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Gender in Time

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"I feel like one of those people who say, 'I go to church on Easter
and Christmas for my parents,' but for my gender."

– Maxwell Cloe

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Introduction

I address two projects in the metaphysics of gender: one which seeks to explain the nature of gender identity, and one which seeks to explain the subjection of women. Philosophers have often taken up these projects in the interest of advancing social justice, for instance, by validating transgender identity or by providing a metaphysical foundation for feminist activism.[1] I believe that we can make progress in both discussions by observing how gender changes or remains static over the course of a person's life. Since transgender people's genders change in highly visible ways, I take trans experiences as the starting point for both analyses. Taken together, these theories reveal the profound value of trans experiences for the broader metaphysics of gender.[2]

Although I will not defend this claim here, there are compelling reasons to think that no single concept can adequately explain all of the data about gender, or about any particular gender.[3] This claim can be construed in a merely linguistic sense, such that words like "woman" have multiple legitimate meanings regardless of whether those meanings pick out metaphysically distinct kinds. It could also be ontologically pluralist, such that "woman" describes several real metaphysical categories.[4] For the purposes of this paper, I assume that at least linguistic

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[1] See Jenkins (2018), Bettcher (2013), and Dembroff (2020) for the former, Haslanger (2012b) for the latter.

[2] For my purposes, a person is transgender (or trans) if they identify as a member of any gender other than the one that normatively aligns with their sex. This includes transgender men, transgender women, and nonbinary (or genderqueer) people, who reject that they are exclusively men or exclusively women. Cisgender (or cis) is the opposite.

[3] I understand the following authors as endorsing some kind of pluralism about gender: Barnes (2020), Dembroff (2018), Haslanger (2012b: 222), Jenkins (2018), Ásta (2018), McKitrick (2015), Bettcher (2013), and Spelman (1988).

[4] Barnes (2020) defends (what I call) linguistic pluralism, while Dembroff (2018) defends ontological pluralism.

pluralism is true, although I take no stance on ontological pluralism. Thus, the option is open to me to endorse several accounts of gender so long as they are consistent.

In Part 1, I propose two ethical guidelines for an account of gender, and I argue that accounts which violate these guidelines will tend to perpetuate epistemic injustice against transgender people. These considerations will guide my ameliorative inquiries into gender identity and gender classes.

In Part 2, I explain the dispositional and norm-relevance accounts of gender identity, and I argue that neither is wholly adequate for trans political projects. In Part 3, I describe gender identity as a mental narrative which consists in a person's memories of the past and expectations for the future. Drawing on Theodore Bach's (2012) description of genders as historical lineages, I argue that we can explain male, female, and nonbinary identity by articulating the relationship between a person's narrative-gender and these historical lineages. I argue that genders are distinct from other lineages, such as races, because they are at least indirectly related to sex. Finally, I modify my account of gender identity to create an account of *third-personal narrative genders,* which are mental narratives that one person has regarding another's gender.

In Part 4, I turn toward Sally Haslanger's influential view that social forces position people as (privileged) men or (subordinated) women, and I introduce concepts which describe (actual or imminent) movement between the positions in her account. I argue that these additions are necessary to render trans people visible in her account.

1. Purpose and Method

1.1 Epistemic Injustice

My intention in taking up these projects is to combat epistemic injustice against transgender people. Epistemic injustice wrongs a person in their capacity as a subject or object of knowledge, and trans people are victims insofar as cis people distort their testimony, trivialize concepts which are necessary to articulate their experiences, and perpetuate factual ignorance about topics which are existentially important for them.[5] These injustices reinforce one another: Since trans people suffer a severe credibility deficit, they have limited power to introduce concepts or factual knowledge into the collective understanding, and the resulting ignorance feeds the perception that trans people are not credible.[6] The result is a conceptual landscape in which trans people are at a severe disadvantage in explaining their experiences. Since the social and legal status of transgender people substantially depends on their identities being intelligible to others, epistemic injustice contributes to a number of severe wrongs against them, including hate speech, employment and housing discrimination, sexual harassment and assault, exclusion from public spaces, and murder.[7] Obviously, these problems demand far more than philosophical answers; transgender equality will require a drastic shift in cultural attitudes alongside institutional and legal reform. Still, I think that analytic metaphysics can help by creating tools to explain trans experiences in the strongest possible way. In creating new concepts of gender identity, I mean to reveal that trans people's identity claims are as reasonable as those of

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[5] These injustices roughly correlate with the concepts of testimonial, hermeneutical, and content focused injustice, as described in Fricker (2007) and Dembroff and Whitcomb (forthcoming). In the rest of this section, I also echo several arguments from Fricker and Jenkins (2017).

[6] Vicious cycles are characteristic of epistemic injustice generally. See Fricker (2007) and Dembroff and Whitcomb (forthcoming).

