

Chapter 2: Language: resisting trans-speak and the sex-gender distinction

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Sex abolition supremacists are forcing language built around a lie into our cultures. This is tyranny & must be resisted linguistically, as it is resisted elsewhere. We must reframe & denounce their premises and get this language, framed as human rights, out of children's schools. It is a lie. It is tyranny & we must stop investing in it (Bilek, 2022).

gender identity ideologues have systematically dismantled significant chunks of the English language and repurposed it to fit their needs. They have come up with a whole lexicon of jargon that they use to create an image of legitimacy and progress (O'Brien, 2019).

The gender cult has taken control of our language, and therefore controls our culture. It's time to stop capitulating and take back English (Trunchbull, 2020).

The transgender agenda is very creative with language, as it must be, given that it cannot appeal to reality. Elsewhere (Thompson, 2020: 322-7) I discussed a number of transgender's neologisms: the 'cis' prefix; the term 'transphobia'; the neutering of language referring to women (e.g. 'uterus owner'); the claim on the part of 'trans' men that they make better 'women' than 'genetic women'; and the abusive acronym 'terf'. The latter refers to the phrase 'trans excluding radical feminist', and such is the power of the trans agenda that it carries the same insulting emotional charge as any of the other terms of abuse applied to women ('bitch', 'slut', 'whore', 'slag', etc.).

It is certainly true that radical feminists (among others, including some men) try to exclude men posing as women from women's private spaces, although they are not often successful, given the social power of the transgender mob. But it's not radical feminists who exclude men from the category of 'women', it's reality. Men are not women and never can be.

Here, I discuss further examples of transgender's distortion of language. But before doing that, I need to point out that my own use of language in this context is intended to resist the dictates of the transgender agenda by refusing to use their

terminology and continuing to use ordinary language terms. The most obvious example of transgender terminology is to call men ‘women’. Throughout this present work whenever I say ‘men’ I mean men (and ‘women’, women). My terminology is ‘men who claim to be women’ or ‘men who pose as women’ rather than ‘transwomen’ (and ‘women who claim to be men’ instead of ‘transmen’).

The qualifier ‘trans’ simply reinforces the absurdity of calling men ‘women’ because it implies that actual women are only one type of woman. This implication is further emphasised with the introduction of the qualifier ‘cis’ to refer to actual women. I also use the terminology ‘transgender men’ to refer to men claiming to be ‘women’, not because I agree that they are ‘transgender’, but because they are part of the transgender agenda.

I also use masculine pronouns to refer to men (and feminine pronouns to refer to women, but I’m mostly talking about men because the transgender agenda is a masculinist project). I sometimes use the term ‘trans men’, as a shortened version of ‘men who claim to be women’, so my usage of ‘trans man’ is the opposite of trans-speak. It refers to a man, not to a woman posing as a man. I also use terms like ‘castration’, ‘amputation’ and ‘mutilation’ to refer to iatrogenic distress and the removal of healthy tissue.

I am aware that the transgender agenda calls such language usage ‘transphobia’ and ‘hate speech’, but there is nothing hateful about disagreement or intelligent criticism. And there’s no such thing as ‘transphobia’, or at least I haven’t found any instances of men posing as ‘women’ being feared or because of the way they present themselves in public. Moreover, it is important to refuse to give in to transgender’s linguistic demands if the ideology is to be resisted.

Some examples

The following quotation is provided as a typical example of trans-speak. It is the description of a proposed webinar to be given by a ‘family therapist’, who refers to herself (it looks like a woman) as ‘they/them’. She works in an organisation called ‘Somatic Experiencing International’ based in Minnesota. The title is ‘Gender as Trauma: a Somatic Perspective’, and the description of the webinar reads:

Rigid gender binaries are part of the legacies of settler-colonialism and cishetero patriarchal norms that systemically impact all bodyminds, albeit in a range of different ways. In this webinar, we will explore how the ways in which our bodyminds are gendered also intersect with the ways in which we are racialized, classed, categorized, normed and read in dominant culture and how these intersections of identities and experiences impact our health. Participants will be invited to reflect on what their role as somatic providers might be in supporting clients in healing from gendered trauma. We will address how the trauma of cisgenderism is held in both our individual and collective soma, and how it is vital to address both when working somatically with clients. By the end of this training, participants will be more aware of how pervasive and somatically held cisgenderism is, how it impacts their personal and

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professional lives, and begin to reflect on how they can work with it somatically both with their clients and in their everyday lives.¹

I'll just leave that there. Readers can refer back to it if they have doubts about the gobbledegook nature of trans-speak.

Another example of the transgender agenda's creative use of language is the neologism, 'assigned at birth', to refer to the way in which we know the sex of a newborn. A typical example:

Normatively speaking, gender is assigned at birth, if not earlier. The gender assignment system is a complex one that draws on the authority of medical figures like obstetricians, geneticists, and ultrasound technicians as well as on "common sense" cultural and moral notions about how genders and bodies should be organized. By the time of birth, most infants are, or have already been, designated as female or male on the basis of external genitalia. This [is a] performative declaration of gender (Zimman, 2019: 152).

This person is probably a woman who presents as a 'man'. Her PhD thesis involved research on 'transmasculinity',² i.e. on the type of 'masculinity' claimed by women who present as 'men'; and it is unlikely that any transgender man posing as a 'woman' would bother to research women, even those who call themselves 'men'. Identifying her as such is, of course, labelled 'misgendering' in trans-speak, but the trans objection to identifying a woman as a woman is just one more absurdity.

