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Abstract The distinction between 'sex' and 'gender' is challenged by arguments that 'sex' is equally a social construction, initiating a self-reflexive effort to return feminism to its foundational grounding. This article concerns intersexuality and transsexualism as two bodily forms that further suggest 'sex' as socially inscribed. I argue that feminist theory needs to ascertain whether the artificial emphasis on sexual difference, contra nature, is better able to effect social change than conjoined efforts to expose 'sex' as a construction intended to ground divisions. Recent support for 'multiple genders' often remain dependent on a morphological notion of 'sex', and, as such, may not constitute a radical challenge to our current 'sex'/'gender' system.

Keywords *multiple genders, nature, queer, sexual difference, transgenderism*

The development of the trans movement has raised a vital question that's being discussed in women's communities all over the country. The discussion revolves around one pivotal question: how is woman defined? The answer we give may determine the course of women's liberation for decades to come. (Feinberg, 1996: 109)

Feminists do need to make normative judgements and to offer emancipatory alternatives. We are not for 'anything goes'. (Fraser, 1995: 71)

Introduction

The journal *Differences* recently devoted an issue to questioning the continued viability of women's studies as a discipline, adjoining a growing 'identity' debate in feminist theory. Notwithstanding a generally supportive attitude, the contributors acknowledged a general movement away from women's studies towards gender, gay, lesbian and sexuality studies:

... women's studies has sometimes greeted uncomfortably (and even with hostility) the rise of feminist literary studies and theory outside its purview, Critical Race Theory, postcolonial theory, queer theory, and cultural studies. Theory that destabilises the category of women, racial formations that disrupt the unity or

primacy of the category, and sexualities that similarly blur the solidarity of the category – each of these must be resisted, restricted, or worse, colonised, to preserve the realm. (Brown, 1997: 83)

That feminist theory dwells on issues of identity is understandable. I need not revisit the now well-trodden history of theory's 'end of innocence' (Flax, 1990).

Current concern with the fragmentation of identities adjoins the debate surrounding the continued viability of differentiating between 'sex' and 'gender'. The 'sex'/'gender' binary has circulated throughout the social sciences, providing a powerful foundation for a material account of women's oppression. 'Sex' referred to biological differences between women and men, whereas 'gender' signified the practices of femininity or masculinity in social relations. This bifurcation served a number of functions, of which the most immediate was to provide a convenient, tangible means to constitute identity and proceed with the immediate concern of challenging the hierarchical relationships that subordinate women to men.

Confidence in this distinction is eroding, or has already degenerated to such an extent that Hood-Williams (1996) is able to offer its 'post-mortem'. Many feminist scholars have contributed to this 'post-mortem' by critiquing the 'sex'/'gender' distinction.¹ For instance, Delphy argues that, rather than seeing sex as the baseline from which gender emerges through sociality, 'gender . . . create(s) anatomical sex' (1984: 144). By conflating the biological with the natural, 'sex' becomes the natural that initiates the social. Moreover, 'natural' difference is based almost entirely on one particular aspect of biology: sexual reproduction.² Under the discursive sign of sexual reproduction, an entire orchestra of 'biological facts' is brought into play to fix the notion of biological 'sex' differences. Thus, chromosomes, hormones and genitalia have been variously 'constituted as embodying the *essence* of sex' (Harding, 1996: 99; emphasis in original).

Also critiquing the 'sex'/'gender' distinction, Hood-Williams (1996) focuses on three interrelated assumptions that underlie this (often) taken-for-granted binary. First, the biological distinction between women and men assumes that a distinction can be made between biology ('sex') on the one hand, and culture ('gender') on the other; and, furthermore, that whereas 'gender' is changeable, 'sex' is immutable. Finally, and most importantly for this article, this binary depends on the idea that biology itself consistently distinguishes between females and males. Nature, as I hope to argue, offers shades of difference and similarity much more than clear opposites, and it is rather a modern ideology that imposes the current template of sexual difference.³

Despite feminist critiques, the overall feminist project has largely depended on a 'real', corporeal base on to which 'gender operates as an act of cultural *inscription*' (Butler, 1990: 146; emphasis in original). Wittig's (1993) theory of lesbian identity illustrates Butler's point. Wittig argues that lesbians' position in the 'sex'/'gender' binary is ambivalent: lesbians are contemporaneously 'women' (as defined morphologically) and 'not women' (as defined by heteronormativity). The political project determined

to challenge the heteronormative definition of 'woman' makes Wittig's analysis valuable. However, the analysis relies on an immutable notion of 'sex' to argue the social construction of 'gender' (Fuss, 1995). Although Wittig goes to some length to discuss lesbian *social* identity, she also quite clearly considers lesbian membership initially on the basis of *morphology*. Nowhere does Wittig discuss the possibility of lesbians with penises. So, implicitly, lesbians are women and women are females and females are human beings with a particular morphological body.

