
Wither Biological Sex?: The Gender Takeover

A Position Paper

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In this position paper, I argue that current ideological and sociocultural shifts in the use and meaning of the term *gender* have also reconfigured what *biological sex* means. Both terms have been made isomorphic and synonymic. The paper challenges this novel relationship, exploring its confounded history and unpacking how and why genderqueer theorists intentionally minimize body knowledge to enable expressive individualism.

Linguistic, psychological and medical anthropology serve as tools of inquiry in my critique on why *gender* is now given the greater valence. Data from neurosciences are also used to refute notions of the body being just a “mute facticity,” as such theorists claim. Christian dogmas on sex and gender are also examined, as is the insistence on a binary model of humanity despite intersex births and the factuality of gender dysphoria. Christian incorrections, when perpetuated without ongoing analysis and change, continue what some call epistemic oppressions and hermeneutic injustices, contributing another layer to the problematic of sex and gender ideology as rendered today.

Everywhere in the world, the self starts with the body.
Roy F. Baumeister (1999: 5)

Introduction

Anthropology has always been a field where discourse and representations of the Other have been central, yet contested elements. From their earliest efforts, anthropologists have grappled with epistemic and political predicaments brought about by their writings; efforts to represent *that Other*. Such frictions eventually coalesced in self-critique volumes, like the now legendary *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Clifford et al. 1986).

In the 1990s, those self-reflections helped anthropology as a discipline turn that proverbial corner,

aiding itself to redefine methodology—a canonical moment in the discipline’s history. Questioned and reviewed was everything from field methods to how to sensitively capture, and describe, human sociocultural phenomena.¹

Discussions begun in *Writing Culture* continue to this day. To say we are now sensitized, if not sensitive, to the lexical appropriateness of narratives, terms, and meanings would be an understatement.

I am by training and practice a psychomedical anthropologist, with postdoctorals in sexological sciences and public health epidemiology of sexual diseases. My thirty-eight years of work in these domains have enabled scores of published articles, symposia, book chapters, now a book, all on topics that inform sexuality: sexual ethnographies, sexual diseases, explorations of the sexual self and identity, and gender.² Stating this confluence of training and

¹ Zenker (2014) reviewing *Writing Culture*’s 25th anniversary second edition, contextualizes this anthropological shifting by noting the world of the 1990’s had become an “increasingly fragmented, globalized, and (post)colonial world,” where writing was defined as *literary*, or *reflexive*, or *postmodern*, *deconstructive*, *post-structuralist*; with much of anthropology undergoing a “crisis of representation.” The net results are anthropologists with renewed sensibilities, writing ethnographies that are more nuanced, mediated by informant experiences, heightened sensitivities to issues of sex, gender, race, and class. (Zenker, Olaf. *Writing Culture*. *Oxford Bibliographies*, 29 May 2014. Retrieved from <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199766567/obo-9780199766567-0030.xml>).

² For a summary reference to my work, please see <http://drvincegil.com/about>. For a full Curriculum Vita, please contact me at the email address given in this article. My recent book, *A Christian’s Guide through the Gender Revolution* (Cascade, 2021), is the authorial reference under which this paper is written, and my position taken.

work early on is necessary, as it is also a backdrop to understanding my deep interest in sexuality and gender as these are rendered today—my current concern for misappropriated terminology and their effect on our understanding of persons. Thus, this position paper.³

Admittedly, the paper is also the result of frustration with academics and genderqueer philosophers whose aim is not to provide novel theoretical possibilities, but rather, to forcefully change culture by contriving lexical idioms that then inhere their understandings and agenda. These, by repetition, eventually root a new ideology.⁴ Political correctness and fear of push-backs make for unquestioned acceptance vs. possible critiques. The new gender terminology has thus altered the groundwork of essentialist thinking via replacement terms which argue against established understandings, most importantly, biological knowledge of the person (Gil 2021). This position paper attempts to untangle the terms, bring to light rationales used by genderqueer activists, their wrong assumptions, as well as how this “gender moment” affects our culture disciplines, and our faith as Christians.

Two Terms

Two terms, both important, yet distinct in many ways. Two terms, now conflated, confound their well-established differences. Since the 1950’s when the term *gender* was introduced by John Money (Goldie 2015, 6),⁵ it has taken the lead over the term *sex*, augmenting *gender*’s lexical entity and altering the meaning of *sex* biological. This is not just a case of polysemy, the capacity of a term to have multiple related meanings. It is also not a case of synonymy, two terms with sufficient semantic relationship to have them substitute for one another, although that is what has ultimately occurred.

Here, I will argue that such generosity with the term *gender* did not occur through serendipity, or casual preference for the term, or to just avoid the “sex word” altogether. *Gender* has been increasingly and deliberately employed as a lexical means of “liberating the world” from what came to be called “the oppressive duo,”⁶ the male and female binary which is core to biological *sex*. *Sex*, and thus its biologic binarism, had become a threat.

Contemporary gender discourses have not only challenged traditional definitions of all things sexual, but also questioned the veracity and influences of biological *sex* on our self-understanding. *Gender*—meaning the socially prescribed roles, performance of these, and internalized identity that result from a sexually-identified body—is now a well-established and staple term (Fausto-Sterling 2012). Biological *sex*—meaning the sex-chromosomal, hormonal, anatomical/phenotypic make-up of a person—is now given credence more as a social construction than as a factual, physical, epistemic, and thus determinative agent. In this novel discourse, the ‘reality’ and influences of *sex* biological are limited to what we lexically inhere to it (cf., Butler 1990; 1993; 2006).

Of course, how we think with language about our *sex* (its biology, physical embodiment) is intimately linked to how we think with language about our *gender*: both terms are close cousins. But there are distinctions to note about the terms, both connotatively and denotatively, to the degree that one should not hear the now popular phrase, “*gender* is assigned at birth” and believe it is factually correct.⁷ (More on this, forthcoming.)

When this now common elision in terms occurs, we are reminded of how purposely flawed our understanding of the terminology has become. Recently, Vioria and Nieto (2020) have devoted a complete book chapter in *The Spectrum of Gender*

³ I grant you, it’s a strange and eyebrow-raising combination for conservative Christians to sometimes understand, especially when people learn I was also, and earlier, trained in Christian theology.

⁴ Vygotsky (1986) emphasized the role of language in mediating cultural knowledge, a symboling tool that creates “master narratives” which then serve as reinforcing sources for what is believed. And of course, Bourdieu (1991) has argued that language should be also viewed as a medium of power through which individuals pursue their own interests and display their competencies.

⁵ See also Money, Hampson and Hampson (1955), for the original mention of the term.

⁶ Butler (1990), *Gender Trouble*.

⁷ Chromosomal and/or phenotypic *sex* is “assigned”—read, *medically determined*—at birth. *Gender* and identity certainly learn and are influenced by the body, but they congeal through experience and not a simple assignation. This process is discussed later in the paper.

to clarifying the terms, calling this elision “linguistic collateral damage” (115). Such flaws also point to wrong assumptions about the primacy of gender in enabling an understanding of ourselves. In such views, the sexual body doesn’t count for much: It’s the performance of gender and how one lexically defines it that is the greater reality.⁸

These notions, of course, challenge much of established scientific views, even as we further engage research on our chromosomes, hormones, and neurobiology. Contemporary gender notions also challenge Christianity, its historical views and interpretations of male and female humanity. Such challenges raise other issues for Christianity beyond not acknowledging intersexuality, to involve views on gender, as now depicted via identity and through historical social roles.

In the Beginning

Early in the 1990’s, revisionist ideas of sex and gender by philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler pointed out that both one’s biological sex, as well as gender, are only determinative and influential when these are imbued with lexical meaning (Butler 1993). In such thinking, any understanding of biological sex—be it how the brain learns about the body proper, or how the sexual body manifests its attributes and thus influences who we are—can only come when we instill biological sex with meaning through language, and thus create gender. Otherwise, biological sex itself has no real, determinative valence.⁹ In other words, we “authenticate” sex via gender, giving these “facticity,” through lexical attributes (Butler 1993; 2006).

Such thinking reveals the profound need by genderqueer theorists to confound the terms sex and gender, and diminish any impact biological, physical sex has on gender (as a construction) and gender identity (as an internalization of sexual self-understanding).¹⁰ Below, I address the reasons in detail.

