SEX AND GENDER

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Abstract

This chapter surveys essentialist and anti-essentialist theories of sex and gender. It does so by engaging three approaches to sex and gender: externalism, internalism, and contextualism. The chapter also draws attention to two key debates about sex and gender in the feminist literature: the debate about the sex/gender distinction (the *distinction debate*) and the debate about whether sex and gender have essences (the *essentialism/anti-essentialism debate*). In addition, it describes three problems that theories of sex and gender tend to face: the Inclusion Problem, the Definition Problem, and the Exclusion Problem. Lastly, the chapter highlights why the division between essentialist and anti-essentialist accounts of sex and gender is not clear.

1. Introduction

This chapter deals with the idea that sex and gender are by their natures essentially distinct. That sex and gender are distinct was the prevailing view in Anglo-American feminist thought in the wake of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) until the popular reception of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993), which challenge the sex/gender distinction in ways unarticulated previously. Following Butler's influential work, two related debates dominated the feminist literature throughout the turn of the century: the *distinction debate* and the *essentialism/anti-essentialism debate*. The first debate concerns whether sex and gender are essentially distinct, while the second pertains to whether sex and gender have *essences*. By 2006, Linda Martín Alcoff argued that the *essentialism/anti-essentialism debate* in feminist philosophy had become "passé" with most believing anti-essentialists had won (152). I shall outline why neither debate was resolved in the early 2000s and how they have shifted in recent years to focus on self-identification.

In order to address what the sex/gender distinction consists in and why it is contested, this chapter also deals with the matter of *what* sex and gender are, which lacks consensus in the philosophical literature. In what follows, I characterize the perspectives I survey as externalist, contextualist, and internalist. Internalist approaches rely on self-identification as a necessary and sufficient condition for having a sex or a gender. In contrast, externalist approaches do not treat self-identification with a sex or a gender as necessary or sufficient. Instead, having a sex or a gender (at least partly) depends on biological or social factors independent of self-identification. In contrast, contextualist approaches treat sex and gender as property clusters, incorporating external factors, self-identification, and other psychological features.

The philosophical study of sex and gender has generated a rich and diverse literature. I'll take two passes at characterizing the sex/gender distinction and assess the viability of essentialist and anti-essentialist approaches to the issue. The theories I'll survey do not exhaust the broader literature and are a snapshot of the major issues I take to be the most salient, particularly at the present time. I'll also characterize three problems that essentialist and anti-essentialist accounts face: the Inclusion Problem, the Definition Problem, and the Exclusion Problem.

The Inclusion Problem concerns the difficulty of, for example, including all women in the category *woman* without identifying necessary conditions for being a member of that category.[i] The Definition Problem points to the worries that arise when there is no clear target for theorizing about (or otherwise addressing) feminist aims (Bogardus 2022; Heyes 2000; Mikkola 2017; Stone 2004). I'll argue that anti-essentialists about *gender* face the Inclusion Problem, and anti-essentialists about *sex* and/or *gender* encounter the Definition Problem. The Exclusion Problem, on the other hand, highlights difficulties that both essentialists and anti-essentialists confront in offering theories of sex and gender essences that do not account for intersex, trans,

two-spirit, or genderqueer[ii] categories or identities, or that exemplify sexist stereotypes. The Exclusion Problem relates to Sally Haslanger's (2000) normativity problem for gender—the worry that "any definition of 'what a woman is' is value-laden and will marginalize certain females, privilege others and reinforce current gender norms" (37). In short, I shall unpack how the Inclusion and Definition Problems highlight difficulties with vagueness in anti-essentialist theses about sex and gender. I'll also explore how the Exclusion Problem can render theses about sex and gender unacceptably narrow.

