensate. So the categories are basically creating an additional burden even for those with good intentions attempting not to stereotype. And it is not just the Other who gets lost, one can also lose the Self to such categories as the beliefs of others about the individual’s identity become impressed on that individual and it begins to shape even what Self image they have.

An individual may find themselves forced into a social construct because to participate in the community one must participate in the language successfully and thus “I can become a social

individual only by adopting some gender or another,” (Colebrook, 2004, p151). Here we see that it is not just when the individual is the object of someone else gendering them but also when one makes oneself the subject of gender that a problem arises. When one wants to participate in the social sphere, due to our gender culture, one is often required to take on a gender identity to fully participate and communicate. The unfortunate truth is that, in society, one does not exist for oneself alone. The fact that one belongs to a social system in the sense that the individual becomes the object of other individuals’ thoughts also carries over into the way we make ourselves subjects. “To see you [or yourself] as a woman is already to liken you to the others of your kind,” and therefore both others and yourself apply stereotypes to your being whether they truly represent you or not (Colebrook, 2004, p150). The problem of “we” is that being in a category “we” are assumed to have many of the same characteristics and thoughts so language *is* being, it is self-presentation (Gadamer, 2013, p502). As explained in the earlier visual experiment it isn’t just how we dress ourselves up that determines whether we are assumed to be a man or woman, it is how we carry ourselves. And those shapes in which we move are related to different character traits we are trained from our youth to assume based on our gender (i.e. for men: strength, exertion, external movement and for women: a quiet or gentleness, a secondariness—like waiting in speaking or moving out of the way of others walking—, and more internal beings)¹⁵. So we present ourselves and act in a way that matches how we have been gender identified so that we are able to fit in.

“Look like the woman you are,” the power of advertising says. Returning to the young, “A child begins to play by imitation, affirming what he knows and affirming his own being in the process,” Gadamer says (Gadamer, 2013, p117). So it would appear that personal knowledge

¹⁵ Though surely, these stereotypes have lessened, at least for women, from what we have seen in the past that does not mean they do not still exist. An interesting social experiment that exploded on Tumblr and other social media for example was to test the submissive-dominant relationship between women and men based on interactions walking in public. The experiences that were widely noted by commenters were that women seemed to be expected to move out of the path of the men if they were walking towards one another in such a way that they would collide. In response women who were posting on the social media decided to stand their ground, and what they found was that most of the men did not move and instead rammed into them. One individual, Anna Breslaw, posted on her twitter account about her sister’s experience with this idea “My sister is doing an experiment: Whenever men walk towards her, she doesn’t move out of the way first. So far she has collided with 28 men.” (Twitter handle @annabreslaw, post date Dec 13, 2014 5:04pm)

depends on common knowledge as we define individually what a man or woman is based on the general societal definition and, likewise, our private selves depend on our public selves as we begin to think in the ways we are expected by the public to act (Code, 1991, pp83, 283). As we determine who we want to be to the public this molds what we are capable of being for our private selves. Trying to fit into an “ideal” image affects the way we think and present ourselves. Our understanding of anything, and more specifically in this case, our understanding of the public knowledge “has not only truth in itself but also its own truth for us,” (Gadamer, 2013, p458). We are who we are by the way we regulate and manage the knowledge we obtain from the outside world and apply it to our Self. Who would you be as an individual without your gender to define you? How would others identify you and how would you identify yourself? What different characteristics about yourself and your relationships would you then have to use in your descriptions? It is a difficult, if not an impossible, task to imagine but it is most likely clear that without a defining gender you would certainly not be the same “Self” as you currently are.

So the real question is whether this is a good or potentially bad thing. Some counterarguments may include that by removing the category of gender we lose some of our identity but I would argue we merely lose the constraints on our identity. We would still maintain the ability to express ourselves in the same way we currently act, dress, and think etc. but we would have opened to us new areas on the spectrum of how we can express ourselves in those ways. Some pushback comes from a misconception that by removing gender all individuals would become the same gender neutral looking, thinking, feeling, acting humans. Based on the fact that a variety of self expressions still exist in the current limited system I believe my argument that there would be more variety among individuals is well founded.