Absurdity is no hindrance to the transgender narrative. Anything goes as long as it serves to deny the reality of biological sex in the service of male encroachment on the female. The purpose of the 'assigned' terminology is to imply that sex is just a matter of opinion, arbitrarily imposed by obstetricians, etc., and because it is only a matter of opinion, it really doesn't matter what sex you are and choosing which sex you are, or no sex at all, is your human right. As Ani O'Brien commented critically:

Humans are "assigned gender at birth" according to these snake-oil-sellers. The act of observing the sex of a newborn has been given sinister overtones as if the act is one of oppression; an imposition of a deliberately restrictive label rather than the acknowledgement that they are female or male (O'Brien, 2019).

Another critic noted that this 'gender identity' was not necessarily confined to opting for the opposite sex, but could also be 'chosen from a lengthy menu including nonbinary and genderqueer' (Biggs, 2018).

Instead of two sexes the transgender agenda gives us an abundance of 'genders'. Examples of such lengthy menus were included in the two US National Transgender Discrimination Surveys (Grant et al, 2011; James et al, 2016) (discussed in the '... and Statistics' chapter). The earlier survey (Grant et al, 2011) asked the respondents to indicate to what extent ('Not at all', 'Somewhat', 'Strongly') each of the following applied to them: 'Transgender; Transsexual; FTM (female to male); MTF (male to

¹ <https://traumahealing-org.zoom.us/joining/register/tZEvdUChrD0pHdOk3pwb09BzTTfeVH2Gt6ud>. An attempt to view this on 27 November 2023 found it had been deleted.

² <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1081491564>

female); Intersex; Gender non-conforming or gender variant; Genderqueer; Androgynous; Feminine male; Cross dresser; Drag performer (King/Queen); Masculine female or butch; A.G. or Aggressive; Third gender; Two-spirit; Other, please specify’.

The later survey (James et al, 2016) expanded the ‘gender’ categories even further. It kept the ‘gender non-conforming’ category and listed another 25 ‘genders’ respondents could ‘identify with’, including a ‘gender not listed above’—‘A. G. or aggressive; Agender; Androgynous; Bi-gender; Butch; Bulldagger; Cross Dresser; Drag Performer (king/queen); Fa’afafine; Gender non-conforming or gender variant; Genderqueer; gender fluid/fluid; Intersex; Mahu; Multi-gender; Non-binary; Third gender; Stud; Transgender; Trans; Trans man (FTM, female to male); Transsexual; Trans woman (MTF, male to female); Travesti; two-spirit’. As well as these terms, survey respondents wrote in more than 500 ‘gender’ terms with which they said they identified (James et al, 2016: 44). It’s extraordinary that such esoteric categories should be given more credence than the existence of two sexes.

For an exhaustive-until-next-time list of ‘key terms’ in the transgender agenda, see: Neary and Cross, 2018;

for a plaintively amusing take on ‘the ever expanding alphabet soup’, see: Bindel, 2020.

The transgender agenda’s misappropriation of language also involves euphemism, with ‘gender’ the most widely disseminated example. Euphemism is a favoured ploy of the ideology of domination, and the transgender agenda has its share: ‘top surgery’ for the amputation of healthy breasts (women), and for the creation of plastic substitutes (men); ‘bottom surgery’ for the amputation of male genitalia and the creation of an ersatz ‘vagina’ (men), and for hysterectomy and the creation of a penis-like substitute (women); ‘health care’ for mutilating surgery and dosing with experimental and possibly damaging medication.

Then there’s the pronoun issue, the demand that people refer to transgender individuals by the third-person pronouns that match their ‘gender identity’, not their sex. So a man is to be referred to as ‘she’ (and a woman as ‘he’). ‘Misgendering’ is the trans neologism referring to any failure to do this. This is not just a polite request on the part of the transgender agenda. It has the power to get institutions to comply with its demands, backed up by legal sanctions in some cases.

Take, for example, the Northern Ireland civil service. During the period in 2020 when parliament wasn’t sitting because of the COVID-19 epidemic, the civil service introduced a ‘Trans Equality Policy Statement’, which states that “names and pronouns should be followed in accordance with the [trans] individual’s wishes”. It goes on to say that “[i]ntentionally and persistently mis-gendering or using colleagues’ previous names would amount to harassment”, and that “[b]reaches of this policy will be treated in a serious manner and be dealt with under the Dignity at Work Policy.” This latter policy says that “Staff whose behaviour constitutes harassment, bullying, discrimination or victimisation can be liable for disciplinary action which could lead to their dismissal” (Kula, 2020). In other words, using masculine pronouns to refer to men who claim to be ‘women’ amounts to harassment, bullying, discrimination or victimisation, and could lead to the speaker’s dismissal from the public service. Even

if no one is ever fired for referring to someone with the ‘wrong’ pronouns, the threat alone is sufficient to intimidate people into obedience.

This transgender concern with pronouns is more absurdity. The only gendered pronouns in English are the third-person singular pronouns: she, her, hers (feminine), he, him, his (masculine), and it, its (neuter). The second-person (you, your) which addresses someone in their presence is not gendered, neither is the first-person singular or plural (I, me, mine, we, our, ours), and neither is the third-person plural (they, them, their). But those third-person singular pronouns (she, her, he, him) are used to refer to someone when they are not present.

A transgender man (who claims to be a ‘woman’) who objects to being referred to as ‘he’, can only know about this if someone tells him about, or he overhears, conversations he is not party to. What the transgender pronoun demand is doing is policing the speech of people who are not speaking to them, who are out of earshot of the transgender person, in conversations that are not addressed to them. Even more bizarre is the institutional compliance with this demand. Institutions are being asked to police people’s ordinary language usage, not their use of abusive or insulting language—there is nothing insulting about pronouns.