[7] Sources abound, but see Lang (2020), Trans Equality (2012), and Andrew (2021) for information about hate crimes, discrimination, and the "trans panic defense." Talia Bettcher (2007) persuasively argues that vicious stereotypes contribute to the murder transgender women.

cisgender people, and that trans identity is not vulnerable to some prominent lines of criticism. In creating resources to describe the "social trajectory" of transgender people, I mean to render them more visible within feminist theoretical projects, and thus to reduce the injustices they suffer as *objects* of knowledge.[8]

1.2 Ameliorative Inquiry and Social Metaphysics

An ameliorative inquiry into some concept is the project of developing a new concept which describes the same phenomenon, and which would advance some group's goals if it entered wide use.[9] Sally Haslanger introduced this form of analysis with an ameliorative inquiry into gender and race; others have done ameliorative inquires into social concepts such as sexual orientation[10] and disability.[11] Although ameliorative projects are necessarily prescriptive, they are connected to descriptive projects about the social kinds which our terms might pick out.[12] We are free to urge people away from commonsense definitions of terms, but our new concept should itself describe a real kind, or organize social data in a coherent way.[13] One virtue of ameliorative projects is that they create conceptual space for new modes of political thought, introducing "resources to be used judiciously" by those who seek to advance some political project.[14] By highlighting and organizing the truths which best advance our practical and cognitive needs,[15] new concepts enable lines of discourse which were previously unimaginable.

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[8] I have in mind projects such as Haslanger (2012b) and Manne (2017), which offer sophisticated accounts of the oppression of cisgender women, but which do not yet include trans people in their analyses.

[9] Haslanger (2012b: 224).

[10] See Andler (2020), Dembroff (2016), Diaz-Leon (2017), and Going (2021).

[11] Barnes (2016: cf. 39).

[12] Haslanger (2012b: 224).

[13] I'm not interested in working out the difference between these two possibilities. As far as I'm concerned, a social kind is "real" if it coherently and non-arbitrarily organizes social data. See section 1.3.

[14] Ibid., 242.

[15] Ibid., 226.

I understand Katharine Jenkins (2018) and Jennifer McKitrick (2015) as doing ameliorative projects about *gender identity,* the aspect of gender which is primarily psychological or subjective.[16] Both authors begin by announcing their conceptual and political commitments—broadly, to demonstrate that transgender identity is coherent and to advance transequality. Each of these accounts is useful for describing some cases, but I will argue (in Part 2) that neither is fully adequate. I supplement their views with a new pair of concepts which, if successful, will more fully describe the phenomenon usually picked out by that term.

I am sensitive to the worry that I should not address this problem using metaphysics.[17] It's possible to advocate trans quality without making contentious metaphysical claims, and that approach would be safe from purely metaphysical objections. On the one hand, people who are skeptical of trans-inclusive metaphysics—that trans men are *literally* men, etc.—might be persuaded of ethical claims such as "We ought to outlaw anti-trans housing discrimination." In these cases, metaphysics might seem at best extraneous, and at worst detrimental to the political ends of this project. Conversely, people who agree with trans-inclusive gender designations might object to this project as *metaphysics.* Even if I develop a conceptually sound trans-inclusive metaphysics, antirealist worries would potentially threaten my view and undermine its political value. In light of these worries, it might seem preferable to advance the same political arguments without proposing a metaphysics.

I follow Dembroff (2018) in rejecting the "Real Gender Assumption," according to which people should only be classed as men, women, or nonbinary if they "really are" members of

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[16] Jenkins explicitly employs ameliorative inquiry, but I am not sure whether she understands her project as an inquiry into "gender identity" or (only) into "woman." McKitrick never mentions ameliorative inquiry by name, but I think it amounts to the same thing.

[17] Haslanger (2012a) addresses similar concerns about the relationship between feminism and metaphysics.

those kinds.[18] However, although I reject that ontological categories should determine our practices surrounding gender, I am sensitive to the fact that people frequently use metaphysical language to affirm or discredit transgender identity. Popular discourse is laden with metaphysical claims such as "trans women are women" and "there are only two genders," and these claims carry normative subtext that either affirms or undermines trans identity. As Haslanger notes, "classifying someone as a member of a social group invokes a set of 'appropriate'…norms and expectations," even when the classification seems merely descriptive.[19] Although it is technically possible to write about this complex of normative issues while avoiding claims which sound metaphysical, these things hardly ever come apart in the political context to which I am writing. Thus, at a minimum, I think it's crucial to offer a defense of metaphysical-sounding claims such as "trans men are men."

Need this defense be metaphysically realist? Antimetaphysical or antirealist projects could also yield a defense of claims such "trans men are men," and these accounts might have theoretical advantages over realist projects.[20] Regardless of these possible benefits, I think it is politically expedient to proceed in the language of realist social metaphysics. By introducing novel concepts of "man" and "woman," Sally Haslanger intended to cause a change in the way that people actually understand gender.[21] I similarly hope to provide a resource to facilitate a cultural change which is already underway, and I believe that seemingly realist language is the most useful for that end. For most people, it would be difficult if not impossible to "unthink" gender—to enter a state of failing to categorize others as men, women, undefinable, or other. By comparison, it's relatively easy to re-think gender—to accept new versions of old concepts, and

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[18] Dembroff (2018).
[19] Haslanger 2012b: 241.
[20] Antirealist projects would take questions like "Do men exist?" seriously, and answer "No." Antimetaphysical accounts would reject the question.
[21] Ibid., 242.

to see the same person as a member of a different group. Most people who attempt to do this succeed, and it becomes second nature for people who have many transgender acquaintances. Just as the mereological nihilist cannot help but perceive tables, our (anti-)metaphysical commitments cannot prevent our perceiving gender; thus I think that explicitly antirealist or neopragmatist accounts are less likely to prompt a change in our cultural imagination even if they are true. In that case, we could use realist language to organize data about gender with the understanding that the realist account might be more accurate if it were translated into another framework.