Another factor that does need to be brought into the argument though, as mentioned before, is we cannot clearly state what differences do and do not occur in the human mind because of differences in gender (or sex). One thing that can be said based off of what is becoming more culturally acceptable is that because it has become culturally acceptable to differentiate between sex and gender we are, as a society, recognizing that gender identity is not determined at birth and instead is determined by the role the individual plays in society (Chanter, 2006, pp11-12). The question becomes then what exactly does this mean—is it that you identify based on the gender norm that you like the best[?]¹—and what does that mean when we have a

limited number of gender options to “choose” from? The meaning of my questions here is that, if you identify with the female body do you act in ways that are stereotypically considered female things to do because you really simply happen to naturally act in those ways... or is it because you wish to be identified as female? I would argue that “she” acts this way to some extent in order to be identified correctly by others. This may not be something that seems necessary for all parts of life but certainly when individuals are looking for life partners it makes for a very difficult time if they are incorrectly identified.

A different but perhaps more familiar case is the homosexual male. Does one stereotype of a homosexual man as rather flamboyant and rather fashion savvy lead him to portray these characteristics, whether natural to him or not, in order to be correctly identified as homosexual such that he can find an appropriate partner (influenced by Weed, 1997, pp109-133)? And for transgender individuals it can become even more necessary to perpetuate gender binary stereotypes as Marjorie Garber explains: “transsexuals are more concerned with maleness and femaleness than persons who are [not] transsexual,” (Segal, 2003, p114). This is because there is any additional struggle to get over in order to get those around the individual to perceive them as the correct gender, only for these individuals it is not just necessarily about being gendered correctly in terms of finding the right partner but about other aspects of life too. Therefore trying to dress the part and act the part becomes a full time job when trying to be identified correctly. My proposal is that without gender terms to fulfill, individuals could pursue the self-identity of their choice without the additional hindrance of needing to fulfill stereotypes.

What needs to occur then in order to perpetuate a Self that is living for the self and not for others is to create a society in which individuals are enabled to stop desiring in such a way that “I want this because I am [insert gender stereotype here].” Desires need to come from a place that is truly unique to the Self in order to build an understanding of individual identity and confidence rather than one based on societal pressures. Only by recognizing the part of the Self that is not caught up in the cause and effect of societal norms, including gender, can one really identify the Self and its individuality. As we have seen, that process is greatly impeded by the use of gender terms (both linguistic and visual) that force individuals into a box by the Other’s opinions and ideals.

But, “even if one could know all the facts about someone, one would not know her as the person she is... no more can knowing all the facts about oneself, past and present, guarantee self-

knowledge” (Code, 1991, p40). To explain I would like to make an analogy: when we talk about writing and art we talk about how it is created for others (just as the stereotypes about Others are impressed on the individual, so too they are impressed on the art by way of an interpretive audience) but at the same time for no one—because rather than for the viewer it is created for the sole purpose of the Self’s creation. Hence one can perform oneself as one wishes. The individual is a work of art. Art is Self-expression and individuality is an expression of the Self. Furthermore, what is unique about the knowledge we obtain from art, and therefore the knowledge we obtain of the Self, is that it is difficult to tell when a work of art, or the person, is complete. Indeed Gadamer asks:

How can even the completeness of a work of art its being finished be conceived? The work is finished if it answers the purpose for which it is intended. But how is one to conceive of the criterion for measuring the completeness of a work of art... if it is not completable what is the criterion for appropriate reception and understanding?
(Gadamer, 2013, p85).