Another neologism is ‘deadnaming’, i.e. the use of the person’s original name instead of the name he (usually) has chosen for himself to match his ‘gender identity’. And then of course there is the ‘transphobia’ insult, defined by Stonewall as ‘The fear or dislike of someone based on the fact they are trans, including the denial/refusal to accept their gender identity’ (quoted in Stock, 2018. See also: Gerlich, 2017).

Under Stonewall’s definition everything I have said here is ‘transphobic’ because I do not accept that men can be women. In fact, all disagreement with the transgender agenda is labelled ‘transphobic’. For example, in 2019 the Thames Valley Police in the UK were ‘appealing for witnesses following a number of public offences in Oxford’ involving ‘a large number of offensive stickers ... containing transphobic comments’. The texts of these so-called ‘offensive’ stickers read: ‘Woman: noun. Adult human female’ and ‘Women don’t have penises’ (Kirkup, 2019; Ffrench, 2019). The author of the first of these references (Kirkup, 2019) is critical of the police action, using irony to emphasise his disagreement:

Let us celebrate the fact that a police force is devoting resources to tracking down the awful people who have apparently broken the law by stating that “woman” means “adult human female” and that “women don’t have penises” (Kirkup, 2019).

The second reference is supportive of the transgender agenda, most of the article being devoted to favourable quotations of what ‘supporters of transgender people’ say: “The transgender community should not have to put up with these transphobic stickers—they get enough abuse as it is without having to see this walking through the city centre” (Ffrench, 2019).

It is true that these stickers are meant to be provocative. Both statements are meant to provoke people into thinking about the issue. Both are puzzling because they are self-evident to anyone unfamiliar with the transgender agenda, and hopefully that sense of bewilderment provokes reflection. They are indeed a ‘denial/refusal to accept [the] gender identity’ of any man who claims he’s a ‘woman’, just as Stonewall said. But they are also a strategy to counter the transgender erasure of women. It is

that erasure that is the original offense. The stickers are part of a campaign fighting back against the original offense against women, and they do so without insulting or threatening anyone.

In contrast, the transgender agenda is reduced to using insults ('terf' is added to the usual vicious slurs against women) and threats of rape and murder, as well as censorship, because their primal proposition that men can be 'women' is unsustainable by any rational standards of argument and evidence. There is no evidence for it apart from the transgender individual's feelings, which can be interpreted otherwise; and there is no argument for it (apart from the transgender individual's feelings, which can be interpreted otherwise). As one critic put it:

By demanding that we change the way we speak—and, indeed, think—about one of the core, and most self-evident categories of reality—biological sex—gender ideologues are undermining the very foundations of reason (Boquet, 2019).

But only if you believe them.

The overarching goal of the transgender lobby is, to quote Janice Turner (2021), to wipe women from our language. 'Words matter, she said. 'When words are removed, when their definitions are changed or conflated, concepts vanish'. Without those concepts, women cannot even voice the sex-based nature of their oppression or call for redress. When that linguistic erasure is mandated, either in formal legislative enactments or in enraged populist disapproval, women are forbidden to speak the reality of their own lives. Turner objects especially to the erasure of the word 'mother' in favour of 'parent'. This not only censors female experience of that unique bond, it also makes it difficult or impossible to speak of such vitally important issues as maternal health or maternal mortality.

Turner also notes the dehumanisation entailed by this linguistic erasure of women. 'Bleeder, labourer, ovary-haver, birthing parent ... gestational carrier', she asks, 'is the entity which performs these disparate functions even fully human?' Such dehumanisation is entirely functional for exploitative purposes such as surrogacy, where the industry 'strives to erase the inconvenient existence of a sentient woman in the lucrative business of commodifying wombs to make babies'. Turner also mentions that replacing 'sex' with 'gender identity' in crime statistics distorts them, and that allowing male athletes to compete with women and girls is unfair.

However, despite her insightful criticism, she still believes that there are such people as 'trans people' and that society 'often diminishes and misunderstands them'. 'There is no need', she says, 'for this rancorous divide between trans activists and feminists'. But not only is the 'rancour', the malevolence and hatred, all on the trans activist side—there is no equality here—the erasure of women she so cogently identifies is essential to the transgender agenda. There is no possibility of compromise between erasing women from the language and recognising that women are fully human in their own right. As she herself said, when words are removed their concepts vanish.

In its advice on maternity care to GPs (AMA, 2021), the Australian Medical Association initially appears untouched by transgender demands. The words 'women' and 'mother' are used throughout, with no sign of the euphemistic 'parent', much less a 'birthing' one. But even the AMA, staunch adherent to the reality of maternity though it is, cannot avoid the transgender push. In a footnote connected to its first

use of the word ‘women’, it says, ‘Throughout this document we refer to women, however we acknowledge that the content is also relevant for transgender men and people who identify as non-binary’.

They give no medical reason for this peculiar usage. Neither do they address any medical issues that these other-than-women pregnant ‘people’ might have. And there *are* medical issues involved when women become pregnant after having spent some time on puberty blockers and/or cross-sex hormones and have had their breasts removed. While these women remain women whatever they do, they do have medical needs different from other women, but the AMA statement contains no mention of this. Clearly, the reference to ‘transgender men’ (etc.) is tokenistic, but it does indicate the power of the transgender agenda to penetrate even the most evidence-based of female spaces.