Even some postmodern feminists often seem unwilling, in the final instance, to give up a corporeal notion of the feminine. At the same time that Shildrick, for instance, is able to write of 'posthumanism' and 'identity as process', she states: 'I . . . have no wish to fully abandon the concept of the feminine' and that although 'boundaries are fluid and permeable, they [do not] cease altogether' (1996: 9–10).⁴ Postfeminist and cyberfeminist analyses may focus on the body as 'fragmented' and 'chimerical', but for most feminists these discussions remain conceptual and remote from the everyday material relations of 'gender', where 'sex' is fully grounded.

Two lived bodily identities currently challenging the modern 'sex'/'gender' binary are intersexuality and transsexuality. Intersexuals radically confront the modern two-sex model of sexual difference, and medical accounts of their sex 'reassignment' tell a disturbing story of the literal reinscription of sex on to 'unruly' bodies.⁵ And if intersexuals challenge the reification of the 'sex'/'gender' binary, then male-to-female (MTF – whether preoperative, postoperative or non-surgical) transsexuals particularly focus the assumption that you need a particular morphological configuration to 'know' yourself as female. Beauvoir's signature statement that 'one is not born, but becomes a woman' seems to anticipate transsexual claims (de Beauvoir, 1953). However, as I will suggest, this social constructionist account more often provides the justification to exclude individuals who have not shared the supposedly common experiences of growing up as women under patriarchy. In our current discursive field, to exist at all means being a woman or a man, or, in Butlerian terms, 'sex is the norm by which the "one" becomes viable at all' (1993: 2). Thus, feminist theory continues to labour definitional concerns based on the 'sex'/'gender' template.

Indeed, on a practical level, much feminist theory continues to operate from a largely undisturbed two-sex model, as it seems to facilitate analyses of women's experiences.⁶ Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire* (1994) remains the 'definitive statement on transsexualism by a genetic female academic' opposed to sex-reassignment surgery, and it clearly voices a shared feminist concern (Stone, 1991: 3). Raymond uses a familiar modern recipe of biology and socialization to differentiate between 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' women:

We know who we are. We know that we are women who are born with female chromosomes and anatomy, and that whether or not we were socialised to be so-called normal women, patriarchy has treated and will treat us like women. Transsexuals have not had this same history. (1994: 114)

Precisely by invoking the 'sex'/'gender' binary, Raymond is able to argue that 'transsexuals are not women. They are deviant males' (1994: 183).

With an aim to questioning the feminist deployment of the 'sex'/'gender' binary, I want to explore the ways in which intersexuals and transsexuals, on different grounds, refuse the opposition of sexual difference. I hope to raise definitional concerns about the continued use of the 'sex'/'gender' binary that has major implications for questions of inclusion and exclusion. Let me be clear that my objective is not to highlight the difficulties of 'including' intersexuals and transsexuals as women, but rather to question how *anyone* claims this membership based on the current 'sex'/'gender' binary. Given the tenuous definitional status of both 'gender' and 'sex', I explore the viability of recent proposals to 'end' gender. My aim is not to entertain a reductionist argument 'for' sex and gender plurality and 'against' sex and gender restriction.⁷ Rather, I am interested in naming the consequences of particular instances of reductionism that the 'sex'/'gender' binary effects.

The variability of sex⁸

Intersexuals provide a valuable opportunity to explore the relationship between 'sex' and 'gender', as well as the designation of meaningful categories of difference. In this section I hope to argue that the 'sex'/'gender' binary is particularly reductive for intersexuals, with very real political, social and personal implications. Chase (1998) estimates that one in every 100 births shows some morphological 'anomaly', which is observable enough in one in every 1000 births to initiate questions about a child's sex.⁹ The sexologist John Money founded surgical sex 'reassignment' of intersexual infants in the United States, and his protocols remain standard practice today. Money's extensive published work testifies to both the discursive gymnastics required to sustain a two-sex model, and the profound impact this reductionist model has had on the lives of intersexuals.¹⁰ Money developed a vocabulary that combined biology and sociality, allowing the medical community to sustain the belief that 'sex' consists of two exclusive types despite *the medical community's own evidence* that this is not the case.

According to Money, core gender identity results from the child's interactions with parents as well as the child's perception of their own genitals (1985: 282). We might expect that the emphasis on gender identity as *socially* acquired might lead Money to conclude that anatomy is not destiny, especially since he is studying children with *variable* genitalia who nevertheless identify as either girls or boys. But Money reclaims the importance of alignment between 'sex' and 'gender' by defining a 'critical period' of parent-child interaction which cements an earlier in-utero period, where hormonal activation of the brain sets the direction of neural pathways in preparation for the reception of 'post-natal social gender identity signals' (Raymond, 1994: 47). Thus, Money argues for surgical intervention as soon after birth as possible, *for the child's psycho-social well-being* (Hird and Germon, 2001). In other words, surgeons believe that

they 'merely provide the right genitals to go along with socialisation' (Kessler, 1990: 17).