2. Sex and Essentialism

In this section, I'll outline three types of essentialist position about sex—*biological determinism*, *sexual difference*, and *socio-historical-linguistic* appeals. These types of essentialist position are not exhaustive but offer a useful contrast. Feminist theories that endorse the sex/gender distinction usually target biological determinism. Biological determinism is a form of biological essentialism, which treats biology as destiny (Beauvoir 1949). Biological determinist views about sex differences have a long history (Taylor Merleau 2003; Mikkola 2022). Such views include the notion that differences in metabolic state determine sex-based psychosocial and behavioral traits. This sort of biological determinism was developed by biologist Patrick Geddes and naturalist J. Arthur Thompson in *The Evolution of Sex* (1889). Their metabolic theory contrasts significantly with Charles Darwin's (1871) theory of sexual selection. Rather than positing that successful reproductive strategies shape the appearance and behavior of females and males as Darwin does, Geddes and Thompson postulate females as anabolic (energy conserving) and males as katabolic (energy spending) types of individual. On their view, sex differences are metabolic differences that evolve over time (especially in terms of appearance and behavior) via mate selection. The activity levels of these individuals, which Geddes and

Thompson note permit of exceptions, generally form a "constitutional contrast" (Geddes and Thompson 1889: 249-250). In other words, having an anabolic or katabolic nature is a matter of fundamental constitution rather than selection pressure. On their view, morphological and biobehavioral differences are expressions of metabolic differences such that "the same general habit of body… results in the production of male elements in the one case or female elements in the other" (Geddes and Thompson 1889: 19). Geddes and Thompson's metabolic theory appears to posit dispositional differences in energy expenditure whereas chromosomal accounts of sex difference invoke genetic information as the microstructural blueprint for sex differentiation along stages of sex development.

The agenda to explain sex differences in biologically deterministic terms remains popular (Fausto-Sterling 1992; Kourany 2010; Meynell 2012). Although Geddes and Thomson's metabolism-based dispositional analysis has been abandoned, analyses of brain-based essential differences between the sexes have expanded from the early modern period to contemporary brain studies (Malebranche 1647 [1997]; Fine 2010). Psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen (2003) is one prominent sex researcher who attributes differences in human female and male behavior to differences in innate brain structure. He outlines five levels of sex: genetic, gonadal, genital, brain type, and sex-typical behavior. Brain type and behavior are ultimately determined by genetic sex (XX or XY chromosomes structures). On his view, females develop empathizing brains and males develop systematizing brains. These two brain types purportedly cause individuals to engage in and excel at empathizing or systematizing behavior. Empathizing involves proficiency in communication and "mind-reading" (Baron-Cohen 2003: 29-84). Systematizing concerns proficiency in mathematical and logical reasoning and organizational skills. Like other brain-based sex researchers (Gurian and Stevens, 2005; The Gurian Institute

2009; Brizendine 2006, 2010), Baron-Cohen endorses the organizational-activational hypothesis. This hypothesis asserts that sex steroids prenatally organize some brain regions in a dimorphic fashion, and then later (e.g., during and after puberty) act again to activate brain circuits so as to result in sex-specific behaviors (Arnold 2009). Testosterone and estradiol are the hormones leading to the brain found in males, whereas estrogen is instrumental in brain development in females. For Baron-Cohen and others who endorse the organizational-activational hypothesis, exposure to pre-natal testosterone marks the "essential difference" in language skills and sociability between females and males with higher amounts leading to systematizing and lower amounts to empathizing.

Biological determinism is considered an essentialist view of sex because it proffers that females and males have certain types of biological features that are intrinsic and necessary to being a member of the kind *female* or *male*. Metabolic and brain-based accounts of sex are worth highlighting because they purport to explain how an intrinsic feature like metabolism or chromosome type determines, on average, female and male behavior. That some or all behavior in females and males is metabolically or genetically determined, rather than socially learned, is a controversial claim in the *distinction* and *essentialism/anti-essentialism debates*. Moreover, the idea that there are binary developmental trajectories in humans, and that intersex conditions are exceptions that do not undermine this rule is also controversial (Ainsworth 2017; van Anders 2017). Biological determinism is typically championed outside of feminist theorizing, which Cressida Heyes calls "anti-feminist biological essentialism" (2000: 33).