Applies to everybody

Trans-speak is not a private language confined to those who identify as ‘trans’. Everyone is expected to use transgender language. As one of the trans commentators quoted said,

these linguistic strategies [‘gendered identity labels, third person pronouns, and body part terminology’] are found not just in the speech of trans individuals, but are also presented as a call to others to join in the process of linguistic affirmation ... trans people don’t just use their self-identified pronouns and identity labels in reference to themselves; they are also seeking for others to mirror their linguistic practices ... trans activists have already effected a great deal of change in the language ordinarily used to refer to trans people (Zimman, 2019: 154, 167, 172).

Another pro-trans commentator (a woman) said: ‘transgender is ... a descriptive label for being differently gendered that illuminates the complexity of gender *for everybody*’ (Jauk, 2011: 808—emphasis added). As evidence that everybody found transgender illuminating, Jauk (2011) cited three sources. I was unable to check the first of these, a 2008 publication called ‘The state of transgender rights in the United States of America’ by P. Currah, J. Green and S. Stryker, because it is not available on the internet.

The second (Elliot, 2009) discussed a rift between ‘transgender and transsexual persons’ involving a hierarchy of transgender whereby ‘transgender persons represent the dominant and more privileged group’ (p.8), while transsexuals are interpreted as politically regressive. But while this text may address ‘the complexity of gender’—dissociation from reality means there is no limit to the complexities that can be devised—the ‘rift’ it discusses is confined to transgender/transsexual individuals only. So it is not evidence that everybody is concerned about ‘gender’.

A further problem with this essay (Elliot, 2009) is that it claims in the sub-title to be a ‘feminist analysis’ when it is not. To define as ‘feminist’ the work of queer theorists like Judith Butler, Judith Halberstam (a transgender woman also known as ‘Jack’) or transgender man, Kate Bornstein (p.8), is to utterly misperceive what feminism is. Queer theory denies the existence of the category ‘women’, and without that category there is no feminism. In fact, such a denial is anti-feminist because it is complicit with male supremacy’s desire for a world without women. So although this essay is correct in identifying the problematic relationship between transsexual and transgender, its

distortion of feminism doesn't help its argument; nor does it substantiate Jauk's assertion that 'the complexity of gender' is relevant to everybody.

The third source cited by Jauk (2011) is an account of one female therapist's anguished attempts to deny reality as she seeks to resolve her dilemma between, on the one hand, believing her male clients when they say they're women, and on the other, her perception that they remain men nonetheless (May, 2002). She tries hard to deny this perception and see the person in front of her as female, and over and over again she fails. She can't divest herself of the knowledge that adopting stereotypical feminine modes of presentation does not change a man into a woman:

However flexibly I think I utilize this bi-polar framework [of two sexes], I still experience unease when working with men becoming women [sic], in terms of the frequency with which I internally register the strong sensation that I am talking to a man not a woman. Thus, on the one hand, I am looking for conforming gender-specific behaviour, whilst on the other, registering a discomfort with clients' keenness to identify with stereotypes of womanhood which I am unable to relate to. The choice of transsexual clients to become a "not-like-me" woman must be a factor in any reluctance on my part to see them as a real woman (May, 2002: 457).

She blames herself. She worries that her inability to deny what she knows to be true might be setting her clients up to fail, and

place transpeople [i.e. men] in an impossible position, where it is unfeasible for them to be perceived by me as real because my categories, prejudice and linguistic limitations do not allow for it (May, 2002: 458).

She finally decides to live with the ambiguity: 'to admit to the very sense of being "at sea" on questions of gender identity and embodiment ... to tolerate murkiness: to cope with not knowing and linguistic approximation' (May, 2002: 460, 462).

But another way of interpreting her dilemma is to see it as a conflict between reality and a powerful discourse that denies that reality. The only rational solution to the dilemma is to acknowledge reality. These men are not women. That might (and probably would) mean losing her NHS job. But she wouldn't be the first, or the last. So in that sense, Jauk (2011) is correct in citing this reference (May, 2002) as evidence that 'gender' is relevant for everybody, or rather, as evidence that the transgender agenda wants to impose this kind of dilemma on everybody. Most people are going to have trouble believing that men are women even, it would seem, the most sympathetic.

The insistence that 'the complexity of gender' is for everybody is no idle boast. The transgender agenda is having a colossal success. All the institutions described here (and more) have succumbed to the transgender demand by using language that reflects that demand. The term 'terf', for example, is commonly used in media reports in exactly the way the trans agenda intends it to be used, i.e. as a slur referring to women (always women) who disagree that men can be women. (Word software, however, still thankfully marks it and 'transphobia' as spelling mistakes).

For example, *Mail Online* reports of the trial of Tara Wolf, a 26-year-old male who attacked 60-year-old Maria MacLachlan in Hyde Park (discussed in the 'Courts' section of the 'More havoc: the law' chapter), used the term 'terfs' exactly as the trans agenda intends. 'TERFs', said one reporter, 'is a term that applies to Trans-exclusionary Radical Feminists, a group that believe trans women [i.e. men] should

not have the same rights as cisgendered [sic] women' (Pearson-Jones, 2018). Another referred to 'TERF organiser Dr Julia Long' without further qualification, saying that she 'initially mistook [Wolf] for a man' (Boyle, 2018). Like 'terf', the language of this latter statement is also trans-speak. In fact, Long did not 'mistake' Wolf for a man, he *was* a man, and his behaviour in physically attacking MacLachlan was typically male.

However, while these examples are typical of the more mindless reports in the mass media, *Mail* publications (*Daily Mail*, *Daily Mail Australia*, *Mail on Sunday*) have largely resisted succumbing to the transgender agenda, instead keeping scrupulously to the facts (for example, see: Manning, 2018, 2019; Manning and Bancroft, 2019; Manning and Walsh, 2019a, b).