Whether genitals, hormones or chromosomes are preferred in 'determining' an infant's 'sex' is debated.¹¹ Given the salience of visual cues, the 'abnormal' appearance of a newborn's genitals most often initiates medical intervention. In the first instance, then, genital appearance is privileged over hormones, chromosomes, gonads and internal reproductive structures (Hausman, 1995). Garfinkel and Stoller argue that the 'natural, normally sexed person [as] cultural object', must possess either a vagina or a penis and where nature 'errs', human-made vaginas and penises must serve (1967: 122). A newborn with ambiguous genitalia is thus considered a 'medical emergency' (Pagon, 1987) and surgeons are roused from sleep to decide the child's 'best sex' (Feinberg, 1996).

Chromosome tests determine the genetic make-up of the child: if they reveal an XX configuration, genital surgery is usually performed without delay (Kessler, 1990). Where tests indicate the presence of a Y chromosome, surgery may be delayed while further tests determine the responsiveness of phallic tissue to androgen treatment. Such treatment serves to enlarge the penile structure to the point where it can pass as a *real* penis:

Since . . . reproduction may be disregarded, the most important single consideration is the child's subsequent [hetero] sexual life. . . . If there is little or no penile growth the male sex will be out of the question and the female sex should be chosen; with good penile development the male sex may be appropriate. (Dewhurst and Gordon, 1969: 45)

The old trope proves true as penis size ultimately dictates whether the child is reconstructed as male or female (Griffin and Wilson, 1992; Pagon, 1987). Surgeons consider the condition of a micro-penis so detrimental to a male's morale that reassignment as female is *justified on this basis alone*. The implication here is that *male* 'sex' is not only, or most importantly, defined by chromosomes or by the ability to produce sperm. Rather, masculinity is determined by the aesthetics of an *appropriately sized* penis:

If the subject has an inadequate phallus, the individual should be reared as female, regardless of the results of diagnostic tests. In the patient with an adequate phallus, however, as much information as possible should be obtained before a decision is made. (Griffin and Wilson, 1992: 1536)

Consequently, it is common for infants with an XY chromosome configuration to be assigned and raised as female.

Further illustrating that nature does not itself provide sufficient material from which 'sex' can be read, the medical literature and the treatment protocols explicitly privilege maleness and devalue femaleness. Delays in 'corrective' surgery to reduce (or remove) phallic tissue of an XY infant beyond the neonatal period is to invite 'traumatic memories of having been castrated' (Kessler, 1990: 8). Clitoroplasty, on the other hand, is undertaken when the child is anywhere between seven months and four years of age, and sometimes as late as adolescence.¹² Further, little attention is paid to aesthetics in the creation of a vagina. The sole requirement is that the vagina be able to accommodate a penis.¹³ Scar tissue is often

hyper-sensitive, resulting in extreme pain during intercourse. Because of the lack of elasticity in scar tissue, a daily regime of dilating the vagina is required to prevent the vagina from closing. The vagina is often constructed using bowel tissue, which lubricates in response to digestion rather than arousal (Laurent, in Burke, 1996).

The high-profile John/Joan case through which Money first argued for the necessity of surgical intervention illustrates many of the contradictions in the modern two-sex model of sexual difference. After a bungled circumcision during infancy, John eventually found himself in the hands of Money's surgical team, who reassigned him as female. John's case was particularly important because he happened to have an identical twin brother. Money argued that if John 'lived' the experience of 'femaleness', then sociality, not chromosomes, determines 'gender' identity. Whereas Money repeatedly detailed the success of Joan's living as woman, interviews with John since he became an adult reveal this success to have been greatly exaggerated (Colapinto, 1997). Despite Money's assurances that *Joan* would live comfortably as a woman, *John* now lives with his wife, three adopted children and a reconstructed penis, adamant that he is a man. While John and Money would seem to disagree on just about every 'fact' of this case, they concur as to the constitution of femininity and masculinity. Money argued that the identical twin brother was 'male' because he preferred playing with 'cars and gas pumps and tools' whereas John was 'female' because of his preference for 'dolls, a doll house and doll carriage'. John himself says that he 'knew' he was not a girl because, among other signs, he did not like to play with dolls, preferred standing while urinating, and daydreamed about being a '21-year-old male with a moustache and a sports car, surrounded by admiring females' (Colapinto, 1997: 69). The various psychiatrists who eventually examined John also used similar markers to define his 'underlying' masculinity. One psychiatrist, for instance, described seeing John 'sitting there in a skirt with her legs apart, one hand planted firmly on one knee. There was nothing feminine about her' (1997: 70). Paradoxically, at the same time that the medical community strongly requires a biological definition of an intersexual's 'sex', the surgeons, endocrinologists and psychiatrists themselves clearly use a *social* definition.¹⁴

A growing political intersexual community identifies many of these problems: the variability of sexual identification, the a priori assumption of 'feminine' and 'masculine' behaviour, the phallogocentric bias in sex-reassignment, and the problem intersexuals often experience in 'belonging' to sexually identified communities. The Intersexual Society of North America (ISNA) presently lobbies to abolish all unnecessary surgery and ensure that what surgery is still performed is with the full understanding and consent of the intersexual individual involved. In making these claims, the ISNA necessarily keys into the wider debate about the 'nature' of 'sex'.