Biological essentialisms that reject biological determinism but endorse the sex/gender distinction are heralded by some feminist philosophers, namely of the sexual difference variety. Sexual difference approaches assume there is a biological reality that exists outside of

socialization. On this view, biological sex exists prior to social expectations about females and males, and is treated as a natural kind (Tahko, this volume). The usual target of feminist *anti-essentialist* arguments is biological essentialism *within* feminist theory rather than the biological determinism I sketched above (Heyes 2000). Biological determinist and sexual difference accounts appeal to an externalist notion of sex where sex exists in virtue of biological properties independent of human attitudes. Both of these views face the Exclusion Problem because they make universal claims about females and males, which may exclude persons who do not have typical female or male attributes or whose self-identification does not match such attributes.

Biological essentialism, whether in the form of biological determinism or sexual difference, is not the only type of essentialism about sex. Accounts that attribute rigid socio-historical meanings to sex terms, arguably, appeal to a type of essence that is linguistic and fixed by socio-historical context. Instead of being a property that exists independently of attitudes or language use, what sex is is *how* it is talked about over time and place. What makes this account essentialist is the particular ways sex is thought and talked about historically establishes necessary and sufficient conditions for what it is. An example of sex treated as a socio-historical linguistic matter is the idea that biological sex cannot be conceptually separated from traditional social expectations about the sexes. In other words, any present or future invocation of the concept *sex* or the term 'sex' independent of an invocation of social attitudes and practices cannot be said to invoke sex. This type of essentialism is externalist based not only in social practices but in the history of language use. Butler's (1993) theory that sex is a regulatory ideal can be interpreted as positing a sort of socio-historical essence because they argue that sex is not a "bodily given" but a "cultural norm which governs the materialization of bodies" which has a social history (Butler 1993: 236-238). Butler and philosophers responding to their work treat this

view as anti-essentialist since they reject the idea that biological sex precedes the social norms that pertain to it (Butler 1993; Witt 1995; Heyes 2000). Butler's view contrasts importantly with Simone de Beauvoir's and Sally Haslanger's externalist positions discussed in the next section.

3. The Sex/Gender Distinction: First Pass

I shall offer my initial pass at the sex/gender distinction by invoking two emblematic philosophical statements. The first is Beauvoir's (1949) claim that, "One is not born, but rather, becomes woman" (283). And the second is Haslanger's (2000) reference to the slogan, "gender is the social meaning of sex"[iii] (Haslanger 2000: 37; Butler 1993: 238). These are distinct statements but both notably capture the idea that the categories of *woman* and *gender* are social and thereby external.

First, let's start with Beauvoir's analysis of *what* it means to be a woman. Beauvoir claims that "not every female human being is necessarily a woman… If the female function is not enough to define woman… we then have to ask: What is a woman?" (Beauvoir 1949: 3-5). Beauvoir's question, "What is a woman?" continues to trouble feminist philosophy (Bogardus 2020; Heyes 2000; Jenkins 2016) and is central to the Definition Problem. Beauvoir frames her analysis from her position as a particular instance of the category *woman* by drawing on her experience as a woman (Bauer 2001: 43; Beauvoir 1949:5).

For Beauvoir, being a woman is not a "natural fact," rather, it is a result of someone's social context and personal history. In particular, someone becomes a woman in virtue of the history of her childhood, i.e., what is socially expected of her and how she is treated by her family and community. In this sense, being a woman for Beauvoir is social and historical, which she refers to as a "woman's situation" (Bauer 2001: 226; Beauvoir 1949). This situation is a "state of affairs" not determined by biology, but by social, legal, and economic conditions (Beauvoir

1949: 9, 21). Beauvoir also rejects the notion that women have intrinsic mental features that explain their unequal social condition, and instead, views their situation as a contingent social matter. Beauvoir takes a functional approach to sex, viewing hormonal and physiological differences between females and males as playing a functional role in differences in bodily capacity, e.g., reproductive capacity or upper body strength. Although she sees biological sex as constraining females and males in different ways, biological sex does not account for the *social* situations of woman and man.