The sex-gender distinction

Gender. n. a grammatical term only. To talk of persons or creatures of the masculine or feminine gender, meaning of the male or female sex, is either a jocularly (permissible or not according to context) or a blunder (Fowler's *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, Oxford, 1940, quoted in Scott, 1986).

The popularity of the term 'gender' must bear some of the responsibility for the rise and rise of transgenderism. Based on the assumption that the sexed body (biology) is irrelevant to society ('gender'), it makes male encroachment into the category of 'female' thinkable. Coupled with the society-wide indifference to the needs and interests of women, 'gender's' deletion of the sexed body opens the way for men to colonise the last category from which they are excluded—'female'.

Feminism's fault?

Michael Biggs put this in terms of (some) feminists arguing that 'socialisation' is the only explanation for sex differences and hence that biology is irrelevant. In doing so, he said, feminists were 'sawing off the branch on which they perched':

By denying biological differences they inadvertently eroded the distinction between male and female, which now licenses a social movement that undermines the interests of women and girls ... If society denies biological differences and does not rigidly enforce gender roles, then the way is cleared for transgenderism. Being a man or woman—or neither—becomes a matter of subjective feeling (Biggs, 2019).

He said that radical feminists were 'relatively immune' from this tendency to deny the importance of biological differences, 'because they had a much greater appreciation of sexual differences'. It was what he called 'mainstream feminism' that was so focused on socialisation and so neglectful of biology. Anderson (2018: chapter 7) has a similar argument, this time alleging that it was 'radical feminism' that prepared the way for transgenderism by denying 'the biological basis for sex differences'.

Both are partly right, but it is the use of the word 'gender' that is the problem, not feminism. As I argue below, the use of the word 'gender' has had anti-feminist implications from the beginning. It was certainly used in feminist circles as a handy shorthand way of alluding to the argument that women's subordination was socially constructed, not biologically determined. But it didn't originate with feminism (mainstream or otherwise), but with the work of such luminaries as Harry Benjamin, Robert Stoller and John Money. Moreover, it became popular *despite* its use within

feminism, not because of it. It was a way to euphemise what feminism had uncovered—calling it ‘gender’ instead of male domination or patriarchy (‘the “system of power” called “patriarchy”’, as Kate Millett put it).

But the crux of the feminist message is neither socialisation nor sex differences nor ‘gender’, but male supremacy. ‘Gender’ was an attempt to provide a shorthand way of signalling (part of) the feminist message, misguided though it turned out to be. And because it was misguided from the beginning, it settled comfortably into mainstream discourse, and now provides faithful service for the transgender agenda. But it was not feminism properly understood that was responsible for the rise and rise of transgenderism, but the euphemising function of ‘gender’.

Feminism and ‘gender’

The sex-gender distinction found favour with the feminism of the early ‘second wave’ (1970s and 1980s) because it suggested that invidious sex differences were not immutable (because they were not biological). They could be changed because they were a matter of culture, of meanings and values that had been learnt, that could be unlearned, and hence were a matter of choice. Kate Millett (1971), for example, said: ‘I agree in general with Money and [his collaborators] the Hampsons who show in their large series of intersexed patients that gender role is determined by postnatal forces, regardless of the anatomy and physiology of the external genitals’. ‘The categories “masculine” and “feminine”’, she said, were ‘arbitrary’, imposed on human personality by the ‘system of power’ called ‘patriarchy’. This system was ‘thoroughly in command’, but ‘when its workings are exposed and questioned, it becomes not only subject to discussion, but even to change’ (Millett, 1971: 30-1, 58).

More recently, it was claimed that the sex-gender distinction is ‘the single most important feminist theoretical contribution to social theory ... [and] the social structures and meanings attributable to sex difference’ (Linda Gordon, quoted in Jensen, 2017: 24). Note, though, that this is not a *denial* of sex differences, but a focus on ‘the social structures and meanings’ attributed to them.

Nonetheless, despite its promise of choice where there traditionally had seemed to be none, the sex-gender distinction has done a disservice to feminism, or rather, ‘gender’ has. At the beginning, there were some warning voices pointing out that the distinction was not necessary and that it undermined the feminist project. But they were not heeded and the warnings dropped out of the feminist repertoire in favour of ‘gender’ here, ‘gender’ there, ‘gender’ ‘gender’ everywhere.

Early criticisms of the sex/gender distinction

The distinction was not necessary, it was said, because sex/biology was already constituted socially. We could only know it through our understanding of it, and understanding came from our shared social reality. As Genevieve Lloyd said, ‘our bodies, as they figure in our self-consciousness, are always already socially constructed’ (Lloyd, 1989: 20). Note that she didn’t say that *bodies* are socially constructed. She said that it is the way we know and understand them, the meanings and values we place upon them, that are socially constructed.

Moira Gatens said that any notion of a body outside the ways in which we know it was meaningless. ‘[T]he human body is always lived in culture’, she said, ‘To speak of the body as somehow being outside of culture and its influence is nonsensical—

already, to speak/write the body (even the biological body) is to subject it to language, itself a cultural product' (Gatens, 1989: 34-5, 43). But she didn't reject the term 'gender' despite her own criticism, but continued to use it uncritically. For example, she referred to 'the gendered relations between the sexes', although she could have refrained from using the word 'gendered' and the meaning would have remained the same. Indeed, it would have been clearer—what meaning is conveyed by 'the gendered relations between the sexes' that is not conveyed by 'the relations between the sexes'?