I now find the terms sex and gender used interchangeably, with gender often taking on the lead, spoken of as if the gender construct “naturally” overrides—or ought to override—biological sex in its importance. Here, one of the many assumptions made is that cultural ideologies about sex are the sole source for understanding our biological sex, and not at all that the biological sexual experience itself may inform our own understanding, and certainly some of that ideology. Likewise, as stated, the idea that biological sex is just a linguistic reality, but not an ontological one, in its own right.¹¹

As a biological “category,” sex may well be subject to lexical description. Cultural ideology and linguistic terms certainly influence both sex and gender understandings, no doubt. But how we come to understand our embodiment, or “the situation of living and being in a body”¹² isn’t solely or primarily deduced from cultural ideologies about it: The body itself is a biological reality—an information mechanism that the brain begins to engage early on, even when words aren’t around yet, and ‘speaks to us’ in its own terms. Thus, while there is certainly a reciprocal influence between the body, its sexual form, and lexically learned cultural meanings about it, cultural meanings don’t come first: The biological body does come to be first, *and so does its ability to inform the individual’s brain about itself.*¹³

⁸ See Salih (2002), On Judith Butler and Performativity; Heinämaa (2012), Sex, Gender, and Embodiment.

⁹ In psychological terms, *valence* indicates the emotional value that is associated with a stimulus. The term is used in several instances to emphasize the affective component involved in the stimulus being talked about. In the case of “gender” as an affective construct, “giving it *valence*” equates to giving authority, power, influence, to the term, vs. for instance, the concept of “biological sex.”

¹⁰ There are many voices, but they coalesce in the works of such as Judith Butler (1993; 1996; 2004; 2006), Leslie Feinberg (1998), and before them, Simone de Beauvoir (1949). Reasons for the insistence of the term *gender* over *sex* is explained later in this paper.

¹¹ Cf., Stanford (1999), Contingent Ontologies, 3.

¹² For a more complete understanding of this notion, see Wood (2021), *Social Studies of Gender*, Chapter 1.

¹³ (In Opp., Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 1993, 1.) For Butler, both body and gender are part of *discourse*. These “exist” in fact; but are not “constituted” until they are legitimized, identified, constructed through discursive means. Thus, gender “absorbs and displaces sex” (1993, xi), since gender as discursive and performative can “classify,” “accept,” or “marginalize.” Butler continuously upholds her statement that the idea of sex is itself problematic. Sex is not a set object, but is a perfect construct. It is, in Butler’s understanding, a lexical, regulatory/cultural norm that creates an understanding of the body, even its appearance, over time. Subsequently, in this argument, the materiality of the body is discursive.

Going Neuro: Affect Theory and Body-to-Brain Imprinting

Neurobiology now has sufficient research examining neural mechanisms, their influence in sensory processing, sensorial modulation, affect formation and imprinting (e.g., *interoceptive coding*), to understand how such relate to experiences of the body, and eventual body-conscious knowledge.¹⁴ Here, I tap into this sister science for evidence.

Doing so does not equate—and I must be clear here—to my endorsement of the colloquially-known “hardwire paradigm” now so popular in neuroscience, yet so contested as a neuro-developmental model explaining sex/gender distinctions. (For more, read the footnote.¹⁵)

That said, one *can* safely cull from *affect theory* and neuropsychology proper an understanding of how early on in *neonatal* development, the body “informs” the brain “what biological sex it is” (natal male, female, or even intersex). This, through the body’s *limbic system*,¹⁶ and subsequently, through the body’s many organ systems and functions.¹⁷ I am referring to those baseline and elemental cues that come from the body—limbic affects that eventually coalesce into a pre-conscious, then semi-conscious, then (with the onset of language) conscious awareness in the brain, of who we are as a sexed body.¹⁸ To be clear here, these are well-documented limbic messaging systems that begin to operate early on in the newborn, spurred by brain development, body growth, and maturation.

The term *core affect* has been introduced in neurobiology to refer to these basic, psychologically

Such notions imply that the recognizable body is not biologically characterized or authenticated; rather, that it is a culturally characterized entity. While acknowledging the ‘reality’ of the biological body, Butler systematically deconstructs that reality by making the biological body subservient to social and lexical inscription, and it to gender. To Butler, the body has no capacity to speak on its own, or signify its own existence. From a biological perspective, however, what makes a body ‘real,’ ‘male’ or ‘female,’ is not its association with a lexicalized gender, but with things more tangible: its physical entity; its chromosomes and gametes, necessary to distinguish one sex from the other, and necessary for reproduction; an eventual body that differs some in constitution due to hormone action and physical differences; ultimately and despite momentous similarities, one with the ability to carry life to term while the other cannot. (See also Griffiths, *Sex is Real*, 8.)

¹⁴ Barsalou, L. W. (2008), *Grounded Cognition*. See also, Ionescu (2014), *Embodied Cognition: Challenges for Psychology and Education*; and how *interoception* ‘works’ (in Raimo et al. [2021], *Body Representations and Interoception*.) “Interoception” is explained as the *sense* of the internal state of the body (Craig 2002). That *sensing* can be both conscious and sub-conscious, and can encompass the brain’s process of integrating signals relayed from the body into specific brain subregions, allowing for a nuanced representation of the physiological state of the body or its regional parts.

¹⁵ Contestations of the dominant brain organization paradigm, now seen as ‘fact’ in neurobiology, are well noted in Jordan-Young and Rumiat (2010), and Jordan-Young (2010), who sum up the problems with it in the referenced works. This dominant brain organization paradigm proposes that steroid hormones at critical periods of fetal development give rise to permanent structural, functional, sex/gender differences in the brain and in subsequent behavior (cf., Hines [2004] *Brain Gender*; Cahill [2006], *Why Sex Matters for Neuroscience*). The paradigm is known as the “*hardwiring effect*”; and despite its many discontinuities, it has “moved beyond the level of theory to be treated as a simple fact of human development” (Jordan-Young and Rumiat 2010, 3): In simple terms, ‘every human behavior can be traced back to a biological substrate that severely, of absolutely influences it.’ In quoting this, I am not discrediting biological contributions to the development of an individual’s sexual-behavioral venue; only that *biological exclusivity* in determining behavior seems outweighed by evidences from the behavioral and social sciences.

¹⁶ The *limbic system* is a complex of nerves and networks in the brain close to the cortex. The ‘system’ controls basic emotions, and most importantly for our purposes, facilitates memory storage and retrieval, establishes emotional states, and links the conscious, intellectual functions of the cerebral cortex with the unconscious, autonomic functions of the brain stem. All this to say, the limbic system is involved in motivation, emotion, learning, and memory. Its influences are thus far reaching in forming the body of its states of being.

¹⁷ I am not referring here solely to sexual *dimorphism*, or the notion that the sexual body is only, can only be male or female, as significant biological evidence confirms intersex forms, genetically and/or hormonally produced. I am also not arguing about prenatal hormones creating “brain sex,” since that notion has been fiercely debated by biologists themselves (cf., Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, [2000, 40-42]), and is beyond the scope of this paper. For affect theory’s impact on body knowledge and cognition, see Duncan and Barrett (2007), *Affect is a Form of Cognition*.