If it turns out that social ontology describes real identities and structures, then I think my project will be defensible on a realist interpretation; if some metaphysical discoveries were to undermine huge swathes of social metaphysics, however, then I think my accounts (and numerous others) would hold their own as attempts to organize social phenomena and render them intelligible. Beyond that, I don't much care whether there are "really genders" or only phenomena arranged gender-wise.

1.3 Guidelines for an Ethical Theory of Gender

Transgender people have a dire existential stake in rendering themselves intelligible to others, and yet social forces have placed them at a severe disadvantage in explaining their experiences. Conceptual projects can alleviate epistemic injustice by providing resources to understand marginalized people's testimony, but they can also aggravate injustice by making this testimony more obscure. In this section, I propose two guidelines for an account of gender. I contend that accounts which satisfy these criteria will tend to alleviate epistemic injustice against transgender people, while accounts which fall short of these criteria will tend to perpetuate it.

My guidelines are partly a response to Katharine Jenkins' desiderata for a theory of gender identity.[22] Jenkins adopts a handful of political and philosophical constraints, such as that gender concepts must "render plausible the idea that gender identity is important and deserves respect," and that they must be non-circular.[23] My approach fundamentally differs from hers in two ways. First, my guidelines only constrain methods of analysis, whereas Jenkins' desiderata constrain the *ends* of inquiry, or the target concepts at which her analysis aims. For the purposes of her own inquiry, Jenkins would discard a concept of "gender identity" that fails to satisfy the desiderata. By contrast, my guidelines are compatible with any account of gender so long as the inquiry does not commit an epistemic injustice at some identifiable point in the line of reasoning. Second, whereas Jenkins allows that other accounts might legitimately aim at different goals than her own, I think that *any* account of gender which falls short of my guidelines is ethically faulty in some way. In saying that they are ethically faulty, I don't mean to ascribe blame to the authors, but rather to propose a course of action: Ethically, we ought to modify or discard these accounts, since they use methods which marginalize or denigrate transgender testimony. (Again, this is different from yielding a trans-exclusionary concept.) Since transgender testimony apparently offers some evidence about the nature of gender, inquiries which fail to properly evaluate it are also less likely to produce apt conclusions.

> G1. An ethical inquiry must observe the principle of charity with respect to transgender people's testimony and arguments which defend trans inclusion.

Philosophers must honor the principle of charity with respect to trans people. Although the demands of charity are broadly similar to the standards for any other philosophical debate, I will flesh out what I see as the requirements for this debate specifically.

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[22] Jenkins (2018: 717-724).
[23] Ibid., 719, 722.

First, if an author chooses to engage with a trans person's testimony, they must construe the person's claims in a fair way. If a transgender woman says that she is a woman, it would be uncharitable to interpret her claim as meaning "I have XX chromosomes," which is obviously false. Charity demands that we interpret her statement as expressing a social or psychological claim, and that we only evaluate it once we have tried to understand it in the strongest way.

Second, when we scrutinize claims relating to trans identity and inclusion, we must avoid committing the "fallacy fallacy"—rejecting the conclusion because the speaker made some philosophical error. It's true that transgender people often attempt to explain gender in ways which are philosophically problematic, for example, by appealing to viciously circular definitions of gender categories.[24] Of course, this is not strong evidence against trans-inclusionary views. Very few people, cis or trans, could give a perspicuous account of their own gender, just as few people are prepared to give perspicuous accounts of mind, language, color, or any number of concepts which people frequently use but are rarely asked to define. The same holds for academic writing on this topic. Philosophers have spent millennia attempting to explain basic concepts such as truth, knowledge, and power, and there is still no consensus on any of these topics. Transgender philosophy has only existed for a few decades, and it has only emerged from obscurity in the past few years;[25] we should fully assume that this literature contains substantial errors, but these errors are not strong evidence against transgender inclusion.

Lastly, we must resist the assumption that cisgender identity avoids whichever philosophical problems are brought to bear against trans identity. Critics of transgender inclusion

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[24] Definitions like, "A man is anyone who identifies as a man." Jenkins (2018: 714-5) makes the same observation.

[25] Laura Guerrero asked me to clarify the cultural scope of this claim. By "transgender philosophy," I mean roughly the Western philosophical literature on transgender identity, or the texts which people working in this field are likely to read. I am not including work which has no relation to this tradition, even if it has other useful insights.

tend to assume that cisgender identity is veridical: Cis men are men and cis women are women.

Given this assumption, any argument which exposes some incoherence in trans identity claims

would also demonstrate that trans identities are uniquely incoherent and comparatively unworthy

of respect. If we resist this assumption by subjecting cisgender identity to the same degree of

scrutiny, we see that there are three possible outcomes: 1. Transgender and cisgender identity are

both coherent. 2. Neither kind of identity is coherent.[26] 3. Cisgender identity is coherent, but

trans identity is incoherent.[27] Of these three outcomes, only the third would justify the view that

trans people's identities are less worthy of respect than those of cis people.[28] Epistemic justice

requires that we subject cis and trans identity to equal scrutiny to diminish the probability that we

will perceive an asymmetry where there is none.