The modern medico-psychiatric response to intersexuality operates a self-referential process of creating, reflecting and reinscribing 'sex' on to the body (Hird and Germon, 2001). This socio-political belief 'is maintained and perpetuated by the medical community in the face of overwhelming physical evidence that this taxonomy is not mandated by

biology' (Hausman, 1995: 25). Thus, Money discursively refigures the natural provision of more than two sexes as a 'handicap' and 'birth defect of the sex organs' that surgery will 'repair' (1985: 280). What incites the medical community to favour extremely intrusive surgery for anatomical conditions that doctors themselves admit present no functional or medical dangers? The *authenticity* of 'sex' resides not on, nor in, the body, but rather results from a particular nexus of power, knowledge and truth. As Garfinkel and Stoller argue, surgeons can substitute for nature when they 'provide what nature meant to be there' (1967: 127). That something as 'natural' as 'sex' can be, or indeed needs to be, produced artificially is a paradox that seems to have escaped the medical fraternity (Hird and Germon, 2001; Kessler, 1990).

Intersexuals' experiences of 'sex' challenge both the medical community and feminist theory, to the extent that both are predicated on the 'sex'/gender binary to operate. To effect the incorporation of an intersexual surgically assigned as 'female' involves a determination as to the constitution of femaleness. Any definition of 'woman' that retains any corporeality must be able to define that corporeality, and this is exactly where the problem begins in definitions based on 'sex' (Hird and Germon, 1998). An intersexual will have any combination of partially or totally surgically created vagina, labia and breasts. She may or may not be able to sexually reproduce. If being female does not entail the possession of particular anatomical parts, then the artificial creation of these body parts is inconsequential. But our current assumptions about the constitution of 'sex' struggle with such a reality. According to Raymond's criteria for womanhood (quoted previously), one criterion is the presence of 'female' chromosomes. I do not agree that 'we' know we are born with 'female' chromosomes. Most people do not bother to have their chromosome configuration checked for authenticity, so there are likely to be many more individuals with 'ambiguous' chromosome configurations than we currently identify.¹⁵ The adult(s) present during our births took a cursory glance at our genitals and defined our 'sex'.

This 'materialist' recourse to 'the body' based on chromosomes, reproductive function, genomal makeup and genital appearance turns out to be, after all of our efforts, quite superficial. Beneath the surface of our skin exists an entire world of networks of bacteria, microbes, molecules and inorganic life. These networks take little account of 'sexual' difference and indeed exist and reproduce without any recourse to what we think of as reproduction. To this life beneath the surface, our fixation on the 'body' is immaterial:

Not that it really matters whether or not he [sic] ever knows about the vast populations of inorganic life, the 'thousand tiny sexes' which are coursing through his veins with a promiscuity of which he cannot conceive. He's the one who misses out. Fails to adapt. Can't see the point of his sexuality. Those who believe in their own organic integrity are all too human for the future [to come]. (Plant, 1997: 205)

This 'body' is not immutable in any biological sense. The skin on which we define the body's border is much more like a porous membrane, a

network of holes held together by a system of threads. Through these perforations all sorts of things flow. More than 50 synthetic chemicals from products we use daily (including tinned vegetables, cigarettes, chemical detergents, makeup, DDT) flow into our bodies and alter our endocrine systems (Colborn et al., 1996).

The 'sex' on which we base our discussions of 'sexual difference' is no less immutable. There are many variations of 'sex': XXY, XXXY, XXXXY, XXYY, XXXYY to name only a few. All foetuses spend their first six weeks in an XX womb and her amniotic fluid, undergoing the same development until the release of testosterone for most XY foetuses.¹⁶ Yet while the genome (chromosomal makeup) of no two people is identical (except for identical twins), the genomic makeup of all people is identical to within 1 percent (Rothblatt, 1995). The differences which we hold so dear (hair colour, skin tone and so on) and on which so much of our social organization is based ('sex'-segregated sports is an obvious example) are minuscule in comparison with our biological similarities.¹⁷ The only thing that does not exist is a pure (Y or YY) male. There has been a case of a boy born with an XX configuration, however. This boy's ovum split several times before being fertilized by sperm, providing further evidence that parthenogenic reproduction extends to humans. Human imagination may be limited to a narrow understanding of 'sexual' reproduction, but nature persists in offering a variety of reproductive means (Cohen, 1995; Margulis and Sagan, 1997). So human reproduction may yet resemble the kind of 'reproduction' most popular on this planet, which requires no sense of 'sex' at all.

I am not arguing that bodies are unimportant, immaterial, mere chimeras or that all is 'surface' (indeed, the surface of the body is *least* important, biologically speaking). Bodies are important and certainly 'material', but not necessarily in ways that justify continued emphasis on sexual difference. Rather than turning away from the 'materiality' of the body, I suggest that we step up to the body and look below its surface to its matter.¹⁸

'Knowing' our socially inscribed gender

If intersexuals raise sticky questions about 'sexed' bodily materiality, at least they have not *chosen* their bodies in the way that postoperative transsexuals are often claimed to have done.¹⁹ And if intersexuals challenge feminist theory's invocation of the 'sex'/gender binary, then MTF transsexuals particularly highlight the assumption (recall Raymond's second criterion quoted above) that one needs a particular relation to patriarchy to 'know' oneself as a woman. Feminist theory particularly values the *experience* of living in the world as a female. MTF women claim gendered status as women based on 'knowing' themselves to be women without the accepted corporeal signs designated as 'female'.