Here, 'gender' plays its usual obfuscating role. It implies that there is something other than sex at issue here. But if 'the human body is always lived in culture', if 'gender' is already included within 'sex' (because we can't know anything about sex/the body/biology unless we understand it), why use the word 'gender'? We've already said it all when we talk about sex. Gatens herself kept switching between the two. At one point she talked about 'the relations between the sexes' without any mention of 'gender'. She seems not to have taken her argument to its logical conclusion. If 'sex' and 'gender' are the same thing, both of them 'lived in culture', then just 'sex' will do. 'Gender' is superfluous—except of course it's not, because of the euphemistic purpose it serves in the interests of patriarchal recuperation.

Another writer who argued that our knowledge of sex was already socially constructed was Gayle Rubin, who originally suggested the notion of a sex-gender system (Rubin, 1975). She said, 'Sex as we know it—gender identity, sexual desire and fantasy, concepts of childhood—is itself a social product' (Rubin, 1975: 166). Note that she said 'sex as we know it', so at least at that point, she was well within the feminist tradition. I hesitate to refer to Rubin's writings as 'feminist', however. On the one hand, her 1975 essay, 'The traffic in women', was a mostly insightful account of women's subordination with some examples of the ways in which it is justified among men.

On the other hand, she was later to espouse what she called 'benign sexual variations', which consisted of nothing but a series of male sexual fetishes, including prostitution—which she located with women ('sex workers') rather than the men who demanded it—and pornography: 'transsexuals, transvestites, fetishists, sadomasochists, sex workers such as prostitutes and porn models, and the lowliest of all, those whose eroticism transgresses generational boundaries' (i.e. paedophiles) (Rubin, 1984: 279). She held that no form of sexuality was to be morally condemned, not even paedophilia, which she defended as a set of 'victims of a savage and undeserved witch-hunt', referring to them euphemistically as 'boy-lovers' and 'men who love underaged youth' (Rubin, 1984: 272-3). Nonetheless, her earlier point that our knowledge of sex is already socially constructed is what feminism was arguing at the time.

For an extended critique of this sexual libertarianism of Rubin among others, see: Thompson, 1991: chapters 10 to 14.

Behind the 'sex-gender' distinction and the 'gender' terminology lies the denial that there are any differences between the sexes, or at least the denial that they are important. Often this denial was well-intentioned, an attempt to counter the sexist belief that women's subordination was caused by their differences from men and that those differences were biological and hence unchangeable. (See Millett above).

Often, however, the denial of sex differences had a more sinister motive, in the sense that it was used as a backlash against a feminism struggling to verbalise the hitherto hidden and denied reality uncovered by the feminist insights. In this framework, feminist writings seen to be arguing that the sexes were different (by Mary Daly, Andrea Dworkin, Catharine MacKinnon, etc.) were accused of ‘essentialism’ and ‘biologism’ and derided as ‘false universalism’ by a false ‘feminism’ busily white-anting feminism from within. If the sexes were not even different, or not in any important respects, it was impossible to identify the social problem responsible for women’s subordination (i.e. male domination), or even to acknowledge women’s oppression at all.

For an extended critique of this strategy, see: Thompson, 1991: chapter 10.

Rubin’s writing fits in with this latter framework, not surprisingly, given her anti-feminist sexual libertarianism. ‘Gender’, she said, ‘is a socially imposed division of the sexes’. So far so feminist (although she doesn’t mention that it is not just a division but a form of male domination). But then she goes on to tell us that it is this social imposition that is responsible for the differences between women and men because, ‘from the standpoint of nature, men and women are closer to each other than either is to anything else—for instance, mountains, kangaroos, or coconut palms’. She then goes on to say,

the idea that men and women are two mutually exclusive categories must arise out of something other than a nonexistent [sic] “natural” opposition. Far from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities ... The division of the sexes has the effect of repressing some of the personality characteristics of virtually everyone, men and women. The same social system which oppresses women in its relations of exchange, oppresses everyone in its insistence upon a rigid division of personality (Rubin, 1975: 179-80).

This is the kind of postmodern argument that prepared the ground for the trans narrative (and it is not a feminist argument). If the sexes are more similar than they are different, it is quite feasible that men might be able to call themselves ‘women’.

Unfortunately for her argument, it’s fallacious: from the fact that human beings are different from other things, it does not follow that women and men are *not* different from each other. They are, and naturally different at that; and it is those differences that feminism is addressing, not, however, as mere differences. Feminism is challenging the ways in which sex differences are used as excuses and justifications for holding women in contempt; and feminism is struggling to assert a human status that is specific to women. To insist (as Ann Oakley also did in *Sex, Gender and Society*) that the sexes are so similar that the differences are ‘superficial’ and ‘merely apparent’, is to argue away the feminist project.

It is true that the sexes are similar in the sense that we’re both human beings. But the male supremacist reality feminism is struggling against denies full human status to women *because* we are women, i.e. because of women’s difference from men. Refusing to acknowledge that ‘difference’, which is not simply a difference but a matter of discrimination against and subordination and oppression of women, arrogant entitlement on the part of men, and dissociation for everyone but especially men, is to deny any need for feminism.