Likewise, we are constantly changing creatures; with every experience we have shifting our understanding of both the world and ourselves, and thus we are unfinished artworks. We cannot be fully understood in any particular moment. But some good advice comes from Braidotti: “the point is not to know who we are, but rather, what, at last we want to become...” but again the problem is that because of the stereotypes coming along with gender and our inability to choose the category hinder one from truly knowing their Self (Chanter, 2006, p135). So in order to discover those desires we need to actively attempt to think of the Self without the use of gender. This way then individuals can choose from the entire spectrum of available expressions (everything that fits for “masculine” expression, “feminine” expression, and everything in between and beyond). By doing this we are allowing for more expression, rather than making individuals choose between different boxes or, in my opinion worse, trying to make everyone conform to a neutrality where everyone becomes exactly the same. The goal is to establish a framework that allows for more individuality and expression.

The convenient reality is that, because language and culture are so intricately intertwined as explained in the first section, this kind of understanding—of Self knowledge—can be used by each individual to help rewrite the collective knowledge just as easily as we have allowed the collective knowledge to impact our Self knowledge. With enough dedication, the individual thus

has the power to change not only their own knowledge but the knowledge belonging to others about them. This realization (though at first it may seem fruitless as it may be difficult to imagine the removal of gender terms) is what will allow for the call for the removal of gender terms and further equity—or rather freedom from being identified as the Other—in the following section.

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CHAPTER SIX

Call for Language Overhaul

“So long as we imagine that the simple fact of race, gender, or class establishes a connection between you and someone who shares the same race, gender or class, we are misled,” (Chanter, 2006, p151). For one, different cultures have different “standards” of appearances for different genders. Second, more liberal societies are increasingly moving towards freedom of expression that allows for a broader spectrum of feminine to masculine women and feminine to masculine men. The most progressive nations (in terms of gender) have even recognized that the biological sex of an individual does not necessarily match with the gender the individual identifies with (if they even identify with a gender). But even with these kinds of acceptances they are not accurate enough of categories. Each individual maintains a variety of qualities within the spectrum of whatever gender they associate themselves with that may be vastly different than other individuals associating with that gender. This simple categorization thus allows us to make the mistake of hasty judgments based on superficial accounts and therefore a more accurate system would not include gender categories at all.

Is it necessary to categorize an individual into one gender or another (whether in a binary or more expansive/inclusive system)? Sure, on the one hand it may be argued that this kind of categorization helps individuals to survive in our society as it provides the categorizations necessary for the community to work efficiently. It is also a very human thing to do as it allows for a sense of security to belong to a categorization. However, on the other hand, it would appear, as we have explored through this paper, that these categorizations create a false image of the individual and restrict their mobility in society by creating such an image—forcing them to partake in the image if they would like to partake in the society. The fact of the matter is that,

unlike other categories which we get to choose—e.g. our profession, hobbies, activities etc.—applying a gender to an individual restricts that individual both from being understood by others and also from understanding themselves as it shifts the focus from the personality and mind to some “fantasy knowledge” of an “essential commonality.”

If we were to remove gender categories then we would finally be able to recognize *1,000's of tiny sexes* discussed in the first section (Colebrook, 2004, p189). It would allow for both our “woman” dressed individual and “man” dressed individual from the visual experiments to carry out any of the poses whether “feminine” or “masculine” by nature. This would mean a larger variety of acceptable ways to express one’s Self and one’s emotional state (as to the earlier fears brought up of a gender neutral world where everyone became very much the same and therefore would lose Self identity). It would allow for more complex interactions with others and therefore more accurate depictions during the Other-ing process such that the Self does not get so lost. By extension this would also manage to reduce and eventually eliminate the inequity concerns expressed in related literature from the introduction as the movement to this situation would create a culture in which gender is simply no longer important and thus individuals would no longer be in the mindset to discriminate against another gender.

The biggest backlash with this idea I believe, is that many find this to be an impossible task. It seems too difficult to change a culture that is informed by centuries of western socialization processes. However, I would like to refer to Gadamer’s explanation that:

[Humans’] relationship to the world is characterized by freedom from environment. this freedom implies the linguistic constitution of the world. Both belong together. To rise above the pressure of what impinges on us from the world means to have language and to have world, (Gadamer, 2013, p460).