Christine Jorgensen's sex-change operation in 1953 propelled MTF transsexualism on to the modern public stage. The MTF transsexual narratives of this time adhered strongly to the 'woman-trapped-in-male-body' trope. Bolin (1994) argues that this narrative was performative, created out of the

necessity to forge an 'origin story', required by the medico-psychiatric community who regulated access to surgery. That is, medical practitioners, psychologists and transsexuals alike crafted a 'transsexual identity' based on the sustained desire for surgery (Billings and Urban, 1982; Bolin, 1994). Many transsexuals were also keen to differentiate themselves from pathologized 'gender' identities. Thus transsexualism was emphasized as temporary identity, a pit-stop before permanent womanhood.

Given feminists' commitment to illuminating supposedly innate 'feminine' behaviours as socially constructed requirements of patriarchal society, transsexual narratives unsurprisingly raise suspicions and rancour. Raymond's critique has been chorused by a number of feminists. For instance, Jeffreys (1990) provides a critical review of early autobiographies by Roberta Cowell and Jan Morris, whom Jeffreys claims are 'typical' transsexual stories. Jeffreys argues that transsexuals choose to 'imitate the most extreme examples of feminine behaviour and dress in grossly stereotypical feminine clothing', in preference to feminists, who supposedly dress 'in jeans and t-shirts' (1990: 177, 178). Jeffreys criticizes MTF transsexuals for what, she argues, is an inability to understand supposedly 'feminine' behaviours and characteristics as those which women must adopt in order to avoid punishment from patriarchy. What transsexuals consider individual attributes, Jeffreys maintains are political signifiers of women's oppression. By donning stereotyped clothing and behaviours, transsexuals, for Jeffreys, collude with patriarchy and further contribute to women's oppression.²⁰

Jeffreys's suspicion towards sex-reassignment as 'transgressive' is argued from a feminist perspective, but scholars more generally share this scepticism. Those opposed to sex-reassignment surgery argue that the medical fraternity colludes with society to silence the cultural imperative of the two-sex system. For example, MacKenzie (1994) argues that surgery maintains the current artificial distinctions based on 'sex', rather than challenging it in any way. In *Sex by Prescription* (1990), Szasz suggests that transsexualism is a 'condition tailor-made for our surgical-technological age' – the desire to experiment with new technology ensures that critical reflection on the efficacy of sex-reassignment is minimized (1990: 86). A number of scholars argue that transsexualism is a conformist, inauthentic gender expression, invented by a modern, medical community keen to experiment with new technology (Sagarin, 1978; Socarides, 1975; Szasz, 1990). In *Changing Sex*, Hausman (1995) argues similarly that transsexualism is a product of a modern belief in technology as societal saviour. Transsexualism, for Hausman, figures as a literal (embodied) privileging of gender identity over the sexed body (Hemmings, 1996). For this reason, Hausman calls for a return to 'bodies' and 'sex' rather than what she sees as the reification of gender identity. Under Hausman's gaze, medical discourse constructs the transsexual, to the exclusion of transsexuals' own subjective accounts. For Hausman, transsexuals' agency is limited to claims for sex-reassignment surgery. As I have attempted to argue in this article, this return to 'sex' as the arbiter of 'real' actually reveals the two-sex model and sex differences more generally as no less discursively imagined than 'gender' identity.

The opposition that Raymond, Szasz, Hausman and others express towards sex-reassignment is challenged by emerging transsexual narratives that suggest that many transsexuals choose sex and gender identification by default. As argued above, modern psycho-medical discourses compel individuals to identify themselves as only one of two sexes and (corresponding) genders. Until recently, transsexual narratives have been scarce because transsexual survival has depended largely on the ability to disappear. In the 1990s a distinct set of transsexual narratives began to contest the definitional status of 'gender' based on shared experience. These analyses argue that if gender can be learned, then 'womanhood' is available to anyone with the capacity to learn (Denny, 1996; Feinberg, 1996; Lewins, 1995; More and Whittle, 1999; Prosser, 1998; Rothblatt, 1995; Stone, 1991; Stryker, 1994, 1995). These narratives reflect a tension in the transsexual community between those who want to 'pass' as genitally 'correct' women or men, and an increasing number of transsexuals who seek disruption of the 'sex'/'gender' system.