¹⁸ At the neurological level, such *imprinting* is done through neural stimuli creating *affect* (sensations, emotions, feelings). At the behavioral level, we have initial bodily and visceral responses (such as when an erection occurs in males). Once affective cues are *scripted* by learned understandings and made *cognitions*, then, and only then can affect be considered motivational as an agency (Demos 1995, 88). Let’s remember, understanding is not automatically converted to *agency*.

primitive states of awareness that come from physiological properties like *hedonic valence* (pleasure/displeasure), and *arousal* (activation/deactivation).¹⁹ *Core affect* is characterized as a constant feedback stream which codes neuro-psychological and somato-visceral information and represents it to the brain, concurrently organizing the flow of that information.²⁰

Core affect is thus a means by which a person's brain comes to "experience," then "know" information about their bodies; eventually, about the external world as well. This information is ultimately translated into an internal code, or set of representations (Barnard et al. 2007). *Core affect* thus functions as *core knowledges* . . . "the handwriting of which is present from birth."²¹

Important to note here is that *understandings* are formed from the continuous feedback which comes from postnatal body experiences, eventual language development, and not from some in-utero "pre-wiring." The brain is not "sexed" in utero as the genitals are—the brain "does not occur in two distinct forms—male/or/female" (Jordan-Young and Rumiati 2011, 3). Thus, the brain learns its elemental sexual anatomy from a specific body type and maturation schema; but the brain itself does not come "formed" or "conformed" to one or the other sex.²²

Infants and their Organs

Let's generate examples of how the body "informs us" about "the sex of us," well in advance of our linguistic and cognitive maturation capacity to understand meaning. Take infants discovering their "privates":

It isn't long after birth that infants begin to relate primal sensations of pleasure (understood here to be limbically satiating feelings) via genital touching. This happens in both males and females—male infants tugging and pulling on their penises, and female infants putting hands to their vulvas, sometimes stroking it.²³ Comforting, soothing gestures instill in infants limbic connections with their organs way before these have any symbolic, let alone cultural-ideological or linguistic meaning for them. These parts are being identified limbically as something "they have"; by receiving their organs' interoceptive information (i.e., the messages that come back to the brain), they sensorially relate with the organs, touching, pulling, stroking—it calms and distracts them. Infant brains don't cognize the connections the way I'm explaining them here, lexically. But somatoviscerally, the connections form and their effects unfold "this way."²⁴ Thus, the "living and being in a body" provides a baseline awareness

¹⁸ See Barrett 2006; Duncan and Barrett 2007; Russell 2003; Russell and Barrett 1999.

²⁰ "Body sensations (ie., 'somatovisceral' information, from *soma* [body] and *viscera* [organs]) via interoceptive loops (stimuli from the body that reaches the brain) and coding (how that stimuli is represented in the brain) provide the critical bases for core affect: emotional experiences. The ensuing knowledge, behaviors, are optimally guided by these physiological patterns of interoceptive and affective information loops. Such is the early neurobiology of feelings, the coalescing of critical ingredients for *understanding body emotions* and generating *consciousness*. Only later are these interpreted through lexical coding" (Damasio 2000, 142).

²¹ Cf., Bridges 1932; Stroufe 1979. (See also Duncan and Barret 2007, Affect is a Form of Cognition, who state: "*Core affect* is crucial to how cognitive processing in general occurs, ultimately at all levels (unconscious, semi-conscious, consciously); *affect* being the determining factor in how we *learn*, *understand*, and eventually also *absorb linguistic terms*. Core affects even play a part in content management—what is encoded and retrieved as memory" (3).

²² Studies that have imaged the living human brain have found only a small number of sex differences, but these differences are generally small in magnitude. Additionally, such have not been linked to any robust psychological or behavior outcomes. See Dussauge and Kaiser (2012), Neuroscience and Sex/Gender. *Neuroethics* 5: 211-215.

²³ Urban, Olga, MD (March 11, 2021). Is It Normal for Babies to Touch Their Genitals? Retrieved from www.ampflo.health.

²⁴ In infant males—and I choose to use a male example first due to differentials in later lexical coding which happens between them and infant girls, not because males have any advantages in somatic coding or development—phallic soothing inheres in them an early connection with their organ, since the phallus erects outside the body proper; does so frequently; and is thus tactually more accessible. In the ensuing months of maturation, such connectivity suggests "my body and this penis belong to me." The feeling is retained through the coherence of afferent sensations that continue to affirm his body; and coherence with those coded cognitive representations of the body as "his body" that the nonverbal, affective subtext has allowed. In infant females, similar connections generate genital awareness, and afferent feedbacks code representations of vulvar distinctives that are "their body." While infant females also have glans-clitoral erections, data suggest these are not reacted to as often by the infant themselves, or by parents; a point which has not gone unnoticed in explaining why females tend to disavow the frequency of their adult arousals. (See Leguichard, Stephanie [March 5, 2021] Why Don't We Talk About Clitoral Erections?) Despite erection, the female's phallic shaft remains internal to the body, thus it is often only the clitoral glans that is visible, tactile, when erect. While some infant

'knowledge'—organs, functions, feelings—that then inform how this infant comes to understand their embodiment, even at a rudimentary (yet important) level.

By the time infants become toddlers, and through visual comparisons, these notice differences in sexual anatomy that correspond to each sex. By age three, male toddlers have a superlative understanding—limbically and physiologically—of their phallus.²⁵ And, of course, by then they have also learned to urinate standing, pointing their organ to do so; these know about small erections (sometimes large ones) that they (and others like parents) have noticed. Female toddlers, by comparison, have learned to urinate sitting, not touching their organ; and small or large clitoral erections often go by unnoticed by them and their parents. But they have learned the importance of “wiping clean, wiping dry,” keeping their “tutu,” or whatever name their vulva is being called, *clean*.²⁶

Most important here, via newly acquired language capacity and symbols, toddlers learn the word-names and connotations given to their sex organ by others. Children have begun to absorb lexical meaning

systems because their brains are also developing cognition and connecting it with *limbic memory*, and both to the new, learned language about the now ubiquitous penis or less acknowledged vulva. We call all this *epigenetic imprinting*.²⁷ The brain has also semiotically indexed a host of other self-understandings, which this eventual language ability allows the brain to then categorize and further discern.²⁸

Primacy of body knowledge—limbic associations, imprints—sets the child's primary level of awareness of who they are:²⁹ In boys, they are “boys” because they know they have, feel, touch, and urinate through their penis; and with all this, a ton of other limbically-understood feelings and subliminal knowledges that go along with having an external phallus, in a body he is *lexically understanding* to be male.³⁰ Taunt that boy at age three or four—ask him “*Are you a boy? How do you know you are a boy?*?” and see how often, if not too shy, the boy will giggle, often point to “down there.”

For the female child, it's another story, as we know. Lexically, she's been “safeguarded” from knowing too much about her vulva, despite her somatovisceral

females do touch their glans, and sometimes do frottage with diaper or other crib objects, this activity is not the same as pulling, stroking, or holding the phallus, as is the case with infant males: there are a series of sensorial activations enabled by the male phallus being outside the body cavity. Ogletree and Ginsburg (2000) have thus suggested the “penis primacy” in our culture is ingrained from a very young age by parents and early education; yet there is no corollary equality for the clitoris. Earlier, Kestenberg (1975) suggested infant girls were “intensely aware” of their “insides,” but questioned whether the child at this stage formed “mental representations” of their vulva. Clower, a contemporary (1975), thus suggested that the vagina is not “cathected” until puberty; and Karen Horney—as early as 1933—claimed “the undiscovered vagina is a vagina denied” (in Baker 1998, 119). Today, we have come to understand female infant genital explorations are not solely clitoral (Mendell 2012, 130), yet remain less ingrained in memory than that of males (Burke 1998).

²⁵ Freud, of course, called this the beginning of the “phallic stage.” (See Freud, S. 1905, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*.) Though contested, psychoanalysts still use this rubric.

²⁶ In a society where female genitalia are constructed as unclean, hygiene, and not function—hygiene, and not pleasure or the right to it—is what is eventually taught *lexically*. In boys, seldom is it their learning experience one which prioritizes hygiene for their genitalia, vs. their size and “activity.”

²⁷ Cortes et al. 2019. “Does Gender Leave an Epigenetic Imprint on the Brain?”

²⁸ The brain is a natural at information mapping, and groups experiences based on similarities of stimuli and learned limbic effects (“imprints”). Once further labeled through language and learning, the brain “indexes” these to facilitate how objects and experiences are conceptualized, then categorized. As well, to provide recall means for the subject to retrieve them from memory. See Jayroe (2008), *Semiotics and Indexing: A Critical Summary*.

²⁹ To Tomkins, father of affect theory and theories of consciousness, human beings are a “structural and process collective” of variously dependent, independent, and interdependent components which combine to produce human mentation and action—“at the nexus of the biological, the psychological, and social spheres” (MacBlog.Mcmaster, Tomkins 101, 2).

³⁰ It would do well to quote here the overall process as explained by Duncan and Barrett (2007, 7): “*Core affective circuitry helps to select the information that reaches conscious awareness by directing it to link with conscious experience. Along with the more deliberate top-down forms of attention, and bottoms-up forms of stimulation from the sensory world, core affect helps to orchestrate the binding of sensory information into a single, unified conscious field. As a result, conscious precepts of the external world [read here, such as linguistic labels] are intrinsically infused with affective content [read here, how the penis feels and how the toddler should react to the labels for it].*” (Brackets mine for clarity.)

experiences with it, and feedback loops that have formed her mental experiences of her body knowledge. The commentary here isn't about what "he has" that "she has not;" it's about how somatovisceral understandings that generate eventual body ownership get convoluted by our culture and its ideologies.