Haslanger (2000) takes a different approach to endorsing the sex/gender distinction. Unlike Beauvoir, Haslanger's (2000) inquiry begins with the question "What is gender?" and notes that the question "What is it to be a man or a woman?" is related to this first question (Haslanger 2000: 32). Rather than taking a dual descriptive and normative approach to answering "the woman question" as Beauvoir does, Haslanger (2000, 2004, 2005, 2006) adopts an "analytical/ameliorative" approach to defining gender in terms of hierarchical definitions of the categories *woman* and *man*. An ameliorative analysis of a concept deviates from standard definitions, and instead, offers a new concept for particular aims. Haslanger's (2000) account construes gender in terms of social class and incorporates differentials in social and economic status between women and men, ultimately, to eliminate those differentials. On her view, someone's presumed sex (based on observed bodily features) marks them as a target for hierarchical social treatment. According to Haslanger (2000), women are sexually marked as subordinate along an economic, political, legal, or social dimension. Women's "presumed" sex marks them as a target for systematically subordinated treatment, whereas, men's "presumed" sex marks them as a target for privileged treatment. On this view, if women were defined as merely those persons observed to be female, then such a definition would not be able to capture

what Haslanger argues are systematic differentials in social, political, economic, and legal resources. The aim of Haslanger's analysis is to define women and men as oppressed or privileged in order to target those social and political properties for ameliorative purposes.

Beauvoir and Haslanger both understand women and men to occupy social positions that depend on, at least, perceived sex difference yet are distinct from being female or male. Being born female does not cause someone to have a subordinate social position, rather the ways that we value persons creates unequal social statuses or hierarchical social classes. Beauvoir and Haslanger take an externalist approach to the sex/gender distinction where sex is biological and gender (understood as *woman* and *man*) is social (or social-historical), economic, political, and legal. The externalism I attribute to Beauvoir and Haslanger, based in an understanding of gender as social role or social position, exemplifies the classical framing of the sex/gender distinction. Beauvoir's and Haslanger's theories face the Exclusion Problem. Beauvoir's theory is generally considered to do so since she offers a general account of the situation of woman as Other, which arguably leaves out differences among women along the dimensions of race, class, or geographical location. Haslanger is criticized for offering definitions of *woman* and *man* based on observed or imagined sex characteristics. According to critics, Haslanger's view is trans-exclusive (Jenkins 2016). Next, I'll survey anti-essentialist positions about sex from externalist frameworks.

4. Sex and Anti-Essentialism

Anti-essentialist accounts of sex take externalist (Beauvoir 1949; Butler 1990, 1993) and contextualist approaches (Alcoff 2006; Bettcher 2013; van Anders 2022). Although it is possible to take a purely internalist approach to sex, which would appeal to self-identification only, such perspectives are not well-represented in the literature. Most anti-essentialist perspectives that

include self-identification or first-person experiences of embodiment also integrate externalist views. For this reason, I'll survey anti-essentialist approaches by first characterizing externalist accounts before contrasting these approaches with contextualist views. Technically, contextualist approaches are a type of externalist approach, but they differ in scope. Contextualist approaches tend to localize explanations of sex or gender to individuals or subgroups; whereas, externalist approaches posit more general explanations. It is worth noting that most social constructionist (Griffith, this volume) positions about sex are putatively anti-essentialist, while some social constructionist approaches are regarded as essentialist (Irigaray 1985, 1993).

Anti-essentialist views on sex typically reject the idea that there are definitive biological properties which constitute an individual's sex. These anti-essentialist perspectives counter biological essentialist approaches which propose that sex is fundamentally biological. Such anti-essentialist accounts, beginning in the philosophical tradition with Monique Wittig (1982) and Judith Butler (1990, 1993), challenge the classical feminist framing of sex. Rather than proposing that a category *female* exists independently of social norms and social/linguistic practices and that the term 'female' merely picks out a group of people with biological characteristics, these perspectives challenge the very idea that sex is natural and prior to language and culture.

In what follows, I'll contrast Beauvoir's anti-essentialist perspective on sex with Butler's, which will set the stage for an analysis of contextualist perspectives. Drawing on Wittig's "The Category of Sex," Butler (1993) develops an account of sex that is socio-linguistic, which builds on their (1990) account of gender as a performance. What sets Beauvoir's externalism apart from Butler's is the latter's emphasis on the function of language in producing a phenomenon through repeated representation in speech.