Transgender studies uses transsexualism as a key queer trope in challenging claims as to the immutability of sex and gender. As such, transgender studies invests heavily in transsexualism's 'transgressive' potential. These emerging narratives, and recent transgender conferences, forecast a coming of age for transgender studies.²¹ Transsexuals agitating in the 21st century against the two-sex and gender system are challenging their 'deviant' status in psychology in much the same way as homosexuals challenged their 'disease' status during the 1980s. For example, Feinberg (1996) refuses to legally conform his sex to his expression of gender, instead directing his efforts towards questioning society's need to categorize by sex at all – the requirement to 'pass' for Feinberg is itself a product of oppression. Kris asks, 'does the fact that everywhere I go everyone calls me "sir" make me a man? Does the fact that I have breasts and a cunt make me a woman?' (in Feinberg, 1996: 158). Bornstein remarks, 'I know I'm not a man – about that much I'm very clear, and I've come to the conclusion that I'm probably not a woman either, at least not according to a lot of people's rules on this sort of thing' (1994: 8). Bornstein argues that transsexuals cannot become men or women, not because they are 'inauthentic' as Raymond and Jeffreys believe, but because transsexuals who refuse to identify themselves as 'female' or 'male' radically deconstruct sex and gender. Bornstein's autobiography highlights the fact that if transsexuals reveal anything at all, it is how messy the 'sex'/'gender' binary really is.²²

As I see it, the problem with the 'authentically experiencing woman' argument is that, despite the emphasis on sociality, it nevertheless adheres to sex as 'real'. Mead (1934) forcefully argued that the self cannot exist without society: the continuous interactive process between individuals establishes and maintains conceptions of self by reflecting back images of the self as object.²³ For Hansen, this is the 'genius of our individuality, for we are not born with individuality – we create it' (1976: 21). The point is not to determine whether transsexuals can or cannot 'know' that they are the 'opposite' sex, or whether sex-reassignment surgery constitutes an ethical resolution. As Goffman argues:

Our concern . . . ought not to be in uncovering real, natural expressions, whatever they might be. One should not appeal to the doctrine of natural expression in an attempt to account for natural expression, for that . . . would conclude the analysis before it had begun. (1976: 7)

Goffman (1976) notes that whereas gender identity does not, in any essential way, exist, the 'schedule' for its portrayal does, and is often mistaken as 'essentially real'. So, to the extent that transsexuals are able to 'pass' as 'real' women or men, 'gender' is revealed to adhere to particular bodies haphazardly. Transsexuals, in effect, render visible the invisible signs on which society relies to produce gender. These are pre-established performances that transsexuals, *like all other individuals*, are confronted with:

The more closely the impostor's performance approximates to the real thing, the more intensely we may be threatened, for a competent performance by someone who proves to be an impostor may weaken in our minds the moral connection between legitimate authorisation to play a part and the capacity to play it. (Goffman, 1971: 66)

Transsexuals wryly note that 'however strange a cross-dresser looks, a genetic woman can always be found who looks even stranger' (Taylor, 1995: 6).

On the one hand, feminist theory seems particularly cognizant of the social aspect of 'knowing' gender – Raymond's definition emphasizes women's identity based on *social interaction* with patriarchal structures. Yet even though 'there is nothing in [de Beauvoir's] account that the "one" who becomes a woman is necessarily female', most feminist theory nevertheless makes this assumption (Prosser, 1998: 29). To reject MTF women's claims to 'womanhood' is to lay claim to the constitution of 'knowing' gender, which cannot be done without recourse to biology – antithetic to the whole point of sociality arguments.

Emerging transsexual analyses contest this *explicit* emphasis on sociality, for its *implicit* reliance on 'biology'. For instance, Prosser (1998) presents a compelling theory of the mechanisms through which transsexuals 'feel' themselves to be the bodies of the 'opposite' sex. Interestingly, it is precisely the psychic investment in the materiality of the body that enables the transsexual to 'imagine' surgically constructed genitals as 'real'. In the same way that people who have lost limbs maintain the 'feeling' of those limbs phantasmatically, Prosser argues that transsexuals are able to recognize the postsurgical constructed body parts as those same parts 'felt' phantasmatically before surgery. This is materiality without 'sex'.

The major mechanism of this phantasmatic 'feeling' is narrative. As Shilling points out, modern subjectivity is increasingly situated in embodied biography, 'a project which should be worked at and accomplished as part of an individual's self-identity' (1993: 5). Narrative restructuring is a constant process, usually beginning years *before* the transsexual is constructed through medical technology, contrary to Hausman's claim that transsexuals are a medico-technical creation. This narration is an inherently interactive process (Gagné and Tewksbury, 1998). What Hausman also fails to recognize is that narrative restructuring is a process common to *all*

individuals. How else do girls learn that their vaginas place them in a particular relationship with patriarchy, if not through social interaction and narrative integration?

Differentiating between 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' narratives is a moral exercise, and calling for a return to 'bodies' and 'sex', as Hausman does, provides no more reassurance of authenticity than 'gender'. Moreover, Hausman invokes a literalizing (transsexual)/deliteralizing (gender) binary that reinscribes the 'sex'/'gender' binary. The entire purpose of transsexual autobiography is to tell the difference of gendered embodiment, and to make this difference processable. Therefore, the enterprise is ambivalent – 'in coming out and staking a claim to representation, the transsexual undoes the realness that is the conventional goal of this transition' (Prosser, 1998: 11). While Hausman diverts the *literal* creation of sex into a culturo-technical creation, I suggest that the transparency of transsexual creations of 'sex' and 'gender' makes theirs perhaps the more honest representation.²⁴

Concluding remarks

A feminist movement based on biology is hazardous: 'to accept that biological boundary would mark a definite break with the key principle of the second wave of women's liberation . . . that biology is not given' (Feinberg, 1996: 110). Consolidated *social* identification, however, is often bought at the expense of experienced variation. Reliance on a notion of 'shared experience' subsumes variations of class, race, ethnicity, age and sexuality that poststructural feminists have so powerfully highlighted. If it is shared experience we are after, then carrying firewood, hauling water and working on assembly lines unite *most* women on this planet.