> G2. An ethical inquiry must adequately represent facts which are directly relevant
> to the subject, along with any context which is necessary to prevent the
> information from being misleading.

Most people are deeply misinformed about issues which are of great political concern to

transgender people, and we must not compound this ignorance by omitting or misrepresenting

crucial data. Philosophers who choose to write about gender must develop a substantial

knowledge about the phenomena which are relevant to their inquiry. Depending on the topic, this

might include information about the effects of medical transition, data about anti-trans

discrimination, or basic knowledge about transgender people's daily lives. Beyond avoiding

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[26] Heather Logue (forthcoming) advances a view like this.

[27] Technically, there are at least two other possibilities. It could be that *only* trans identity is coherent, and that cis identity is incoherent; I doubt that anyone takes this position. It's also possible that there are degrees of coherence, such that one kind of identity is somewhat more confused than the other. A side-by-side comparison of cis and trans identity, of the sort I am prescribing, would also allow us to evaluate this possibility.

[28] This disparity would not necessarily justify a different in treatmence between trans and cis people, but it is probably necessary for such justification; if trans and cis identities are equally coherent or veridical, then I doubt there could be any other basis for, e.g., treating cis men preferentially over trans men.

inaccuracies, an epistemically just account must properly contextualize information when the failure to do so would be misleading. In an article about medical transition, it's pertinent that people who pursue hormone replacement therapy are extremely likely to have positive medical outcomes. It's also reasonable to mention the small minority of people who have poor outcomes, and to cite testimony from "de-transitioners," who halt or reverse medical transition. If, however, an author cites a de-transitioner while excluding or downplaying the evidence about positive outcomes of transition, their work is likely to convey the misleading implication that transition frequently, or even typically produces bad outcomes. In this example, the author distorts important factual information without saying anything that is specifically untrue.[29]

I cheerfully announce my suspicion that epistemically just lines of inquiry will yield trans-friendly concepts of gender, while trans-exclusionary accounts probably result from lines of inquiry that commit an injustice. However, this is merely a suspicion, and others could prove me wrong by making anti-trans arguments which are both charitable and well informed. I think that this approach provides a fair moral standard by which we can judge trans-exclusionary metaphysical arguments, as it avoids the extremes of assuming that anti-trans arguments are above moral scrutiny (why would they be?) or condemning them dogmatically. These guidelines are also useful for articulating problems in some pro-trans views which perpetuate injustice, for example, because they center some transgender people while marginalizing others.

In the next section, I evaluate two theories of gender identity. I argue that the first, McKitrick's dispositional account, unjustly marginalizes the testimony of some queer and

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[29] It would also be wrong to hastily discredit the testimony of de-transitioners. We should tend to assume that they are describing their experiences competently, and that their testimony yields insights about transition and gender identity. Although good transition outcomes vastly outnumber bad ones, neither experience is authoritative or negates the other.

trans people. Jenkins' norm-relevance account does not violate G1 or G2, but it does not satisfy some important needs for a concept of gender identity.

2. Two Accounts of Gender Identity

2.1 The Dispositional Account

On Jennifer McKitrick's account, a gender is "a complex behavioral disposition, or cluster of dispositions" to perform actions which the "relevant social group" considers to be characteristic of that gender.[30] Broadly speaking, someone is a man if they are disposed to behave in ways that their community considers masculine, and likewise for women and feminine behavior.[31] Gender is a matter of degree, so that someone is more of a woman/man in proportion to the strength and number of their dispositions.

McKitrick's account is meant to make sense of gender dysphoria, a condition of distress relating to dissatisfaction with one's assigned gender, gender expression, or sex features.[32] In a paradigmatic case of gender dysphoria, a transgender person might experience prolonged distress about their sex features and their gender expression, and they would alleviate this distress by pursuing medical transition and changing their gender expression (a trans man adopting masculine expression, etc.). Most transgender people experience dysphoria relating to at least some of these features, and dysphoria is usually a significant factor in a person's decision to

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[30] McKitrick (2015: 9).

[31] Curiously, McKitrick also lists "trans" and "queer" as genders which this model could describe, but she does not explain what it would mean for someone to have a queer or a trans disposition. I think this is problematic, since the very same dispositions—to date men, perhaps, or to say "I am a woman"—will be queer for some people and not others. McKitrick's theory is stronger if we ignore this.

[32] It is difficult to give a precise definition of gender dysphoria since it manifests in quite different ways for different people. Defining it poorly also creates a risk of marginalizing trans people who do not fit the definition. See Dembroff (2019a) for analysis of this concept.

transition. McKitrick argues that other accounts cannot adequately explain gender dysphoria and the desire to transition, and she proposes her theory to fill this conceptual lacuna.[33] Although I am grateful to McKitrick for identifying and responding to this problem, I think that her approach has some serious shortcomings: It miscategorizes gender non-conforming people, fails to explain nonbinary identities, and renders incoherent some identities which are probably coherent.

McKitrick's model works well for transgender people whose desires align with what their cultures see as masculine or feminine. Abby Stein was raised as a boy in Brooklyn's Hasidic community, one of the most gender-divided societies in the modern world. From a young age she held strong dispositions toward feminine behavior, even though she had little power to act on them.[34] She believed that other people were mistaken to see her as a boy, and she frequently prayed that God would transform her body as she slept.[35] When Stein says that she has always been a girl, she is communicating, in part, that she has always had this powerful disposition toward feminine action. Many transgender people fit this mold, and the dispositional account provides a helpful resource for explaining the relationship between their psychological identities and their cultures.