On Butler's socio-linguistic approach, gender norms constitute sexes as the natural foundations that serve to legitimate and "reproduce" binary gender (1993: 12-13). For Butler, sex is socio-linguistic in the sense that it is a regulatory ideal that "materializes" and "naturalizes" gender in the human body through discourse and repetitive practices. From this anti-essentialist perspective, sex is socially constructed in a way that aims to buttress the compulsory performance of restrictive binary gender norms. In this way, biological sexes are produced through rule-governing discursive practices that secure binary gender categories (1993: 23). Through discourse bodies are materialized as natural surfaces to fit gender categories, but for Butler that fit is never wholly successful. Gender establishes sex as its pre-linguistic and pre-socio-political foundation. But if sex really is, let's say, the enforcement branch of a binary gender ideology, then the sex/gender distinction is a mechanism that naturalizes the gender system too. Beauvoir's and Butler's analyses of the sex/gender distinction were arguably the most ground-breaking and influential philosophical contributions to this topic in the 20th century, and appear to have informed many 21st century responses to this issue.

Social neuroendocrinologist Sari van Anders (2022) presents what I call a 'contextualist' anti-essentialist account of sex. Similar to Ásta's (2011, 2018) conferralism (Vaidya and Wallner, this volume), contextualist approaches are informed by some interplay of (external) social norms and socio-linguistic practices with (internal) self-identification. The particularities of each interplay depend on the individual involved and their social and personal circumstances in time and place. The upshot is that sex has multiple biological, social, and social-psychological constitutive features and in each case some features may be more salient than others.[iv] Van Anders offers a contextualist analysis insofar as she views sex as involving "biological/evolved," "biomaterial," and "bodily/physical" constitutive elements that are located in a "within-bodily

outline" (2022: 3). For van Anders, questions about what sex is must also be accompanied by questions about context.

It is worth mentioning that van Anders (2022) does not endorse a clear demarcation between sex and gender. Instead, she views sex, gender, and sexuality to be partially co-constitutive. Van Anders (2013) also sees sex and gender as sometimes invoked or operating in a composite, which she labels "gender/sex" (202). Her definition of sex incorporates externalist elements in its biological/evolved features (endogenous biological properties) and biomaterial features (biological properties that arise from exogenous influences). In addition, van Anders' account integrates self-identification with bodily/physical features, which she describes as objects, substances, or practices that shape or modify "bodily sex" as the individual understands it (2022:3). The self-identification component of her account becomes clearer when we consider her analysis of the location of sex. Recall that biological determinists do not argue that sex has a location, rather they assume there are some universal properties that are instantiated on the basis of a more fundamental property that all females and males share, respectively. Those fundamental biological properties could be a metabolic disposition or a microstructural feature, i.e., XX or XY chromosomes. These essential features have a 'location' in the sense that they are parts of a human organism but biological essentialist theses of sex-based properties are usually theorized in a way that aims to shed light on what can be said of females, males, or humans in general rather than specified in terms of what can be said about a particular individual's attitude or circumstances. Van Anders' within-bodily outline conceptualizes sex within a mind-body boundary that involves diverse mental, physical, and behavioral phenomena that include acting, responding, sensory processing, believing, perceiving, and imagining (2022: 3). According to van Anders, the advantages of her account are that the within-bodily outline doesn't universalize

or homogenize sex. Rather, through incorporating self-identification, her position represents a range of individuals' first-person embodied experience.

5. The Sex/Gender Distinction: Second Pass

In our first pass, we looked at the classical externalist framing represented in Beauvoir's existential-phenomenological theory and Haslanger's ameliorative analysis. In the wake of Butler's challenge to the sex/gender distinction and its influence on social constructionist critiques of sex as biological, another pass at the distinction is in order. In addition to Butler's challenge, the critical impact of intersectional analyses developed within Black feminist theory (Crenshaw 1989, 1991; hooks 1984; Lorde 1984; Collins 1990) continues to influence accounts of gender. Intersectional theories analyze how social position, social identity, and inner-life experience are shaped by social factors including gender, race, sexuality, class, age, and disability. Generally, for intersectional approaches, offering accounts of gender that do not incorporate other social factors yield dubious and incomplete analyses. Arguably, van Anders (2022) offers an intersectional treatment of sex and gender, but recall that she does not view sex as fundamentally biological. For those theories that take the biological essentialist route, offering an intersectional account of sex seems less plausible. From the late-twentieth-century onwards, intersectional, trans, and genderqueer perspectives featured more centrally in feminist philosophical accounts of sex and gender (Alcoff 1988, 2006; Bettcher 2007; Butler 1999; Heyes 2000; Stoljar 1995; Saul 2006), which aimed to "solve" the Exclusion Problem faced by feminist essentialists (Haslanger 2000) and by some anti-essentialist endorsements of the sex/gender distinction (Beauvoir 1949).