Theorizing intersexuality and transsexualism involves a fundamental challenge not so much to understandings of 'gender', but to the fact that we rarely contest the constitution of 'sex'; and in our discussions of 'gender', 'sex' remains concealed, but present nevertheless. In other words, we have relied on a particular set of assumptions about the materiality of bodies and the relation this materiality has to gender. How might feminist theory proceed from here?

Feminist theory offers two broad responses to this critical reflection, which I will examine only briefly here. One feminist response argues with queer and transgender studies for the multiplicity of 'sexes'/'genders' (Butler, 1990; Feinberg, 1996; Grosz, 1994; Rothblatt, 1995). For instance, in an effort to propel transgressive politics, Rothblatt suggests the use of a colour scheme with which individuals term their 'sex' identity. The question immediately raised by Rothblatt's chromatic identity is why use any categories at all? Surely it is the very regulation of individuals into increasingly detailed divisional categories that has produced the sexism, racism, ageism, nationalism and trans-phobia that Rothblatt's schema clearly seeks to oppose. Replacing a two-'sex' model with a 10-sex (or 20 or 30) model does not in itself secure the abolition of gender discrimination, only perhaps that the mental gymnastics required to justify such discrimination becomes more complex.²⁵

Although queer theory contests the attribution of any particular character to masculinity or femininity, performing or 'doing' gender seems to consist principally in combining or parodying existing gender practices. Queer theory presumes that transgressing boundaries will subvert, and eventually dismantle, hierarchies based on sex and gender. But subversion can lead to unanticipated outcomes that may not be transgressive at all. By forging a 'third' sex, transgenderism may leave unchallenged the two-sex system.

All modern expressions of sex and gender identity depend on the current two-sex system for their expression. The trouble in accepting male lesbians is precisely that lesbianism, homosexuality and heterosexuality are defined by a particular morphological base (Zita, 1998). That is why two men in a loving relationship are not typically defined by themselves, or others, as lesbian. In other words, queer theory might be able to produce interesting cakes, but it uses the same ingredients every time.

The second response calls for the 'end' of 'sex'/'gender'. Jackson (1999) asks, 'why not think instead of the end of gender, the end of the hetero/homosexual division?' (1999: 182). Jackson criticizes Butler and Grosz's almost exclusive focus on 'bodily aspects of gender' (1999: 176). She is wary of accounts that purport a definitional separation between 'sex', 'gender' and 'sexuality' – emphasizing instead their 'exceedingly complex' interdependent definitional status. Jackson's aim is to deconstruct how these divisions are made meaningful, rather than to join the effects of these categories in new combinations to 'do gender'.

It is difficult to imagine, let alone practise, subjectivities without 'gender' or 'sex', and appealing to a multiple gender schema may be an attempt to forestall, or at least tread softly towards, such an eventuality. I think this is why theories of multiple gender have garnered such appeal of late. Confronted with analyses of heteronormativity, marginalization in lesbian and gay communities, and the general fragmentation of identities, multiplying sexes/genders seems to offer a way to express a variety of sexed and gendered identities without anyone actually having to give up their 'chosen' identity. There is also the tendency of transgender theory to use transsexuality as metaphor for multiple sex/gender 'best practice'. As Prosser notes, 'queer theory has written on transitions as discursive but it has not explored the bodiliness of gendered crossings' (1998: 6). Intersexuals and transsexuals themselves may not seek at all to 'transgress' sex/gender boundaries and the 'end' of gender has major implications for continued access to hormones and sex-reassignment surgery, which must be considered.²⁶

This is why I think that intersexuals and transsexuals offer such valuable insights into contemporary dependence on the 'sex'/'gender' binary. Intersexuals and transsexuals who attempt to 'fit' into a sexually divided world reveal the regulatory mechanisms through which sexual difference is enforced; whereas intersexuals and transsexuals who refuse an either/or 'sexed' identity disturb the infallibility of the binary.²⁷ Ontological assumptions about 'sex' are all too often either invisible or posed in the abstract. Credit where credit is due, intersexuals and transsexuals *live* the internal

instability of the 'sex'/'gender' binary. Rather than exploring how successfully intersexuals and transsexuals may define themselves as 'women' or 'men', the foregone analysis suggests that *all* recourse to 'nature' to define either the constitution of 'sex' or how we 'know' our 'gender' is problematic. If our understandings of nature continue to reveal the focus on sexual difference as politically derived, feminist theory will need to ascertain that the artificial emphasis on sexual difference, contra nature, is better able to effect social change than conjoined efforts to expose 'sex' as a construction intended to ground divisions.