Unfortunately, McKitrick's theory is poorly equipped to describe people with gender non-conforming dispositions. "Gender non-conforming" (hereafter GNC) describes people whose expression is at odds with social expectations for their gender. The dispositional account decidedly miscategorizes GNC people whose dispositions are very counternormative, or else it properly categorizes them only in a trivial way. Take the example of "he/him lesbians," typically butch women who ask others to describe them with "he" pronouns in at least some contexts.

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[33] McKitrick (2015: 2577-8).
[34] Stein (2019).
[35] Ibid.

He/him lesbians reject some of the most basic feminine dispositions, and yet (typically) maintain that they are women. It seems very likely that McKitrick's account would classify some of these people as men. I think the only way to escape this implication would be to validate these women's gender identity in a trivial way, such as by saying that they are women because they have the disposition to say things like, "I'm a woman."[36] McKitrick's view rules out the possibility that very masculine women could be *primarily* women rather than men, even though this is how they generally see themselves.

Though she calls it a "controversial" implication, McKitrick acknowledges that her theory implies that some people are wrong about their own genders.[37] People are often wrong about their own dispositions; someone might think that she has the disposition to finish her book given enough time, only to finally take a sabbatical and realize she was wrong.[38] In this case, the person who holds the belief proves to be mistaken about herself—perhaps she isn't as diligent as she hoped. GNC people are not generally like this. A he/him lesbian who believes he is a woman might fully understand his own dispositions and how they relate to gender norms (i.e., he knows that he is transgressing them). Even in this case, McKitrick's view implies that he is wrong to identify as a woman. Which part is he wrong about? He's not wrong about his dispositions, or about how society sees him. He apparently believes that he has masculine dispositions *and* that he is a woman, and charity demands that we only evaluate these claims once we have understood them. Since McKitrick's account precludes the possibility that this person will have plausible reasons for identifying as he does, it violates my guideline G1.

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[36] McKitrick cites this as an example of a feminine disposition, but I consider this problematic for reasons which will soon be clear. Ibid.

[37] In Appendix A, I argue that it's actually fine for an account to imply that some people are wrong about their genders, and that this is a matter of common sense in trans communities.

[38] Ibid.

McKitrick's theory is also incapable of describing many nonbinary people. In dominant ideology, there are no behaviors associated with nonbinary gender because nonbinary genders are not thought to exist. Even within resistant (pro-trans) contexts, very few behaviors are robustly marked as nonbinary or genderqueer—certainly much fewer than are marked as masculine or feminine. People in resistant contexts acknowledge that nonbinary gender expression is extremely varied, such that a person can be nonbinary without possessing dispositions toward any particular behavior. Since nonbinary identity, by its nature, resists association with norms, I am doubtful that a dispositional account could satisfyingly explain it.

McKitrick makes one argument which, if successful, would resolve every problem I've raised so far, but I have ignored it because I think it contradicts other aspects of her theory. She says that, in spaces where gender identity is considered to be sufficient evidence of a person's gender, someone's disposition to say things like "I am a man" could be sufficient to make them a member of that kind.[39] To explain the identities of GNC and nonbinary people, we would only have to appeal to subcultural norms which validate gender identity. Unfortunately, this is problematic. The appeal of McKitrick's theory is that when it works, it works regardless of what anyone has to say about it: People who reject that trans women are women nevertheless assent to the classification of Stein's dispositions as feminine, and this is sufficient for her to be a woman. As McKitrick generally describes it, her view is beholden to social beliefs about the *gendered valence of actions,* but not about *gender classification.* By adding that self-identification is sufficient if and only if some group considers it to be sufficient, McKitrick undermines the successful part of her theory. In dominant contexts, someone's biology is sufficient to categorize them as a man or a woman, regardless of whether the person's medical history is known. Thus, Abby Stein would be a man in contexts where biology is considered definitive, and a woman in

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[39] Ibid.

contexts where self-identification is considered definitive. McKitrick's theory would collapse into one which considers a "woman" to be whatever a community says it is.[40]

I think that all of the problems I've identified result from a single methodological issue, which is that McKitrick's analysis begins with relatively normative experiences—those of (cis and trans) people whose desires are typical for the genders with which they identify. As a result, by the time we apply her theory to less normative experiences, it produces the result that those experiences are incoherent in the absence of serious engagement with them. Although someone could try to create a version of the dispositional account which allows for fair evaluation of nonbinary and GNC identities, I am personally skeptical that any version of the account could avoid these problems. To create a unifying account of gender identity, we need an account which is sufficiently flexible to describe a broad range of identities and experiences. I believe that my own account will achieve this.

2.2 The Norm-Relevance Account

Katharine Jenkins proposes a view according to which a person's gender identity is an "internal map" which guides them through the "social or material realities" which are characteristic of men, women, neither, or both. I will argue that Jenkins' model is a good candidate for a concept of gender, but that we should not describe this concept as "gender identity." Like McKitrick's theory, it is not equipped to make sense of some nonbinary genders, and it also miscategorizes some trans men and women. I believe that we should accept the insights of Jenkins' account while reserving the term "gender identity" for other concepts.