Butler's (1990) conception of gender as a series of repeated speech acts helped pave the way for the integration of trans philosophy and queer theory in what would become mainstream

feminist philosophy, but even their theory faces problems with accounting for diversity along van Anders' schema. For example, Butler's view does not appear to account for transgender or genderqueer identities that are *not* produced through the performance of binary gender norms. Butler (1990, 1993, 2004) addresses this issue by arguing that regulatory ideals inevitably create points of disruption and resistance, but it is debatable whether a more robust psychological component is needed to complement Butler's theory.

In light of such problems with externalist approaches, Katharine Jenkins (2016) offers a trans-inclusive analysis of *gender as class*, drawing on Haslanger's (2000) account, and as *identity*. Jenkins' view attempts to solve the Exclusion Problem that Haslanger's account faces. Recall that Haslanger's (2000) ameliorative account of *woman as class* excludes some trans women from the definition of *woman* by requiring that a woman be "regularly and for the most part observed or imagined to have certain bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction" (Haslanger 2000: 42). Jenkins builds on Haslanger's externalist approach with her inclusion of *gender as class*, but supplements it with an internalist position that involves a notion of gender identity (Jenkins 2016: 410). She defines gender identity as the "internal map" that allows one to navigate gender class structures. Even though the general idea of an internal map may be promising for trans-inclusive approaches, some object that Jenkins' (2016) internalist framework is needlessly strong (Brigandt and Rosario 2020). The reason being is that Jenkins' internal map includes a relevancy criterion. According to this criterion, an individual has the gender identity *woman* if she takes feminine norms to be relevant to herself (even if she does not comply). This criterion makes Jenkins' account vulnerable to the Exclusion Problem because it assumes that, e.g., a woman needs to know which gender norms are relevant to her. The worry is that gender norms are culturally specific, and in principle, one can have the

experience of being a woman without believing that feminine gender norms are relevant to oneself. In addition, persons with some cognitive disabilities appear to be excluded from having the internal map as an awareness of gender norms is required. As several philosophers have raised recently, internalist accounts of gender, especially those that treat self-identification as necessary and sufficient, appear to be too weak or even incoherent (Barnes 2022; Bogardus 2022; Lawford-Smith 2022; Stock 2021).

6. Context, Dispositions & Identity: Essentialist & Anti-Essentialist Perspectives on Gender

In this section, I'll take a closer look at contextualist theories of gender (Heyes 2000), dispositional (McKitrick 2015), and other essentialist theories of gender (Byrne 2020; Jenkins 2016; Witt 2011) as well as another pass at theories of gender identity (Barnes 2022; Bettcher 2013; Bogardus 2022). Heyes (2000) argues for an account that treats gender as Wittgensteinian (Hamawaki, this volume) family resemblances. She is skeptical of the purported clear divide between essentialist and anti-essentialist accounts of gender, and assesses the limits of anti-essentialist orthodoxy in feminist theory as well as its critiques. In so doing, she offers an account that is a "middle ground" between essentialism and anti-essentialist theories wary of generalizations about women (Heyes 2000: 67-72). Heyes' family resemblance approach is contextualist because it looks to examples of contexts where diverse claims about women can be made through identifying commonalities without assuming that women are all the same. Heyes describes her project as anti-essentialist:

> Wittgenstein's anti-essentialism recommends that we "look and see," … Instead of trying to "get it right" about who women are, we can give examples of contexts where different claims are justified. … I take up the challenge of giving such examples, using my Wittgensteinian feminism to develop an anti-essentialist feminist research method… (Heyes 2000: 75-76).

but in ways similar to van Ander's contextualist analysis, Heyes' theory of gender could be described as a type of essentialism that defines gender in terms of a range of constitutive features that not all members share in common. For Heyes, when we observe how language is used in practice we can look for connections in deployments of gender terms, and see how, for example, boundaries about who women are are drawn in different contexts.