Conceptions of differences are not innate, but they do come from contrasts in sexual biology, from all those visual cues, signals, and "understandings" that flow initially, organically, from body and organs to brain. Concurrently, they also come from observations of similarities and differences between themselves, their bodies and other children's, other adults, even when language hasn't come forward totally and symboling systems are only in their infancy.

On these points, biologists agree.³¹ This "seeing" an object (genitalia), learning their names, are now equated with differentiations; earlier perceptions that have an "about me" quality to them are further understood, and are underscored as personally relevant in some physical way. Others that do not "fit the me" are distinguished, and remain in contrast to one's emerging body ownership.³²

Enter Lexical Gender Ideology

Certainly, as the child develops language ability and learns the meaning of terms, there is then the *overlay* of a *cultural and lexical schema* on how to understand their organs, and many other things "male/masculine," or "female/feminine." *Gender*, as a feature of identity

is then being coalesced from these elemental limbic understandings as well as from the now lexically-learned, and socialized constructions of what it means to be a boy or a girl. Assuming physical and cognitive normativity here, and as the child grows and internalizes these knowledges, gender is certainly being socioculturally formed. It is also being *moderated by those limbic, then affective understandings—imprints—of the body proper*. Biologist Fausto-Sterling summarizes it this way:

In the beginning, infants process bodily information [sensorially]. We presume these varied sensory stimuli imprint brain development as intermodal connections form. With time, what begin as relatively simple sensory shells [read: limbic core affect and imprints] transform into more complex capabilities. A sense of self, independent from parents, emerges; and toddlers associate their newly independent selves with the culturally-specific gender knowledge they are acquiring at more-or-less the same time. Gender [and] roles don't develop in a vacuum. (Fausto-Sterling 2000, 55-56).³³

Fausto-Sterling underscores the importance of how body messaging and social learning interact to generate epigenetic consequences of biological sex. It would thus be a mistake to say that sex biological is foremost a *social construction*, and of any influence *only when it is inherited with word-meanings*—"a linguistic device for convenience and contrivances" (Irigaray 1993, 127).³⁴ Or, that the sexual body carries valence *only*

³¹ "Body image certainly develops and depends on self-exploration and the recognition of sensations of self-touch and eventual feedback from self-examination, from [visual] comparisons to other children's and adults' genitalia." (Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 57. Bracket mine for clarity.)

³² This is probably achieved via the "binding" of somatovisceral information with the sensory information coming from the external world, e.g., comparisons with other children's and adult's bodies, and learned language symbols. The evaluations that occur involve modulation of core affect, since without this modulation, the child will never achieve knowing consciously what they are experiencing when "seeing" or "feeling." (See Duncan and Barrett 2006, 9.)

³³ Brackets in quote and italics are mine for clarity and emphasis. The broader implications of these perspectives boil down to what it means to develop a "self." Cognitive scientists are now confident that all humans *experience* their emotions, even though newborns don't 'reflect' on these *anoetic* experiences. They do experience such as powers of guiding forces in their lives (Panskeep et al. 2010, 8). Eventually, when language is inherited, affect guides a considerable amount of thinking, ruminating, decision-making about what is being learned. In such ways, we develop a sense of self that is independent from others, but not independent from our body.

³⁴ See also Bucholtz (2002), *From Sex Differences to Gender Variation in Sociolinguistics*. Collectively, these works ignore the fact that for language to be used and be meaningful, it must itself be imbued with core affect. Core affect is not only necessary for first-person conscious experience; it is an integral component of normal linguistic functioning as well (Duncan and Barrett, 2007:10). For "words" to function with meaning, they must have an affective dimension. The idea, then, that language functions as a semi-autonomous if not independent agent, absent of core affect, for use by humans in determining whether the body can "speak" or "influence" the brain, is absolutely absurd. And yet, Butler, and before her, de Beauvoir and others take on that presumption *as fact*.

when we explicate it socially. The body as a primary, physical template has *already* inhered limbic understandings and affective imprints in the brain *way before* social learning does its job. That some of these limbic understandings and social learning *co-occur* at particular stages of development is a given; yet both are nonetheless dependent on limbic *imprints*, and on how the cognitive maturation of that child aligns with their linguistic and sociocultural acquisitions.

Judith Butler, nevertheless and again, argues for biological sex as a *secondary variable* in her second book, *Bodies that Matter* (1993) (a misconstrued title).³⁵ Here also, gender is being presented as a social construction, now more powerful than biological sex in how it enables or disables the self: Gender as *performance*, regulated by social, cultural, and juridical institutions, is defined as what we do/are allowed/encouraged to do, and not who we “are.” Which turns our conversation again from biological sex (being) to gender (doing)—notice the hand-over.

Gender is clearly argued as not at all stemming from any bodily cues, but rather, from the social institutions that give meaning to sex, and use language to create gender; indeed, generate socialized compliances to it. Sarah Salih, explaining Butler (who often needs explaining), writes,

Butler has collapsed the sex/gender distinction in order to argue that there is no sex [biological sex, the sexual body] that is not always already gendered. All bodies are gendered from the beginning of their existence. . . which means that there is no “natural body” that pre-exists cultural inscription. (Salih 2002, 55; brackets mine).

Butler “troubles” the naturalness of the body and biological sex. I note her insistence of there not being a “natural body” that in and of itself can inscribe the brain (Butler 1993). Of course, Butler isn’t denying the existence of a physical body; her emphasis is on the denial of the body’s ability to render influence on the brain aside from lexical agency being present *in* the brain. I have already cited neurobiological findings

that evidence how the body can, and does, influence our brain’s understanding of our body, despite lexical agency being present or still to come. There is a natural body, male, female, or intersex, that continuously feeds somatovisceral information to the brain; that sets the early template and needed cognitions for eventual body-self understandings.

Gender: Assignment or Formation?

Views by Butler and other genderqueer theorists emphasize that gender is definitively *assigned* at birth. In fact, the argument goes, gender inscription is what actually makes the sexed body “real” (Salih 2002). Such is wrongly deduced, of course, because gender develops over time from the multiplex influences that interact with the psyche to *teach role, and form identity*, as one grows into knowledges and negotiates these and one’s experiences; body knowledge included.³⁶ To call a baby “a boy” doesn’t translate into him becoming masculine or even seeing himself eventually as a gendered male. Assignment is an apt label only when one refers to a factual sexual biology (chromosomal, hormonal, anatomical) ascribed as birthed.

We are thus assigned a *sex* at birth based on validated and confirmed biological tests from newborn screening, which in the US is done in every state as a public health service. We develop gender via the ideology that surrounds our socialization, yes; but also through those limbic messages about our sexed body that the brain continues to receive postnatally. Gender ideology and our actions toward the neonate do start to situate that newborn into a *gender schema*; but we are not assigned a gender at birth: We are born into a sexed body. That sexed body is assigned a medical term: *male, female*, or in some cases, *intersex*.

Still, genderqueer theory argues for an assigned birth gender,³⁷ its internalization as a gendered identity in a performative and regulated society being guided by language. In such a view, this naming results in social constructions that then direct gender conformity. The body has no part in all of this, since

³⁵ See also Butler 2004, *Undoing Gender*.

³⁶ Fausto-Sterling, 7; 55-56.

³⁷ See, for instance, Ryan Anderson’s (2019) Transgender Ideology is Riddled with Contradictions. Here Are the Big Ones. *The Heritage Foundation*, February 9th. Retrieved from <https://www.heritage.org/gender/commentary/transgender-ideology-riddled-contradictions-here-are-the-big-ones>.

the body is only meaningful—indeed “real”—only when lexical definitions make it a reality. This is merely oxymoronic word play.