The depoliticising function of 'gender'

Not only was the sex-gender distinction unnecessary for conveying the feminist message, its denial of any important role for sex differences, undermined the feminist project. There were a few feminists who recognised this from the outset. For example, the editors of the *Australian Feminist Studies* journal noted that some of the articles in a 1987 issue of the journal *Daedalus* argued in favour of using the word 'gender' instead of 'women' or 'feminist'. The reasons were that 'women' was 'too specific' (presumably because it excluded men and we can't have that), and 'feminist' was 'too political' (and hence biased towards women, and we can't have that either). The *AFS* editors expressed disquiet at this preference for 'gender', commenting that

privileging "gender" over "women" or "feminist" is a strategy that can all too easily rebound against Women's Studies courses and feminist research ... A supposedly super-ordinate category is being introduced to de-fuse, indeed to eliminate, the political impetus from which feminist research and Women's Studies arise and draw their strength (*AFS*, 1989: iii).

Joan Scott also noted the depoliticising function of using the term 'gender', arguing that its usage on the part of feminist historians was an attempt to gain academic credibility:

In its simplest recent usage, "gender" is a synonym for "women." Any number of books and articles whose subject is women's history have, in the past few years, substituted "gender" for "women" in their titles. In some cases, this usage ... is actually about the political acceptability of the field. In these instances, the use of "gender" is meant to denote the scholarly seriousness of a work, for "gender" has a more neutral and objective sound than does "women." "Gender" seems to fit within the scientific terminology of social science and thus dissociates itself from the (supposedly strident) politics of feminism. In this usage, "gender" does not carry with it a necessary statement about inequality or power (Scott, 1986: 1056).

She did not, however, find this a reason to refrain from using 'gender'. On the contrary, she accepted it as an accurate designation of the subject matter of feminism and went on to use it herself, e.g. 'A way to conceive of "social reality" in terms of gender is lacking [in feminist psychoanalytic theory] ...' (p.1064); 'Concern with gender as an analytic category has emerged only in the late twentieth century' (p. 1066), etc.

Moira Gatens (1983) also argued that the sex-gender distinction was depoliticising (despite her continued use of 'gender'). It neutralised sex differences, she said, and in doing so, it neutralised sexual politics. It allowed sex differences to be ignored and gave priority to discourses other than feminism—"class", "discourse", "power" or some other "hobby-horse"—which co-opted or trivialised feminist struggles and feminist theory: 'as if women's *bodies* and the representation and control of women's bodies were not a crucial stake in these struggles' (Gatens, 1983: 156—original emphasis).

She pointed out that behaviours have quite different meanings depending on whether they are done by women or by men, and that those meanings are not neutral, but applied to sexed bodies. In other words, 'gender's' function in separating bodies from

their meanings and changing the meanings with no reference to the sex of the body, does not lead to neutrality (nor equality, it might be said). Rather, in a society where men are seen as the norm, it leads to ‘a “masculinization” or “normalization” of women—a making of “woman” into “man”’ (p.156). And of course a making of men into ‘women’, as the transgender project would have it, a logical consequence of the insistence that sex differences don’t matter.

The sex-gender distinction didn’t remain a distinction for very long. The ‘sex’ side of the dichotomy was quickly dropped in favour of ‘gender’ as the preferred designation of whatever we were talking about when it came to ‘women’ or ‘sex differences’ or ‘equality’ or ... (see, for example, Scott, 1986; SRG, 1987). The excuse for this avoidance of the ‘biology’ side of the distinction was the supposed need to avoid ‘essentialism’. As Moira Gatens put it: ‘In general, the favouring of the category “gender” over the category “sex” is defended in terms of the “dangers of biological reductionism”’ (Gatens, 1983: 144).

For a criticism of the use of the term ‘essentialism’ to describe so-called ‘cultural feminism’ (i.e. radical feminism), see: Thompson, 1991: chapter 10.

But perhaps a more honest reason is that biology made it impossible to argue sex differences away. If women were to be equal to men they had to be the same as men—on some essential level beyond the merely social? (Note the irony—those most eager to label others with the ‘essentialism’ accusation were the worst offenders). Acknowledging that the sexes were different was an impediment to arguing for women’s equality with men. If the sexes were different, how could women be equal? Since biology couldn’t be argued away, it was best to ignore it. Thus ‘gender’ became the sole referent of a ‘feminism’ bowdlerised and sanitised for everyday usage by being confined to pleas for ‘equality’. To my knowledge, feminism has two responses to this. The first is the slogan, ‘Women who seek to be equal to men lack ambition’; the second is the insight that men are not equal among themselves, so which men are women supposed to be equal to?

In its euphemising function ‘gender’ does sterling service for male supremacy’s process of recuperation from the threat posed by feminism. The usual term for this euphemising process is ‘depoliticisation’, and it is true that the term ‘gender’ waters down the politics in what passes for ‘feminism’ in the malestream. But the way in which it does this is by using a term that serves the purposes of the male supremacist system of power that feminism is designed to challenge. Euphemising is still political. It does defuse feminist politics by gutting its terminology. But that ploy serves the political purposes of male domination by substituting something anodyne, even meaningless, for any term that might threaten to expose it.

‘Gender’ has worked well as this substitute. It replaces the word ‘women’—a word that excludes men, the ‘real’ human beings, and hence brings into question the primal principle of male supremacy, that only men count as ‘human’. It replaces the word ‘sex’ (‘the gender of the foetus’)—a word which still seems to cause some embarrassment when said aloud. It is a substitute for sex differences—we can’t be all that different if we’re equal, and guess who we’re all the same as. And it is a substitute for the name of the real enemy.

My early critique

But despite the fact that using the word ‘gender’ took the politics out of feminism, no one, to my knowledge, has suggested dispensing with it. Except me:

I would like to see feminism dispense with the word “gender” (a vain hope, I suspect, given that it appears to have become thoroughly embedded within feminist discourse), in favour of the old, easily recognisable, ordinary English term, “sex” (Thompson, 1989: 23).