We have a language that has developed based on the world around us but that also means that we can likewise shape the world around us with the use of our language. Change your language, change your world. And it *is* possible.

And by possible I don’t mean simply by trying to “break the mold” of stereotypes as some of the other mentioned literature has suggested. Pointing out stereotypes and then breaking them in public ways can be effective only to a certain extent. With this method there will always be the remnants of the distinction between gender; subconsciously we will recognize the reason we need to break the mold is because there is a mold. Furthermore, the breaks to the mold tend to

be drastic or exaggerated attempts and so still do not allow for a full spectrum of actions and thoughts. So again, let's just remove the mold altogether.

To do this let's return to childhood and the idea of play. This, we know, is where children begin to learn our language even prior to speaking and so it is the place we need to start if we want to see future generations develop without gender terms. Furthermore, we know that it is far easier to teach language to children rather than to adults, or so the adage goes "can't teach an old dog new tricks." Some may be uninspired by this, asking how can we possibly teach our children to see that gender is not an important distinguisher if we cannot stop ourselves from doing so? It is true this would take some work but it does not mean it is impossible, certainly we have seen it in other areas.

For example, a woman from an older generation said to me once, "I am racist. I know it, and I hate it. It's the way I was raised and even though I do my best to not make my choices based on it I cannot help but see race. But what I can do is raise my children from the beginning so that they don't." And she was pretty successful in that endeavor, in my opinion. She worked very hard making conscious decisions on what she said and did, despite not being able to change what thoughts subconsciously came to mind of categorization, and because of that her children did not develop the subconscious thought of those categories. It is clear that racism is not yet extinct (and it also must be noted that this example is different from my proposal in that not all race related words were removed from our everyday use of language but instead only the derogatory ones), but it is also clear that there is far less of it around than there once was and that is a testament to our ability to change visual and verbal language over the course of generations if we *choose* to make that change.

Still, removing gender terms sounds difficult because we are living with them everyday. But as hard a task as it sounds, many individuals are already taking on trying to remove gender terms from their children's education. By providing their children with gender neutral options of play and/or introducing their "boys" to traditionally "girls'" toys as well as traditionally "boys'" toys, and vice versa, from a young age these parents are acquainting their children with the idea of naturally taking on the roles of both traditional genders, rather than forcing them into a box of one or the other. The parents are trying to create an environment based on the idea that the toys and types of play do not belong to any gender. Based on the way in which racism has been slowly weeded out (though unfortunately not yet eradicated) it would be easy to argue that when

these children grow up they will be more likely to pass on those same traits of not gendering play to their children. Some parents are already even attempting not to use verbal gender terms with their children as can be viewed in many personal stories shared on It Get's Better (a project in which LGBTQ+ members, which includes allies, share their stories of fighting for inclusion), but this is not an easy task. An interesting example outside of American culture is that Sweden actually created an official gender neutral pronoun and many parents there are raising their children using this pronoun instead of the equivalent “he” or “she” and there are even schools that have opened gender neutral learning facilities using this term instead (Hanna, 2016).

The place where I believe this section of the task will be most effective most quickly will be in conjunction with academics—by this I mean both in the education system itself and also by the materials produced for public consumption. The reason academic standards will be important is that this is the primary place outside of the home life that children will be likely to hear gender terms. One can attempt to remove gender terms in the home but it is less effective if the child then goes to school and is taught differently. Attempting to remove gender terms within the home can also be impeded by a lack of good materials (i.e., children’s books for learning to read) that do not use gender. Learning a grammatical system in school that uses only proper nouns and gender neutral pronouns compounded with writers who produce children’s literature with the same structure would be paramount to removing the terms from circulation.