In 1964, sexologist Robert J. Stoller divided the concept of gender to distinguish behavioral aspects and social expectations about gender from the individual’s psychological sense of self, partially to explain the condition of his transsexual patients, and to distinguish them from transvestite individuals (220). In doing so, he aligned with his contemporaries in believing there is a “critical period” in gender acquisition, such solidifying around the first eighteen months of life. He named the outcome of this period, *core gender identity*, and believed it to be a stable essence in every individual.³⁸ Of course, anything “core” has to be disputed. . . .³⁹

Distinguishing between gender *role* and *identity*, Stoller anchored gender *identity* to some “core essence” beyond mundane behaviors, language, and roles that are products of social norms. At the time Stoller wrote (1960’s), neurobiology had not taken wings, so concepts like “*core affect*,” “*limbic associations*,” “*somatovisceral coding*,” had not been brought into any body-identity equation. Stoller was theorizing within a psychoanalytic paradigm. Nevertheless, he had the foresight to suggest “biological forces” were possibly involved in the generation of *core gender identity*, “a drive from inside the organism that possibly arose from the endocrine and central nervous system” [Stoller 1964, 228-9]. Even then, there was growing suspicion that the body wasn’t just a “mute facticity.”⁴⁰

Time and again, Butler’s views are inconsistent with every psychoanalytic and scientific understanding of what goes on in early neonate life. In Butler’s view,

there are no somatic influences on the formation of body knowledge, or an emerging self, that count for much until *lexical* gender learning and internalization of such “do their thing.” Salih, again explaining Butler, states,

Gender identities are constructed and constituted by language, which means that there is no gender identity that precedes language . . . language and discourse “do” gender. There is no “I” outside language since identity is a signifying practice (Salih 2002, 56)

I argue here that *gender* isn’t solely a social prescriptive we internalize lexically and then perform because we were assigned it, and thus also and only self-define through it. I argue that gender (as role, as identity, and before that, as aspects of “it” as core knowledges) is influenced by the biological body proper—our limbic, organic, and whole body cognitions—soma to mind.

I am, alike others, “attempting to read individual corporeal experience back into theories of the body and self” (Prosser 1998, 7). To thwart that is to deny an embodiment to identity, an elision of the body as experience. We return to this later in this position paper.

Language, once acquired and internalized, certainly provides added means by which one understands “corporeal experiences;” but these do not originate solely from language. Sometimes, even words fail us. We say we “don’t have the words” for certain feelings; yet those feelings are nonetheless real, and exist in our body, our consciousness despite our inability to name them. Words themselves are sometimes not enough to

³⁸ It would do well to quote Stoller directly here: “*There appears to be evidence of a third component producing gender identity which, variably powerful in most humans, is usually hidden silently behind the effects of postnatal psychological influences. This force has yet not been demonstrated by endocrinological or neuropsychological studies, though some day such a force may be found to be the algorithmic sum of the activities of a number of neuroanatomical centers, and hierarchies of neuropsychological functions. At present, we cannot be more specific*” (Stoller 1964, 228). See also, Germon (2009), *Gender: A Genealogy of an Idea*.

³⁹ Stoller’s “core gender identity” became a disputed concept, but it still retains salience among psychotherapists and in current articles that explain identity. Stoller was underscoring what he and other colleagues were beginning to cognize: that the first and crucial step in sexual differentiation *postnatally*, i.e., the recognition that one was of ‘one version’ and ‘not the other’ physically, was the child’s self-awareness as male or female. To Stoller, this was also the beginning of that subtext, *gender identity*, which instills in that person one’s own sense of what it feels like to belong to a sex and to a gender. See Catharine Stimpson & Gilbert Herdt, eds. (2014), *Critical Terms for the Study of Gender*.

⁴⁰ Once again, let me be clear, that what is being discussed here as interoceptive feedbacks, somatovisceral coding, etc. *is not* the same as insisting *polygenic gene contributions* provide additively to the formation of a gender identity (cf., Vischer, Hill, and Wray 2008). Study after study have demonstrated there is no single genetic variant (or set of genetic variants) that can reliably distinguish between people of varying gender identities (See Polderman et al. [2018], *The Biological Contributions to Gender Identity and Gender Diversity: Bringing Data to the Table.*)

capture the reality we limbically know.⁴¹ Biology is an influence, certainly not the sole one; yet our biology is what forms that early template of our embodied understandings.⁴² That template also keeps on informing the brain about the sexual body over the life course (McEwen 2017).

Even with these sequenced occurrences, how that individual ultimately comes to understand themselves (their *body network*); how they play out that role (their *body image representation*), truly depends on the person and their experiences. “Intervening cultural variables” (gender ideology, gender norms) determine the latitude for variability possible in that person’s culture. In sum, self-understanding and identity result from how individuals negotiate and assimilate all these elements (Raimo 2021). And, despite a society being exceptionally stringent in its gender requisites, gender identity and self-expression are still individuated variables (Howard 2000); variations will occur in *every culture* (Neculăesei 2015, 33-35).

Thus, to make the process simply and causally linear, saying “gender is assigned at birth” and therefore if “wrong,” that assignation doesn’t result in what the person “is,” or “wishes to be,” is a gross simplification of a complex process. That process involves individuation, and mental understandings which include the sexual body and all it tells us of ‘us’. Its conclusion is the person developing an internalized identity which is, of course and in most cases, “gendered.” However, whether such results are concordant with one’s sexual body or at odds with it, is the subject of the next section.

Incongruity of Sexual Biology and Gender Identity

Incongruity between biological sex and gender identity is a reality for some—what the “body says,” vs. what affective, experiential, and thus psychosocial deductions have concretized on how one feels about their body. In some, a similar incongruity seems to stem from gender role discontent, a need to reformulate self-presentation and identification without physical body disjunctions of the type just mentioned being present. Thus, we must separate these two forms of incongruity.

Gender Dysphoria

In *gender dysphoria*,⁴³ body-self dissonances become severe: The body says you are female; you menstruate; you are growing breasts; you have limbic messaging tied to neurobiological and hormonal entities of a female body. But, the affective constructions of these, how such have ultimately concretized and become cognitions themselves in the brain, may result in a persistent incongruity. Such incongruity is classified by the APA as a disorder.⁴⁴ At this moment, there is no known, discernible cause for gender dysphoria and its dissonances—psychological or physiological.

But that doesn’t presume *core imprints* and eventual affective disjunctions leading to distress are not real. We may one day find some biological substrate to intractable gender dysphoria. Until we do, and findings are validated through consistent research and testing, the jury stays out on causes of dysphoria. What remain are solid notions of disjunction between

⁴¹ “Knowing” here consist of moving limbic sensory and motor input “forward” to *association areas* in the brain, which are themselves the sites of cognitive processing. Let’s remember, *no part of the brain works independently*, and thus, “knowing” in order to “say,” requires the coordination and association of all areas, including Broca’s and Wernicke’s areas responsible for language processing and speech. There may be some limbic inputs which have not correlated with learned lexical items; thus, “words can fail us” in their lexically situating an emotion or cognition.

⁴² As suggested earlier, such are pre-reflexive, preliminary, and unstructured awarenesses, because they are logically prior to objective “knowing.” They become reflexive when “knowing” is a cognitive, developed capacity, and when imbued with word-meanings. All of this does not mean there is no awareness, no “about me” before lexical inscription.

⁴³ *Gender dysphoria* is classified as a disorder. Criteria for diagnosing gender dysphoria is detailed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Version 5 (DSM-V)*, and must include a history of (1) chronic distress, (2) gender nonconformity, and (3) incongruence between gender identity perception and body sex. Per the DSM-V, the presence of (2) and (3) *without* severe and chronic distress about one’s sexed body does not constitute gender dysphoria.

⁴⁴ See APA, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, 5th Ed, §302.5 (F64.9) for a complete detailing of gender dysphoria.

“interiority” and “exteriority,” and negative affect toward the body, all of which reinforce the feeling of the body being wrongly sexed. In such instances, the self aims to gain independence from, and primacy over the sexual body.

Whatever its origins, dysphoria disjunctions generate an “interstitial and transitional figure” (Bornstein 1994, 71) who then needs to resolve the conflicting messages between the body and the self. In this sense, gender dysphoria is often manifest as an affective, dissonant result of what should have been a congruent set of understandings and feelings about the sexual body and its psychological gender identity. I realize this is a limited, short-hand description of what—by all accounts—is a complex interaction between stated, and conceivably other variables. What we can agree on at this juncture is that affective body signaling, mental cognitions, personal and internalized experiences can dissociate; sometimes not align at all; and thus cause the historical distress that characterizes this disorder.

