

## Sex, Gender and Language

One of my personal peeves is the regular substitution of the word "Gender" for "Sex" on forms and in conversation. While the choice "*Sex: Male or Female*" when strictly referring to biological or external morphological characteristics is not always accurate, the choice "*Gender: Male or Female*" is absurd in my opinion. Below I will outline the understanding of these terms that leads me to see absurdity in the way that they are frequently used.

To keep this relatively simple I will limit myself to sex as one can perceive it from a visual inspection of external morphology or physical appearance. This leaves out the confounds of internal morphology, which includes internal sex organs, and genetic sex or what pair of chromosomes one carries in one's cells. These two confounds are most clearly illustrated in cases of CAIS (complete androgen insensitivity syndrome). In this condition, an individual would be classified as female by the external morphological criterion above. This individual would most likely self-identify as female and would be almost universally seen by others as female. However, this individual will not have internal female organs and will have an XY genotype. A third confound is the growing evidence for the possibility of "sexed" brain structures, which can occur independently of the sexing of external morphology during gestation. This sexing of the brain is probably responsible for one's "sense" of sexuality. The sexing of the brain may also be related to sexual orientation independently of one's sex and sense of sexuality. Given the imposed limitation, there are three discernible possibilities:

- 1, Sex:
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Intersexed (ambiguous)

Gender is a more complex term and has far more social, cultural and behavioral components to it than physical sex but probably has an underlying biological component affecting one's sense of sexuality. Gender is often used as if it had a one-to-one correspondence with physical sex, which is clearly not the case. The most common gender terms are *masculine* and *feminine* but these are not all-or-nothing categories and includes several possibilities:

2. Gender:
  - a. Masculine
    1. Hyper
    2. Modal
    3. Hypo
  - b. Feminine
    1. Hyper
    2. Modal
    3. Hypo

While sex can be treated as categorical without grossly distorting reality, especially if three categories are used, gender is clearly dimensional. Gender can significantly vary along a somewhat normal (or bell shaped) distribution curve that has tails anchored by hyper and hypo and a modal center. Clearly, there are numerous potential positions all along this continuum that aren't being given labels. If conventional classification of someone by gender is the goal one might do better to use a numeric scale where 1 is hyper masculine, 4 is neutral and 7 is hyper feminine.

There is one further complication to gender that must be introduced to make this discussion somewhat complete. The concept of *transgender* is important to this discussion as well. Presentation of transgenderism can be either overt, covert or both and along both behavioral (doing) and cognitive dimensions (imagining). Overt behavioral presentations can be either public or private. Some variations of transgenderism would not be observable and would only be known through self-identification. The following outline for the range encompassed by transgenderism is taken from the work of British sociologists Richard Ekins and Dave King.

- c. Transgender
  1. *Oscillating* (Switching)\*
  2. *Migrating* (Shifting)\*\*
  3. *Negating* (Neutralizing)
  4. *Transcending* (Blending)

\* Episodic switching between masculine and feminine.

\*\* Permanent shifting from masculine to feminine or feminine to masculine and may, in some individuals, include changing external morphology as well.

The use of sex and gender as interchangeable terms implies that reality conforms to the following structure:

1. Sex: Male & Female &
2. Gender: Masculine Feminine

A more accurate, if incomplete, structure would resemble the following:

- 1, Sex: Male
2. Gender:
  - a. Masculine
    1. Hyper
    2. Modal
    3. Hypo
  - b. Feminine
    1. Hyper
    2. Modal
    3. Hypo
  - c. Transgender
    1. Oscillating
      - a. Masculine
        1. Hyper
        2. Modal
        3. Hypo
      - b. Feminine
        1. Hyper
        2. Modal
        3. Hypo
    2. Migrating
      - a. Masculine
        1. Hyper
        2. Modal
        3. Hypo
      - b. Feminine
        1. Hyper
        2. Modal
        3. Hypo
    3. Negating
    4. Transcending

1. Sex: Female
2. Gender:
  - a. Masculine
    1. Hyper
    2. Modal
    3. Hypo
  - b. Feminine
    1. Hyper
    2. Modal
    3. Hypo
  - c. Transgender
    1. Oscillating
      - a. Masculine
        1. Hyper
        2. Modal
        3. Hypo
      - b. Feminine
        1. Hyper
        2. Modal
        3. Hypo
    2. Migrating
      - a. Masculine
        1. Hyper
        2. Modal
        3. Hypo
      - b. Feminine
        1. Hyper
        2. Modal
        3. Hypo
    3. Negating
    4. Transcending

1. Sex: Intersexed
2. Gender:
  - a. Masculine
    1. Hyper
    2. Modal
    3. Hypo
  - b. Feminine
    1. Hyper
    2. Modal
    3. Hypo
  - c. Transgender
    1. Oscillating
      - a. Masculine
        1. Hyper
        2. Modal
        3. Hypo
      - b. Feminine
        1. Hyper
        2. Modal
        3. Hypo
    2. Migrating
      - a. Masculine
        1. Hyper
        2. Modal
        3. Hypo
      - b. Feminine
        1. Hyper
        2. Modal
        3. Hypo
    3. Negating
    4. Transcending

The above is not intended to be definitive and is certainly open to alternative arrangement. The purpose is not to delineate but to illustrate. What is being illustrated is that sex and gender and especially gender is a complex topic and one that is grossly over simplified in the ordinary use of language. Add to this an individual's sense of sexuality and sexual orientation and the complexity grows exponentially.

If I had to take a stand on the collection of public information from individuals, I would suggest that in almost all cases a three category, self-identification for sex would be adequate for public purposes. In ordinary verbal or written reference to people by sex, I would favor limiting labels to male or female, by appearance, except in cases where individuals have publicly self-identified otherwise. I would be opposed to asking about gender because the meaning of the term is far too complex to be easily queried and would seldom be relevant information for most public purposes, including conversational use of the term. I would definitely favor disassociating the terms male and female from the concept of gender because not to do so confuses two different concepts: sex and gender.

The equating of gender with sex in common language usage is in fact an example of how the modal majority "democratically" attempts to define a public, social reality and marginalize and at worst imply pathology in anyone not fitting the majority stereotype. As Milton Diamond founder of the Pacific Center for Sex and Society has said, "*Nature loves variety. Unfortunately, society hates it.*" Language is the primary tool for creating socio-cultural reality and how it is used has important implications that should not be taken lightly.

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