Another movement that would be especially helpful would be in film; many young individuals are aided in initially learning to speak from watching TV shows and movies and even once already have an established speech pattern we are prompted subconsciously by other sources to pick up the style around us. There are of course other things that would have to go along with this including our visual propaganda for example unisex or gender neutral bathrooms or even things like division of clothing sections within department stores being removed. However, all of these visual cues, and others I have not mentioned explicitly, are new but seemingly growing trends. We see in the news everyday more and more about big name stores (i.e., Target, Kroger) implementing unisex or gender neutral or trans-friendly bathroom policies and “ungendered” clothing that is comfortable for all body types is becoming popular in the fashion scene while still maintaining a surprisingly large variety in clothing style (and some brands, like Zara, are producing such clothing lines for mass production).

Removing gender language (both spoken and visual) would require a group effort and it would perhaps be slow to catch on. In fact I would suggest a slow generation by generation approach is necessary in order for this solution to be effected. A fast and radical “burn the books!” approach would surely leave us with a destabilized society and an entire generation that is unable to function well due to having their gender identity ripped from them too quickly. So this will not be done overnight or even quickly, but it *can* be done and in this generational approach it can be done successfully. According to the Oxford dictionary in addition to words being constantly added to and removed completely from our language roughly 20% of currently listed English words are obsolete and that does not even include words that were simply completely lost to time. Surely we can drop a handful of gender terms while actually putting an effort in when we were able to lose so many words not even trying!

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Final Thoughts on the Difficulty of Implementation

In trying to be a practical theorist on the topic I must admit that (though I thoroughly believe the thus far explained difficulties of cultural implementation of a lack of gender terms will be made possible with the acceptance that it will be a slow process occurring over many generations) the area I believe may cause the most trouble is in health. Currently there is a strong belief in the specialization of health sciences and for this of course we would find that delineation would still be required based on physical differences (now we are looking at male versus female rather than the gender identity that is man versus woman) that require different biological attention when it comes to medicine. Because of the way in which we currently live it appears that it would be very difficult to remove the gender terminology of man and woman to any great positive effect without also removing those biological terms of male and female as we find them so closely related. Perhaps holistic medicine would help because it focuses on the unity of the entire self rather than specialization in certain body parts. If we do not move to holistic medicine perhaps we would simply not term the entire human one sex or another and instead attend a doctor for a particular part of our anatomy that we happen to have (the same way we attend one doctor for heart conditions and another for knee problems—but not everyone goes to both a heart and knee doctor, they only attend the ones that they need).

A subcategory of health would be the ability to bear children. Certainly we see a biological difference between male and female however, not all females are able to bear children. Some are infertile from the start (meaning after puberty), some have aged to a point or contracted illness that makes them infertile, and some simply do not wish to have children. So my thought would be perhaps we would simply develop the idea of “bearing children” as another kind of

trait that we attribute to individuals (much like strength or intelligence—some people have them and some people don't) rather than categorizing individuals as nouns: “bearers of children” and “not bearers of children.” Part of this idea also comes from my second inclination to believe we are headed to a future where someday our technology will allow any individual who would like to bear children to do so.

Another biological factor that has been proposed as pushback for my hypothetical world is that individuals will more freely, in the terms we currently use, present as one gender while maintaining the sex organs of another. To this my response is that we are *already* living in this kind of world with exactly such difficult discussions that must be made between potential life partners. I offer no solution to this as I find it unavoidable even in our current world and do not find it to be a hindrance to my hypothetical world. Additionally I feel we have other very difficult conversations with our potential partners on topics such as a desire or lack of desire for children or perhaps religious views or a number of other topics that do not visually present themselves... and on the basis of discovering them we may find ourselves more or less suited as potential partners. If we were afraid of such difficult conversations in general we would need to implement a policy of carrying a placard around one's neck with all their views and physical descriptions displayed for all to see.

Ultimately, my proposal is not perfect, however, I do believe that even with its potential problem areas it has real potential to be an effective solution to many of the inequity problems we have today by allowing space for identity of the Self in one's own terms rather than those terms impressed upon the individual by society.

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