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[40] I don't think this is, strictly speaking, a bad view; it's rather similar to Bettcher (2013), which I think is on the right track. Still, it's very incomplete, and it doesn't accomplish what McKitrick seeks to accomplish.

Internal maps describe the norms which people take to be relevant to themselves.[41] A person's map does not necessarily align with their actions, values, or desires, but rather reflects their sense that their own behavior is "norm-compliant or norm-violating" relative to the social spaces which they usually inhabit.[42] Jenkins gives the example of a woman who chooses not to remove body hair from her legs, although doing so is non-normative in her society.[43] Even if she rejects this norm as illegitimate, she is likely to experience her own behavior as transgressive if she violates it. Thus, the norm is a part of her internal map. Gender maps also include the ways that we engage with features of the world, such as by using some restrooms and not others.

This concept is useful because it gives some sense of what it means to *live within* a gender class.[44] Jenkins' concept of gender maps, which is itself based on Haslanger's theory of racial identity,[45] allows us to explain the relationship between a person's place within a social hierarchy and the tools available to them to navigate it. My (subordinated or privileged) social position causes me to have experiences which teach me how to interact with the world; they cause me to form relationships with people who are similarly subordinated or privileged, and to take cues from those people about how I ought to behave. Jenkins' model lays the foundation for further investigation into the relationship between social structures and individual agency.

The concept of gender maps is also useful for explaining some trans people's experiences. Transgender people are often disadvantaged precisely because their maps are non-normative, whether because their desires fall out of sync with the norms that already apply to them, or because they lack skills or experiences which are beneficial in their assumed role. For example, a transgender woman might seek advice about how to navigate the world safely when

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[41] Jenkins (2018).
[42] Ibid., 728-9.
[43] Ibid., 731.
[44] That is, Haslangerian social positions. See Part 5.
[45] Haslanger (2012c).

others perceive her as a woman, since people raised as men are less likely to acquire these skills in the ordinary course of things. Many trans people work hard to develop skills which help them to "pass" as cisgender, or at least to signal their gender identity to other people. If a transgender person learns new ways of speaking, dressing, applying makeup, talking to women, talking to men, and even walking, then we can describe this as a radical extension or restructuring of their internal map. I think that it would also be fruitful to extend this concept to distinctly gay and trans experiences, since adopting these identities often causes a restructuring of the internal map in ways which are not reducible to "male" and "female." When genderqueer activist Jacob Tobia began to wear lipstick and high heels in public, they learned how to navigate the social reality of someone who is perceived as a man in drag, which is not exactly a male or a female experience.[46] Jenkins' extension of Haslanger's theory points toward the exciting possibility of an account which could unify a wide range of social experiences.

Despite the many virtues of Jenkins' account, I think we should resist describing a person's internal map as their gender *identity*. Jenkins is appropriately vague about the degree to which a person with a male or female identity must have a map which is "formed to guide them" through the social reality which is characteristic of women or men. If we set the standard too high, then we risk marginalizing people whose maps insufficiently reflect their sense of self. If the standard is too low, however, then we will wrongly describe people as having gender identities which they reject. On the most permissive formulation of this theory, it would be sufficient for a persomomomomon's map to be characteristic of a particular gender *in any way*.[47] Even among cis people, it is fairly common to repeatedly navigate at least some situations which are more characteristic of the other gender. Consider a woman who survives a sexist corporate

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[46] Tobia (2020).
[47] This view does not appear in Jenkins' revised account; I engage with it here only to explain a criticism of the updated theory. Jenkins (2016).

environment by behaving like her male coworkers, a single father who struggles to participate in public life because he has to watch his children, or a gay man who takes significant precautions on dates because his partners pose a physical danger to him. Each of these people engages with the world in ways that are characteristic of some other gender.[48] For this reason, I think that the most permissive formulation of Jenkins' account would categorize many cisgender women as men, and vice versa.

This problem is more pronounced for trans people, since practically all binary trans people have maps which are partly characteristic of both men and women. Abby Stein identified as a girl from a very young age, and yet she became highly competent in observing her community's expectations for young men—for example, by capably studying the Tanakh. After transitioning, she retained much of the cultural knowledge and skills which allowed her to perform a man's role in her former community. I think the permissive version of Jenkins' theory implies not only that Stein had a male identity before she left the Hasidic community, but also that she has one even now, in addition to her female identity. Since Stein's map is "formed to guide her" through the social realities of both men and women, the permissive version of Jenkins' theory would classify her as genderfluid.[49] If I am right about this, then the permissive

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[48] In many cases, the very same social realities will create these problems. To complete the above examples, these realities might include a corporate culture which rewards aggression, practices which exclude children and their caretakers from public spaces, and social attitudes which contribute to sexual assault and intimate partner violence.

[49] On Jenkins' account, to be genderfluid is to have a map which is "at times formed so as to guide someone classed as a woman through the social or material realities that are, in that context, characteristic of women as a class, and at other times formed to guide someone classed as a man [through the equivalent realities]." I am not sure whether the genderfluid person *also* has male and female identities, or if genderfluid identity displaces these, but neither reading resolves the problem. Either Abby Stein *does* have a male identity, or she *doesn't* have a female identity; neither interpretation would explain why it's wrong to misgender her. Jenkins (2018), 735-6.

version of Jenkins' account cannot explain why it is inappropriate to describe Stein as a man, since she would in fact have a male identity.