Gender Atypicality/Nonconformity

Being *gender atypical* or *nonconforming* are constructs distinct from gender dysphoria. Per the DSM-5 (2013), gender atypicality or nonconformity do not qualify for classification as dysphoria: Gender atypical or nonconforming individuals do not display significant or chronic distress about their bodies, or disown their sexual body outright.⁴⁵ Rather, these pursue a reformulation of their gendered roles and labels, reframing their gender identity, self-presentation, and even sexual orientation. Gender atypical or nonconforming individuals are not

disavowing their biological sex. Most often, these are reconstituting their identity by moving it away from binary schemas and culturally produced role prescriptions, thus altering their self-presentation and self-labels.

Atypicality of gender or nonconformity is an important distinction to make here, because such often gets subsumed under the *transgender* label, despite there not being any dysphoria present or changes to their body ownership network. The transgender label is now also *inclusive*, and has thus accommodated a spectrum of gender variants and identifiers. Moreover, mainstreamed and popular notions of being *gender fluid*, *genderqueer*, appear to further confound current transgender understandings and statistics (Meerwijk et al. 2017; Gil 2021).⁴⁶

Lisa Littman has also introduced research which substantiates a phenomenon she called *rapid onset gender dysphoria*—dysphoria-like symptoms in adolescents not having shown earlier signs of gender confusion or distress (Littman 2018). Such symptoms appear to me as part of a “culture-bound syndrome,” which now seems to coexist along with factual cases of gender dysphoria, and further compounds statistics.⁴⁷ To repeat, none of these atypicalities are enough to render a diagnosis of dysphoria, per the DSM-5. They do not reflect the conflict of gender identity over physical sex/anatomy which is the hallmark of dysphoria.

Intersexuality and Self-Identity

This is another distinctive we need to acknowledge. Medically, *intersexuality* refers to “disorders of sexual development,” or DSD.⁴⁸ Children born with

⁴⁵ See *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association, 5th Edition*, or “DSM-5” (2013) §302.5 (F64.9) for these exclusions.

⁴⁶ Gender discourses that solidified over the last fifteen years follow two generic lines: (a) activists, who are increasingly “inclusive” of the labels and criteria for gender atypicality or nonconformity, and thus incorporate “the spectrum of gender” without necessary academic or clinical data to distinguish subtypes; and (b) academics and clinicians, who opt for data-driven specificity on all categories of sex and gender. There is reason to opt for the latter, given that some aspects of gender atypicality and nonconformity present with serious comorbidities due to how individuals feel about themselves and society. Lack of celebratory acceptance of all the spectrum often generates pushback on academics, and these get labeled as transphobic for wanting data-driven understandings.

⁴⁷ Melchior (2018), Peer Pressure and Transgender Teens. See also Gil (2021) *A Christian’s Guide through the Gender Revolution*. A ***culture-bound syndrome*** is a broad rubric that encompasses certain behaviors, emotions, and ways of thinking seen only in specific cultural situations. These manifestations are out of the ordinary from the usual behavior of individuals in that culture, and thus are reasons for distress/discomfort. (See also Guarnaccia and Rogler (1999), Research on Culture-Bound Syndromes, 1322–27.)

⁴⁸ Lee et al. (2006). Consensus Statement on Management of Intersex. ‘DSD’ is a term now critiqued by intersex voices like Hida Viloria, who point to such as “negative medical labeling” (Viloria, H. 2017, *Born Both*, 17).

dysgenesis of the genitals, who are chromosomally or hormonally variant, may exhibit a range of genital and internal organ outcomes. In two specific conditions, 46,XY-cAIS (a complete androgen insensitive male who is *phenotypically* female), and 46,XX-CAH (a congenital adrenal hyperplasia female who has been severely genitally *masculinized in utero*), we have studies which suggest that congruence between gender of rearing and the sexual body form is not only possible, but persists without generating conflicts between their biology and identity long term. (Studies underscore that these individuals can, and do continue to manifest gender identities that are congruent with their body form when not surgically or hormonally altered as children—an important point to note.)

In cAIS boys, the cellular inability to process testosterone results in complete feminization of the XY boy's genitalia, and possible variances in internal organs. Such cAIS boys often have undescended testes that still produce testosterone; but the body's inability to react and morph with testosterone enables adrenal estrogen, and free testosterone's aromatization to estradiol, to further differentiate the body at puberty into even greater conformance with the female phenotype.

We have evidence from studies that male limbic coding does not result, notwithstanding testosterone's presence (Haman et al. 2014). And, with rare exception, cAIS children do not challenge their sex of rearing or gender identity as females when adults (Gangaher et al. 2016). In other words, the body's inability to respond to testosterone and an ongoing feminization of the body appear to signal somatoviscerally as a female XX body would. Reared as females despite being a chromosomal XY male, and having a body that is in phenotypic form female, renders a female identification that is gender/body congruent.

In CAH girls, studies demonstrate that these identify with their gender of rearing as girls as well, despite their genitals having been severely androgenized in utero (Meyer-Bahlburg 2005). CAH girls often retain ovaries, and thus secrete estrogen. The androgenization of genitals in utero does not inhibit eventual ovarian production of estrogen.

Consequently, the body develops as a female body; and somatovisceral coding instills female knowledges. Having been reared as girls, and their bodies at puberty continuing to develop as female, seem to generate sufficient concordance to maintain gender self-identification as female. This, despite studies noting “tomboyish behavior,” and their masculinized pudenda.

Studies confirm that their limbic coding seems to follow the path of female bodies, and the brain seems to not be truncated from pursuing a limbic identification with a female body form “despite severe pudendal masculinization in utero” (Meyer-Bahlburg 2005, 432). Once gender of rearing is mentally linked to their feminizing body, female gender identification remains “natural for them” despite genital malformations (Meyer-Bahlburg 2005, 432).⁴⁹ Indeed, CAH girls studied often thought their genitalia were normal, notwithstanding its severe masculinization (Meyer-Bahlburg, 2005, 433).

What can be deduced from studies of these two intersex conditions, and the testimonials of many intersex individuals? We learn that despite mild, or severe dysgenesis of genitals/organs, gender of rearing and a congruent gender identity can align, thus interoceptive messaging and coding seem not only possible, but likely.⁵⁰ Such studies confirm the constitutive, enactive relevance of body knowledge in the formation of a cognitive sexual and gender identity. If it were not so, we would be seeing a great deal more discordance globally between *body* and *identity* in the reports of such studies and books now available.

Suffice it to sum up here by saying there is no discrepancy in understanding the relationship between sex and gender is complex, at times correlational and bidirectional. But correlation is not causation, in either direction; and the terms are not synonyms.

The Current Valence of Gender over Sex

So, why is gender activism so assiduously insisting that gender and sex are interchangeable terms? Why are some so quick to turn biological realities into linguistic euphemisms? And, even more to the point,

⁴⁹ See also Meyer-Bahlburg (2004), Prenatal Androgenization, 97-104.

⁵⁰ See Vioria (2017), *Born Both*, Introduction. Also see Cox and Basham (2018), *Intersex in Christ*; Davis (2015), *Contesting Intersex: The Dubious Diagnosis*.

why is gender given greater valence than biological sex in our contemporary culture?⁵¹

The conflation of gender and biological sex is essential for those that wish to “liberate” one’s identity (gender identity, in this specific matter) from any possibility that one’s sex may have a deeper biological influence, greater than that socially constructed, or “assigned.” To Butler, it is the *binarism* of biological sex—its presumed “regulation” of sex into “the two,” and its molting into “mechanisms of oppression” that become the offenders: Do away with the imposition of the biological binary, and you can do away with its tyranny:

Sex [how one is born] does not determine the interpretation of gender in any significant way, although it is the presumption always inherent in naturalistic and biologic discourses.⁵²

To genderqueer theorists, it is the very sexual essentialism of male and female that “exhausts the semantic field of gender.” Thus, to liberate gender from this “oppressive duo” (binarism), the definition of gender (and any ties to biological sex) must be “expanded, deconstructed, *denaturalized*.”⁵³ Here, then, is Butler’s *coup de grâce*.

Butler continues to insist that “the binary of man and woman performs a regulatory operation of power that neutralizes the hegemonic instance and forecloses the thinkability of its disruption” (2004, 40).