In fact, I was suspicious of ‘gender’ from the beginning, and I was never tempted to use the word within a feminist context (except to criticise it), despite decades of thinking, theorising and writing feminism. But I seemed to be the only one who recommended getting rid of the word ‘gender’ altogether.

Like the theorists quoted above, I too argued for dispensing with ‘gender’ because there was no need for it. ‘Sex’ was already socially constituted through language and meanings and values. ‘Biology and bodies have meaning and political relevance’, I said, ‘only to the extent that they are already situated within discourse (or ideology, or the cultural, or the social, or language)’ (Thompson, 1989: 25). Confining the social aspect of sex differences to ‘gender’ implied that ‘sex’ was somehow outside society.

I also argued that the way the sex-gender distinction dealt with the connection between ‘biology’ and sex differences was confused. Sometimes biology was appealed to in order to show that the differences between the sexes were not very marked after all. (Oakley, 1972, argued this in relation to sexual desire and activity).

Sometimes ‘biology’ was dragged in as a red herring to dismiss arguments by so-called ‘cultural feminists’. Alice Echols, for example, referred to a ‘growing tendency among some cultural feminists to invoke biological explanations of gender differences’ (Echols, 1984: 64). No one seemed to notice that accusing ‘*cultural*’ feminists of appealing to *biology*, was an oxymoron, given that ‘culture’ and biology (i.e. ‘nature’) are each other’s opposites.

And sometimes ‘biology’ was used to prove that there were so many differences that no one difference made any difference: ‘the multiplicity of bodily conformations and sexualities presented to us by concrete physicality—hermaphrodites, transsexuals, “freaks”, Siamese twins, etc.—[is] evidence that the grand dichotomy of sex is but one distinction among many’ (Thompson, 1989: 29. See, for example, Grosz, 1988. See also: Grosz, 1996).

The whole point of the exercise, the reason for the sex-gender distinction in the first place, was to deny that there were any significant differences between the sexes. If there is no real basis for sex differences, if sex differences are ‘superficial’ and ‘merely apparent’ (in Oakley’s words), simply a matter of ‘gender’, then there is no real reason why each sex can’t take the place traditionally reserved for the other. Women can take up men’s places in the workforce and the boardroom, men can take up women’s places in child-rearing and domestic activities. This fits neatly into the transgender agenda: if there is no real basis for sex differences, then men can be women. And women can be men, but because they are women, they can be ignored once they have served their purpose of tokenistic inclusion.

Conclusion

Biggs was right to identify the denial of biology in the name of ‘feminism’ as a precursor to transgenderism, as was Anderson (up to a point). Neither of them noticed, however, that it is the term ‘gender’ that has been central to that process of denial. From the very beginning the ‘gender’ usage has been antithetical to the feminist project, because of its denial of sex differences certainly (e.g. ‘gendered violence’), but also because of its euphemistic denial of the real enemy, male domination.

This is not a term they use, of course. Biggs referred to ‘a men’s rights movement’, an obvious instance of male domination, but Anderson rejects ‘patriarchy and male power’ as an explanation for socialised sex differences because ‘the most developed countries show the greatest gender differences in various measures of personality and disposition’. That’s because ‘the most developed countries’ have ‘prosperity and equality ... wealth, freedom and education’, and that ‘empower[s] men and women to be who they are’ (Anderson, 2018: chapter 7). Oh well, he is on the political Right, after all.

Nowadays, the term ‘gender’ is exposing its true colours as camouflage masking the real problem. It is central to male encroachment into the category of ‘female’, giving men permission to penetrate women’s spaces. ‘Gender’ rendered sexed bodies irrelevant. It is no wonder, then, that it has provided good service for the transgender agenda. Divorcing ‘gender’ from sexed bodies, and the popular enthusiasm with which it has become a euphemistic substitute for sex (and women, and the subject matter of feminism), eased the way for the transgender agenda.

The arrogance of the masculine entitlement to go wherever he pleases and do whatever he wants, and society’s acquiescence in that entitlement, is so extreme that it overrides reality. But then, that is the nature of the male supremacist mindset, whose dissociation from any genuine humanity (Thompson, 2020) is rooted in the stubborn refusal to acknowledge the full humanity of women.

One of the conclusions to be drawn from what I have said above is that ‘confusing sex and gender’ is not one of the problematic aspects of the transgender agenda. I am not arguing that ‘sex and gender identity are entirely distinct concepts’ (e.g. Sullivan, 2020). The more basic problem is the use of the word ‘gender’ at all. Just as there is no such thing as a ‘trans person’, so there is no such thing as ‘gender’. The solution, as I argued decades ago, is to drop the word ‘gender’ from the feminist lexicon altogether. The only feminist purpose it might have served is to get some of the more acceptable (to the malestream) feminist messages across. But the damage it’s causing isn’t worth it.

So the use of the word ‘gender’ serves to mask the unreality and misogyny of transgender’s claims, just as its absurd neologisms do. Functioning as it does to euphemise the social problem exposed by feminism—male domination—‘gender’ allows anti-feminism to masquerade as ‘feminism’, and transgender is one of the more extreme examples. ‘Gender’ does sterling service for the transgender cause just because of its connotations of ‘choice’. If sex is nothing but ‘gender’, then one can choose one’s sex. Men can choose to be ‘women’ and, because they’re ‘women’, they can claim feminist status. Feminism is, after all, for all women, including ‘trans women’. Thus does transgender colonise feminism. The logic might be superficially

plausible, but only by accepting its false premise that ‘gender’ is sex. One can almost admire transgender’s ingenuity, if it wasn’t so pernicious.

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