A less permissive formulation of Jenkins' theory could resolve the problem of over-inclusion by setting some other standard for counting people as men or women. However, I think there are reasons to worry about this approach as well. First, there may not be a principled way to determine how many male/female norms one would have to take up to have a male or a female identity. Even if we do set a standard to determine this, I am not sure this strategy could succeed. Many binary transgender people experience mostly norms that align with their (common language) gender identities, but some have probably internalized a greater proportion of norms that align with their assigned sex. I think it's unlikely that any standard would include precisely the right people as having either kind of identity.

As Jenkins notes, there is no single folk concept of gender identity, and the folk concepts which exist are philosophically problematic.[50] Although it would be a mistake to hew too closely to these concepts, I think that Jenkins' account departs from them more than is necessary or desirable. Ideally, our concept of gender identity should do the same work that transgender people think they are doing when they claim to "identify as" some gender: What truth is this person communicating, and does our concept get at the same idea? Broadly, transgender people tend to understand gender identity as a subjective sense of "who one really is" with respect to gender. If I spent a year taking detailed notes about the norms which I experienced as relevant or irrelevant, the places where I felt safe or endangered, the actions for which I was rewarded or punished, etc., then I would have a sophisticated description of my social experience, but not of who I *am* with respect to gender. I believe that narrative-gender, the concept of gender identity which I propose in the next section, successfully performs this function: A complete description

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[50] Jenkins (2018).

of someone's narrative-gender would thoroughly explain their (common language) gender identity. Since my theory rejects that any particular features are characteristic of men, etc., it also avoids the problem of miscategorization.

Is it possible to resolve the problems I've identified by adopting a pluralist view of gender identity? I've already said that gender maps deeply shape our self-concepts; perhaps a complete theory of gender identity would understand gender maps and narrative-gender as overlapping, compatible concepts. Although the norms which a person internalizes will inevitably shape their narrative-genders (and vice versa), I think there are good reasons to reserve the term "gender identity" for concepts which describe a subjective sense of self.[51] In common language, gender identity is the only concept which distinguishes a person's sense-of-self from their classification within dominant ideology. This function is vital for explaining, among other things, how trans people want others to treat them and why many feel that their dominant classification is "inauthentic." If our goal is to preserve this useful function of the term, then I think it would be counterproductive to apply the term to an account which does not describe the "felt sense" of gender, even if the account is only one among several.

Jenkins adopts this view partly because she doubts other prospects for defining "gender identity." If it were impossible to posit a coherent definition that aligns closely with folk concepts of gender identity, then I might agree that it is better to apply the term to gender maps than to simply abandon the project. However, if my argument in the next section is persuasive, then we will have a theory of gender identity which accounts for these same worries and which preserves the benefits of aligning with folk concepts.

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[51] I don't claim that narrative-gender is the *only* such concept. In particular, I think there is room for concepts such as "subconscious sex" and "subconscious gender," which are a deeply felt sense about how one's anatomy, dress, etc. "ought to be." I think these concepts might describe some features not captured by narrative-gender. I take "subconscious sex" from Serano (2007).

3. Gender Identity as Narrative

In this section, I argue that gender identity is a mental narrative which is constituted by a person's perception of their gender in the past and future. Gender identity is distinct from *genders,* which I describe as historical lineages. Rather than listing necessary or sufficient criteria for membership in gender kinds, I argue that people take up (or are placed into) these lineages, and that statements like "I identify as male" are coherent when they describe a person's relationship to these lineages.

3.1 Sensed-Gender and Narrative-Gender

Before giving the narrative account, I will explain *sensed-gender,* which is more basic:

> S has a sensed-gender at time t if historical concepts of "man" or "woman" are integral to their sense of self at that time.[52]

Another way to formulate this claim:

> S has a sensed-gender if any of a following are true:
> 1. Some concept of "woman" is integral to S's identity
> 2. Some concept of "man" is integral to S's identity
> 3. S rejects identification as a man or a woman in such a way that the rejection, itself, is an integral part of S's identity
> 4. S is unsure about how they ought to identify with respect to terms such as "man" and "woman," but nevertheless experiences this as important information about who they are[53]

This definition includes people who resist dominant gender norms, but whose identities nevertheless interact with those norms. No matter how completely a genderqueer person rejects association with concepts of "man" and "woman," it is very likely that the rejection of these

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[52] Out of the available gender concepts, how do we know which ones are "concepts of 'man'" or "concepts of 'woman'"? Building on my arguments in 3.3, a gender concept is a concept of "man" if its members are broadly associated with the male reproductive role.

[53] I have listed these criteria as though they are exhaustive, since I think they probably are. If I have omitted some experiences which apparently satisfy the previous, vague definition, then we should amend the longer definition to include additional sufficient criteria.

identities is still integral to their sense of self.[54] By contrast, this definition excludes people, such as babies, who simply lack concepts of "man" and "woman." There are other ways that we can give metaphysical sense to the claim that a baby is a boy or a girl, but it's clear that babies do not experience themselves in this way, and thus do not have sensed-genders. In specifying that gender is "integral," I mean to exclude people who are aware of gender concepts, but who do not perceive these concepts as being deeply relevant to their sense of self. Fiction supplies examples of nonhumans who understand gender norms, but who do not identify with them.[55] We can also imagine a child who perceives other people as men and women, but who does not yet understand themself in these terms. On my account, the features which realize sensed-gender are also the minimal requirements for having a gender identity.