In simpler English, since Butler has been often accused of ‘impossible English,’ what she says here amounts to the following: Having a biological binary in place is, in itself, a regulation; one which then doesn’t

let one think of alternatives and, in this way, closes the door on gender options. Thus, to get past the “normative insistence on the one or two,” Butler suggests we *denaturalize* the binary idea of sex—so that we can then “disrupt,” “put out of play,” a “norm” which she and others feel are regulatory and binding.⁵⁴

Butler states the body is a “mute facticity,”⁵⁵ i.e., a rather silent fact of nature; and like gender, is “produced” (given authenticity) by discourses and performance. As we’ve noted, Butler collapses the sex/gender distinction to argue that there is no sex that is not always and already gendered. To Butler, we do both by naming, within a precise series of lexical acts: Such are the scripts that form for “acting out” sex/gender. These are already socially formed when one is born; we inherit them; they then become regulatory, limiting the subject and constraining their choices. All of it implies there is no body to note prior to cultural inscription; no “real” influence by one’s body (i.e., no “inner truth”), or self, prior to language; and, no performance prior to a semantic script.

Reinscription and Liberation

Following Butler, “Sex, as well as gender, can [thus] be linguistically and performatively reinscribed in ways that accentuate its *factitiousness* [i.e., its constructedness] rather than its *facticity* [i.e., the fact of its existence]” (2006, 130; brackets and italics mine for clarity).

Change the script, and you free the performer to act otherwise; you enable them to reinscribe their identity.

⁵¹ Before I go further, let me quickly acknowledge that I am not blind to the historical oppression of gender ideology in our own, and many cultures. I am also deeply aware, and sympathetic, to those who have experienced the suffocation of gender oppression for multiple reasons, not the least of which is factual dysphoria, and not the most of which is political incorrectness and legal oppression of identities. These points I discuss later, hopefully with empathy. Certainly, they are covered in my recent book, already noted (Gil 2021).

⁵² Stanford, “Contingent Ontologies,” 5. (Brackets mine for clarity.) This line of thinking seems consistent with Simone de Beauvoir’s earlier, and more general assumption that biological givens are themselves *meaningless*, and that the lived body is one *culturally interpreted*: “If we accept the body as a cultural situation, then the notion of a natural body and, indeed, a natural “sex” seem increasingly suspect. The limits to gender, the range of possibilities for a lived interpretation of a sexually different anatomy, seems less restricted by anatomy itself than by the weight of the cultural institutions that have conventionally interpreted it” (De Beauvoir [2009 edition], *The Second Sex*, 21-43).

⁵³ All quotes in paragraph from Butler (2004), *Undoing Gender*, Chapter 2: Gender Regulations. (Bolding mine for emphasis.)

⁵⁴ All quotes in paragraph from Butler (2004), *Undoing Gender*, Chapter 4: Undiagnosing Gender.

⁵⁵ Butler (2006), *Gender Trouble*, 129-136. In this venue, Butler refutes the idea that any pre-linguistic, inner core or essence of body knowledge resides in the body proper, or that it informs the brain. She suggests “that it [the body] has no ontological status apart from the various acts [linguistic and performative] which constitute its reality.”

You free them from the “one or two.”⁵⁶ Note Butler “implicates” sex, but in the word play, never mentions sex biological outright as the foundational culprit. It’s sufficient to call into question the body’s “facticity;” use the cover term “binary gender;” or mention the “oppressive duo” (male/female) in describing sexual binarism as “restrictions,” to focus attention on how terrible it is and how oppressive it becomes.

She has a point: gender, via social constructions of role, can “constrict and negate.” But the “constriction” argument as centered on the cover term *gender binarism*, to also infer biological results that are sex-binary, doesn’t carry truth when we introduce science to question it.

Is Sex the Real Culprit?

Does it create a subversive parody we all unwittingly engage? I mean, are our sex genes the bad genes that initiate a normative binary template, and thereby “conform” us into sexual normalization schemas? Do we have to *denormalize* the sexual binary to free our gender ideology? Biology and genes aren’t the culprits.

We, culture creators, are the culprits behind constrictions and negations. First, by our not acknowledging intersex births, which would then rewrite our reproductive outcomes from a *binary* to a *trisomy*.⁵⁷ It is not wrong to cite the statistical binary norm when it is a fact of human procreation: Sexually binary bodies are produced 98 to 98.3 percent of the time in human offspring (Yau et al. 2019). But it is wrong to dismiss the 1.7–2 percent intersex (about 70 million) as non-existent by not acknowledging them; by denying their reality in our reporting; in our theology (next up!), and by not hearing their voices when these speak to us.

Second, we should fault how cultures and societies interpret reproductive outcomes. Gender ideology

isn’t developed from biological sex; it’s born from cultures and societies insisting that the sexual biology should make a difference in how we view males, females, and other biological formats. And cultures do use their languages to cement ideologies about males and females.

Cultural Culprits

The formation of a *sexual division of labor* early on in human culture history—a perceptual-performative cleavage in labor due to presumptions about sexual-biological form and differential ability (Leacock 1981, 474); and from there, *sexual segregation*—the physical, legal, and cultural separation of people according to their biological sex (Grusky and Charles 2001, 689–703), make it facile for any social system to structure *ideological sexual discrimination* (Steinberg 2001). Such ideologies then root in socialization differences for men and women, eventually creating *gender segregation* (or the distinct differentiation of people based on social constructions of what it means to be masculine or feminine).⁵⁸

At that juncture, we get role divisions that inhere themselves as embodied acts of masculinities and femininities, reifying them into standards as we gender-socialize generations. Gender is being constructed not because biology normed a binarism, but because that binarism was imagined by human ideology and action to represent particularistic masculinities and femininities.

Fueled by *patriarchy*, another cultural creation,⁵⁹ specific self-identities emerge, now hierarchical and authoritatively distinct, with differentiated power and vetted privileges for men and everything less for women—all that has gone awry for these in the Judeo-Christian West’s sociocultural and ideological sexual segregation. And there’s more that wrongs the problem

⁵⁶ Butler is overtly out to create “gender trouble” by disrupting the binary view of sex, gender, and sexuality. She argues that gender, rather than being an essential quality following (at least in part) from biological sex, or (at most) an inherent identity, is an act which grows out of, reinforces, and is reinforced by, societal norms, all of which create the illusion of binary sex. This is “restrictive” and “constrictive,” and does not allow individuals to self-define, *performatively*, apart from the body proper. To Butler, there is an inherent limitation to binary sex, an “idea” that must be *disrupted* in order for individuals to *reinscribe* their identity apart from biological sex.

⁵⁷ That is, male, female, and intersex. We continue to represent reproductive outcomes as only binary bodies.

⁵⁸ See, for instance, how such happens in culture systems, in Taggart (1992), Gender Segregation and Cultural Constructions of Sexuality in Two Hispanic Societies.

⁵⁹ As anthropologists, please don’t cringe: Patriarchy became the imported and Western norm. Here I concede that it does not exist universally; however, for the sake of this Judeo-Western focused position paper, the term is well employed, me thinks.

Christianity, Binary Bodies, and the Other

This position paper cannot possibly elaborate what has taken me a whole series of chapters to fill, on how Christianity has contributed to—not resolved—the problematic of gender ideology (Gil 2021). Here, I concentrate on a few dimensions of relevance to the paper’s position.

The Heritage—Ignored

For a faith rooted in Judaism, Christianity hasn’t paid much attention to how historical, rabbinical Judaism has dealt with those that specifically fall outside the sexual/gender binary. Persons who were identified in the Talmud as *tūmtūm* were neither male nor female (*intersex*); or male *and* female, the *andrōgynōs* or hermaphrodites. Others were also recognized: *sāris*, or feminine men, and the *āylōnit*, masculine women (Cohen 1999).

Thus, if one reads rabbinical literature carefully, one notes the latter two categories also include references to variations in *gendered identities*, as seen in transgender persons.⁶⁰ It was understood that some *sāris* more than likely were identified male at birth, but developed female characteristics and identity later. These could become female in due course, usually through some human action. Such were called *sāris adam*, ‘male-born,’ but becoming ‘woman-made.’ There is no direct record that a transition possibility applied to ‘women-born’ becoming ‘male-made.’ However, women born as women, but with masculinized pudenda (what is now known as the results of CAH) were allowed to live as women and identify as women.⁶¹

Such persons weren’t ostracized from Jewish communities, but rather were encouraged to participate in communal *and* religious life, albeit some restrictions on reading the Torah publicly, minor

regulations on inheritance, and serving in the priesthood (Cohen 1999). In historic Judaism, these persons’ legal standing were protected, with a death penalty for those who hurt, slandered, or in other ways harmed them. Moreover, parents of such individuals—all mentioned—could claim them “as they were” (meaning intersex, hermaphroditic, or transgender), and not lose any “piousness” as Nazirites, or religious persons. Nor were parents encouraged to “conform” children to a binary gender schema via any Judaic law (Cohen 1999).