Notes

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1. For a useful summary of feminist critiques of the 'sex'/'gender' binary, see Sedgwick (1991), especially pp. 27–35.
2. The priority accorded reproduction as the 'source' of sex differences has been argued elsewhere (see Delphy, 1994; Hird and Abshoff, forthcoming).
3. Sedgwick (1995) makes the point that the rhetorical use of binaries not only designates two discrete opposites, but also organizes the multiple differences between the two axes of any binary.
4. Shildrick seems to sidestep the question of sexual difference altogether as she lengthily quotes Haraway's (1990) work on cyborgs and then concludes 'whether a cyborg has a sex is perhaps rather more complicated' and ends the article by stating 'there remains also the issue . . . of what becomes of sexual difference' (1996: 10, 12).
5. For a discussion of the emergence of the current two-sex system, see Laqueur (1990).
6. The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival has continued to exclude transgendered women from the physical space of the festival since 1991. The current policy is to include womyn-born-womyn-only, but the festival organizers have dropped the physical examination required for admission to earlier festivals [<http://www.camprans.com>].
7. My thanks to the anonymous reviewer whose critical questioning of an earlier version of this article helped refine my argument here.
8. I defer to Kessler's (1990) distinction between genital 'variability' and 'ambiguity'. See pp. 8–9.
9. Accounts differ as to the statistical frequency of intersexuality. The Intersex Society of North America (ISNA) states that one in every 2000 infants is born with some form of intersexuality, from approximately 14 different causes (Nataf, 1998).
10. Money's management philosophy is almost exclusively adopted, and the vast majority of published literature has been written or co-written by Money. Very few physicians seem prepared to contradict Money, or provide alternative management theses; notable among the exceptions are Diamond (1982) and Diamond and Sigmundson (1997).
11. It is further testament to the variability of 'sex' that several factors can be

- used singly or in tandem to 'determine' an individual's 'sex': chromosomal sex, hormonal sex, gonadal sex, genital sex and reproductive sex.
12. Despite increased risks of stenosis or injury that accompany early vaginal construction, some physicians 'prefer' to complete all surgical procedures before the child reaches 18 months of age (Perlmutter and Reitelman, 1992).
 13. Indeed, surgical teams consider that one of the worst mistakes that can be made is to 'create an individual unable to engage in genital [that is, heterosexual] sex' (Kessler, 1990: 20).
 14. Kessler quotes one interviewed endocrinologist as saying 'why do we do all these tests if in the end we're going to make the decision simply on the basis of the appearance of the genitalia?' (1990: 13).
 15. Many intersexuals do not become aware of their condition until adolescence.
 16. Testosterone is also released in other chromosome variations.
 17. Rothblatt (1995) points out that the average Japanese man and American woman share the same weight and height, although we would not organize international sports tournaments such that Japanese men compete against American women, or that Asian men compete as a separate category.
 18. Among postmodern feminist scholars who are accused of 'abandoning' the materiality of the body, but who do, in fact, attend to this materiality, are Angier (1999), Probyn (1993) and Riley (1989).
 19. Physicians are more likely to endorse surgery for intersexuals than transsexuals, even when they are behaviourally indistinguishable (Green, 1969).
 20. Whittle (1998) points out that male-to-female transsexuals seek inclusion within the group (that is, women) that patriarchy oppresses, leaving behind whatever benefits they derived from their male status.
 21. The Renaissance Transgender Association will host the 4th International Congress on Crossdressing, Sex and Gender in May 2000. GENDYS 6th Gender Dysphoria Conference will be held in September 2000.
 22. For further disruptive transsexual narratives, see Ekins and King (1996) and More and Whittle (1999).
 23. What now might be termed the 'performative' aspect of identities, Mead emphasized as the continually renegotiated character of social action, which produces malleable identities, and which allows for the possibility of contradiction and conflict.
 24. Hausman was pregnant during the writing of *Changing Sex* and expressed her terror at the thought of having an intersexed child. The desire to have a 'normal' child reveals much about Hausman's own normative positioning with regard to transsexualism.
 25. Fausto-Sterling (1993) offers a variation on this theme by arguing for a five-sex taxonomy.
 26. ISNA and the Intersex Society of New Zealand lobby against compulsory sex-reassignment surgery. Both organizations recognize, however, that individual intersexuals may wish to undergo surgery.
 27. Interpretation of the public effects of revealing the internal instability of the 'sex'/'gender' system vary. Butler (1993), for instance, interprets Venus

Xtravaganza's life (in *Paris is Burning*) as 'sex'/'gender' transgressive in that she is incoherently female. This transgression is sustained, for Butler, as long as Venus does not undergo the sex-reassignment surgery she seeks. The 'sex'/'gender' binary is violently reinvented by Venus's death, as in the similarly violent death of Brandon Teena. Their deaths produce for Prosser, contra Butler, 'not the revelation of the fictionality of gender categories but the sobering realisation of their ongoing foundational power' (1998: 11). This is not to say, however, that such power cannot, or should not, be resisted.

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