Jennifer McKitrick's (2015) dispositional analysis offers a view of gender as relational and psychosocial. McKitrick does not offer a purely internalist account, rather, she integrates externalist features by positing that dispositions toward gender-based behaviors are products of being part of a social environment. Gender dispositions change across time and place, and are instantiated in various degrees. Although flexible and changeable, gender dispositions are stickier than habituated patterns of behavior.

McKitrick interprets her dispositional analysis to accommodate subjective experiences of gender in ways Butler's performativity does not. Presumably the reason McKitrick's internalist picture is better equipped to address conflicts between one's first-person experiences of gender and the gender norms in one's social setting is because dispositions don't require manifestation or external recognition to be what they are. What secures someone's being a woman even when she is not observed to exemplify the traits associated (or stereotyped) with *woman* is that she has "sufficiently strong and sufficiently many" dispositions constituting a feminine gender identity even when not manifested (McKitrick 2015: 9).

Although McKitrick aims her dispositional account to provide a more robust framework for one's gender psychology in defining gender, a significant question arises: "How do we draw lines around women's, men's, and genderqueer behavior without simply invoking stereotypes or appealing to intrinsic gender essences?" To this question, McKitrick's view offers two responses.

Firstly, acquiring gender-based dispositions is a complex interactive process between an individual and their social environment. Our habits, responses, and desires are shaped by our social contexts; yet, as subjects we are often (but not always) in a better position to know what we are disposed to do and desire even when we are not outwardly expressing it. McKitrick seems to grant some degree of first-person authority to gender dispositions if one is aware of them (2015: 5,10). Secondly, since she views gender as subject to change, relational, and psychologically integrated, one's dispositions take shape in their respective culture and linguistic community but it is (at least to some extent) up to them whether or how to express those dispositions given their circumstances.

Moreover, there isn't a single set of dispositions that is necessarily associated with each gender category. So, what counts as feminine, masculine, or genderqueer will depend on the norms of one's social location, and importantly, how one interacts with them. In this way, this account appeals to relational essences that lack indexed contents about what women's dispositions or "feminine gender identity" looks like in every case. This approach contrasts with other essentialist views like Haslanger's (2000) and Charlotte Witt's (2011) uniessentialist view that gender is the unifying essence of social individuals who occupy various social roles (Witt, this volume). On Witt's account, gender is the "mega social role" that unifies constituent roles of the social individual. Haslanger's and Witt's externalist approaches necessitate that *woman* or *gender* exemplify particular characteristics. A narrower and more contentious contrast to McKitrick's dispositional analysis is Alex Byrne's claim that "Women are adult human females" (2020: 3794-3795). Robin Dembroff offers an extensive reply to Byrne's biological essentialist view, which they label the "natural attitude" (2021: 19-20). The natural attitude about gender makes several assumptions, viz., that there are only two genders, that all persons have one or the

other, and that this picture is supported by the biological sciences. Byrne's analysis of gender can be understood as endorsing the natural attitude.

On the flipside, McKitrick's internalist view of gender might side-step the Exclusion Problem depending on what being aware of one's own gender dispositions involves exactly. In addition to having advantages over other essentialist accounts, McKitrick's appears to go beyond Jenkins' account of gender identity by positing a less rigid relationship between the navigating subject and their social environment.

From a feminist disability perspective, Elizabeth Barnes (2022) raises a worry concerning the popularization of gender identity, particularly via self-identification, as the unique criterion for gender. Although she views gender identity as important to theorizing about gender categories and crucial to the lived experiences of many, she argues that gender identity should not be the sole determining criterion nor should an account of gender exclude the lived experiences of cognitively disabled persons. Barnes' view can be contrasted with Talia Mae Bettcher's (2009, 2013) theory of gender as sincere self-identification and with Jenkins' claim that the labels 'genderqueer,' 'woman,' and 'man' should be reserved for those who self-identify with the genders those terms refer to. As a result, the externalist aspect of Jenkins' view includes all disabled persons but it does not do so in its internalist framing.