Creation Narratives

Today, we can trace ideological, socialization and performative male/female differences upheld by Christian denominations as stemming from hermeneutical and exegetical interpretations of creation narratives on human origins (*vide*, de Franza 2015). Interpreters of these foundational narratives render the first male and female binary forms as paradigms for all humanity, the only format in “God’s design” (de Franza 2015). The view upheld is that God created a man and a woman (Gen 2:4-23), and this binary, sole, sexual differentiation should be the determining factor—the mold—not only for physiological sex determination, but all else. The argument often extends to cover gender, one’s identity, and even to serve as blueprints for differentiated male/female world views and social scripts.⁶²

Elsewhere, I have unpacked the problematic of insisting on a paradigmatic, binary-only schema, especially when we go beyond creation to *include procreation*—how all of us factually came to be (Gil 2021).

Procreation results in more than binary bodies. The distinction is enormous, given that genetic variation in offspring occurs via procreation, but assumedly was

⁶⁰ The Southern Jewish Resource Network for Gender and Sexual Diversity (SOJOURN) (June 26, 2015), More Than Just Male and Female: The Six Genders in Classical Judaism. Retrieved from <https://sojourngsd-blog.tumblr.com/post/122525505505/more-than-just-male-and-female-the-six-genders-in>.

⁶¹ Freidson (n/d). More Than Just Male and Female: The Six Genders in Ancient Jewish Thought.

⁶² For an example of this thinking, and extension, see Gregg Allison (2009), Toward a Theology of Embodiment. Allison is generating what I’ve called “a theology of *causal difference*” (Gil 2021, 150), a world of experiences, understandings, and motivations *fundamentally different* for men and women due to their “special creations” (Allison 2009, 5). Thus, he exclaims in rather frustrated tone, “*Try as I might, even urged on by my wife, I cannot see life from her—a woman’s—perspective*” (p.6). One has to ask how one bridges this chasm if, in fact, men and women can’t comprehend each other’s perspectives; especially if they are to be in complement and communion with one another. . . .

not “needed” in human creation itself.⁶³ Nevertheless, the omission transmutes into a persistent theological incorrection (de Franza 2015; Cornwall 2009; In opp., Colson, 1996).

A biblical theology of the body that embraces only body essentialism in its binary format isn’t complete. It defaults on other formats resulting from procreation, and offers no acknowledgement of the social elements also involved in their identification. It leaves out *other essentialisms*—those of biological variability, and the significant role culture has in shaping identity, role, and understandings. It is a fact that there are intersex bodies formatted along God’s allowances in human reproduction. (Are these not, as well, embodying *imago Dei*?) It is also a fact that there are many influences which come to bear on how a body—any body—is internalized into an identity.

Contingently, comingling of anatomy, identity, and gender roles—all, often presumed as God-designed—contribute to the significant revulsion of Christian orthodoxy by those not fitting into its assumptions. Also, by others who come to understand themselves extended beyond the “boxes,” social categories, and identities as these are constructed by culture *and* church traditions. Still, by others who find the entire system of classification oppressive and limiting, to the degree that discarding normative biological sex binarism seems the only means of identity liberation.

The point is, Christian orthodoxy has not done well here. Such orthodoxy perpetuates maintenance of this overarching binarism in its theology, seen then as exclusive; and the idea that outside of this position, there is only falsity. It facilitates arguments from genderqueer theorists that these become constrictive, since there is no allowance to believe intersex bodies exist. And, it continues to assume that those who experience gender dysphoria, for example, can’t “simply change their minds;” or better stated, “let Jesus change their minds” to conform mind to body.

On that note, the Christian church must come to a more merciful and embracing acknowledgement of its past wrongs against “these others,” and work to enable a more holistic embodiment of *imago Dei*. Per Christian philosopher Teri Merrick, it still needs to happen:

The affirmation of the binary as the Christian theological norm certainly has the weight of tradition behind it. However, we also know—and those authorizing this statement are in a position to know—that women and those deviating from this norm have been longstanding victims of hermeneutical marginalization. Yet, there is no evidence that those authorized to assert the We-belief [statements] were aware of, or consulted any alternative readings of the Bible or the Church Fathers that might have challenged this assertion.

The fact that a competent consideration of alternate interpretations of the scriptures and classical Christian texts is neither expected nor encouraged, indicates that the religious communities of which I am a part have yet to confront the likelihood that hermeneutical injustice is second nature to us. (Merrick 2020, 97-118)

Take-Aways

Let’s briefly restate: I am challenging flawed rationales from genderqueer activists who require an obliteration of the sexual binary to save gender, and thus humanity, from the tyranny of *sex*. I am also challenging the notion that the body proper is nothing more than an artifact which does not provide input into identity or self-understanding. This is the greater challenge. Finally, I am questioning voices from the Church which insist on a perpetual and only sexual duality, discrediting in the process what *procreation* brings to the human tableau; and spawning from creation “God’s preference” for also identity and role.

The real need for change should be focused not on denying sexual biology, but on how cultures create gender ideology; how roles for binarily-sexed selves and others are cognized culturally and structurally. Complicit are those role socializations we invent and then teach each generation; and the impact such have on how they steer people away from body knowledge—male, female, intersex—and into social fabrications.

Such arighting does nothing, however, to quell the need for incorporating the actual products of biological reproduction, i.e., intersex bodies, and those with gender dysphoria, into our anthropological and theological narratives. Integrating how such individuals negotiate their truth, self-define and identify, is much

⁶³ Let’s recall that Adam clearly refers to Eve as “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh,” to mean bioidentical genetics. Variability potential, however, is encoded into the human genome to insure *procreated offspring* have the capacity to adapt to different environments, and thus “fill the earth.” See Genesis 2. Such is *not* the “results of the Fall,” as some have suggested. Genetic variability is a requisite for biologically adaptive life on this planet.

needed work—both bio-culturally, and in the church; in its theology; and as a social institution.

Similarly, we ought to distinguish gender nonconformity and the current movement for self-identification from issues related to anatomy proper. Comingling them only further complicates knowing and being. Moreover, by engaging political correctness to the detriment of fundamental and core truths biology and neurosciences bring to the table, we err on the side of a *spectrum*, and do no-one a favor (Soh 2020). This is not to say we don't need to reframe how we enable latitude for gender self-expression, or how the church, in particular, views masculinities, femininities, and androgynous expressions.

Activists that blame biological sex and its normative binarism for the ills produced by culturally-constricting gender ideologies, are “looking in all the wrong places.” All of it, together, favors the consistent confusion of wrong ideas, and by extension the coterminous usage of sex and gender to mean the same thing.

I close this position paper by underscoring that if we have anything to learn here, it is the need for a more principled basis in examining our work—especially our lexicon. Christian anthropologists are encouraged to involve themselves more readily in contemporary dialogues on gender as now rendered. In so doing, Christian anthropologists can help bring clarity to gender issues the church faces. Equally, to challenge cultural-religious propositions that lock us into believing people can be summarily boxed by exegetical propositions without questions, to affirm God's will.

We should pay greater attention to scientific findings: our sexual bodies do speak to us, and inform us. That body conversation is fundamental and continuous. Most often, body messages and affects align; yet sometimes they do not. When they don't, we must believe persons sharing that history. And yes, the body comes in more than just two formats; and yes, it is not the only voice. Influences from our culture, learning, experiences, all contribute to the gauntlet we pass through in generating our embodiment and sense of self.⁶⁴

Agreeing or disagreeing to listen to what this position paper brings to the table is another matter, not settled by clarifying terminology, cultural polemics, or reviewing religious tradition alone. Rather, it demands our will to be informed, to seek out truth, find better grounds than argumentative territory on which to

revisit our theology. Doing so should help us develop a more Christ-like anthropological hermeneutic, and be humane without bias to win the day.

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⁶⁴ “Apologies to Shrek, identities are built up in layers.” Yes, and thank you, Michael Rynkiewich (personal communications, 12/2/2021).

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