From a different angle than Barnes, Tomas Bogardus (2019, 2020, 2022) also rejects defining gender in terms of self-identification, pointing out the circularity that results.[v] Like Byrne, he favors a biological essentialist account of gender, and challenges those who endorse the sex/gender distinction to show why gender is social rather than merely a way of referring to biological sex. For Bogardus (and Byrne), gender is a set of linguistic features that serves to pick out members belonging to *female* and *male* natural kinds. Unlike Barnes' challenge to gender as

(solely) self-identification, Bogardus' contributions to this recent phase of the *distinction debate* have been largely negative, putting the onus on social constructionists to show why gender isn't just linguistic.

7. The Problems

The *distinction* and *essentialism/anti-essentialism debates* continue. Contemporary anti-essentialists have rightly pointed out problems with feminist essentialist approaches, but anti-essentialist accounts can seem overly fuzzy and *ad hoc*. Even the most promising post-Butlerian views (Ásta 2018, 2011; Heyes 2000; van Anders 2022) raise worries about the ability of theses focused on norms and language to account for shared material and psychological realities among persons. Barnes' (2022) theory of gender offers a useful way to account for material conditions shared by women while being pluralistic. For Barnes, there are real and objective facts about gender but our use of gender terms doesn't always match these objective facts (2022: 21). She argues that rather than using gender terms to match perfectly with theoretical hallmarks in the metaphysics of gender, viz., matching our use of the term 'woman' with only those who identify as women, we should incorporate permissive uses of gender terms. The reason for this is that someone who does not (or is not able to) identify as a woman can still be materially impacted in ways specific to women. Barnes' account highlights that there isn't always a one-to-one mapping between a gender category's extension and those disposed to certain treatment or characteristics of life history based on (perceived) sex.

I stated at the outset that this chapter was concerned with whether sex and gender are essentially distinct. Noticeably, many of the positions I've surveyed either reject the distinction altogether or atomize the distinction by defining it in terms of local/individual cases. Caution or even skepticism about the distinction is a common feature of essentialist and anti-essentialist

approaches that aren't classically externalist. And even what seem like the most advantageous hybrid approaches (e.g., anti-essentialist contextualism, dispositional essentialism) have difficulties addressing the Problems. For instance, van Anders' view may lump together related but diverse phenomena (sex, gender, sexuality) yet split common features in a way that makes identifying *explananda* difficult. On the essentialist side, situating dispositional analyses in social location can make it hard to track common features across time and place. That is, very localized accounts of gender can obscure intersecting social patterns and are vulnerable to claims that feminism is no longer needed since conditions, e.g., of women in higher education, can change dramatically. Despite attempts to clearly demarcate essentialist vs. anti-essentialist views, the boundaries between them aren't always clear since putatively anti-essentialist accounts can make essentialist claims in several ways, some of which have been surveyed here (Butler 1993; Heyes 2000; van Anders 2022). Perhaps a promising way to approach the *essentialism/anti-essentialism debate*, and the difficulties the Problems present, would be to defuse it by focusing on accounts of sex and gender that are sufficiently fine-grained and inclusive of individual variation while still being able to project useful generalizations.

Related Topics

Natural Kind Essentialism, Dispositional Essentialism, Social Justice, Unity, Social Construction, Conferralism, Wittgenstein

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[i] The Inclusion Problem relates to Haslanger's (2000) discussion of the commonality problem, which concerns the issue of whether there is anything social that all females share in common beyond body type (if even that).

[ii] I shall use 'genderqueer' as an umbrella term to refer to gender categories that fall outside of the categories woman and man, which include non-binary, gender-nonconforming, third gender, genderfluid, and pangender categories.

[iii] Butler (1993) characterizes the statement, "gender is the social significance that sex assumes within a given culture" as the Beauvoirian position to the sex/gender distinction (238).

[iv] Van Ander's view could be characterized as essentialist because she appeals to sex having certain constitutive features, but it appears that she takes her account to be anti-essentialist.