The concept of sensed-gender is also useful for explaining the gender classification of people with certain cognitive disabilities. Sally Haslanger expresses a worry that identity-based definitions of "woman" exclude cognitively disabled women who lack a gender identity.[56] When employed within a pluralist framework, the concept of sensed-gender can explain precisely which kind of gender these women lack, while also allowing that they are still "women" in other significant ways (for example, because they are socially positioned as subordinate, as per Haslanger's model).

Whereas sensed-gender refers to a person's perception of their gender at a particular time, *narrative-gender* describes the influence which sensed-gender has on a person's perception of their history or future.

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[54] In their analysis of the kind *genderqueer,* Robin Dembroff identifies political resistance as the feature which distinguishes "genderqueer" as a social kind. Although it's technically possible that some genderqueer people lack sensed-gender, I think it's unlikely. Dembroff (2020).
[55] See Janet from *The Good Place,* discussed below.
[56] Cited in Barnes (2020).

> S has a narrative-gender if S has a sensed-gender, and either of the
> following are true:
> 1. S's sensed-gender persistently shapes their interpretation of
>   events in their personal history (S has a *gender past*)
> 2. S's sensed-gender persistently shapes their perception of how
>   they will behave or what they will value in the future (S has a
>   *gender future*)

To break this down further:

> S has a gender past if they have a sensed-gender, and either of the
> following is persistently true:
> 1. S's sensed-gender shapes their perception that certain past
>   events are relevant to their current gender identity
> 2. S perceives that particular past events inform, align with, or
>   created their current gender identity

> S has a gender future if they have a sensed-gender, and either of
> the following is persistently true:
> 1. S makes conscious or unconscious predictions about S's
>   sensed-gender at future times (for example, imagining themself
>   as an older woman/man)
> 2. S perceives that their gender is unstable, and might change in
>   unpredictable ways

"Personal history" describes the totality of past events (real or imagined) which a person experiences as relevant to their identity. This includes not only someone's own remembered experiences, but also secondhand information about their early life, their ancestors, and even historical events with which they bear no direct relation. Consider an American patriot who feels connected to the Revolutionary War, or a contemporary philosopher who strongly identifies with Plato. If the philosopher's beliefs about Plato shape her sense of self (e.g., by informing her identity as a Platonist), then these beliefs constitute a part of her personal history.

There are a few ways that S's sensed-gender can "shape their interpretation of events in their personal history." S's sensed-gender might cause them to understand themself in relation to certain historical figures and events. If S is a woman, then they might experience kinship with historical feminists; if S is queer, then they might experience kinship with the victims of the

AIDS crisis, even if they're too young to remember it. S's sensed-gender can also inform their interpretation of events in their own life, such as their being understood as female when they were a child. If S is trans, then they probably experience some past events as being congruent or incongruent with their current sensed-gender.

In specifying that these perceptions are "persistent," I mean to escape objections based on unlikely fringe cases. On the fantasy sitcom *The Good Place,* Janet is a robot-like ethereal entity who intelligently navigates female social norms (for example, by wearing feminine clothes), but who repeatedly insists that she is not a woman. Janet is never offended, like a human who has been misgendered, but is instead totally disinterested in her gender classification; Janet lacks sensed-gender. Still, if she wanted to, Janet could mentally "try on" a male or a female identity, imagining what her life would be like if she were a man or a woman. If this exercise evolves into an enduring part of Janet's thought, then she might acquire both a sensed-gender and a narrative-gender, but if it passes away, then the thought exercise will prove idiosyncratic, and she will not be gendered in either sense. For a mundane example, we can imagine a young child who has no sense that gender roles will shape the course of their life, but who sees a woman in a wedding dress and thinks, "Is that going to be *me?*" Afterward, the thought passes, and wedding dresses do not affect the child's sense of self. The child lacks a narrative-gender.[57]

Narrative-gender is highly individualistic and unique to individuals, so it cannot independently tell us what it means for someone to belong to a gender category. In the next section, I propose a way to coherently describe people as having male, female, and nonbinary identities without listing necessary or sufficient requirements for membership in gender kinds.

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[57] I am careful to avoid some psychological claims which would require empirical research. I find it useful to distinguish sensed-gender from narrative-gender, but I do not know whether children actually acquire one before the other.

3.2 Genders as Historical Lineages

Working from a view about the metaphysics of biological species, Theodore Bach (2012) argues that the kinds "man" and "woman" are historical lineages. To be a woman, on this view, is to be the product of a historical process which causes one to "participate in a lineage of…women."[58] Since male and female social roles date as far back as prehistory, this view also justifies our use of the terms "man" and "woman" to describe members of every historical culture. For Bach, the essence of gender is historical rather than biological or social: Bach describes a bizarre accident of nature in which a lump of swamp matter transforms into something which perfectly resembles a human woman. He rejects that this creature would be a "woman," since they would not have been created through the historical process which creates women.

As written, Bach's view implies that most trans people do not belong to the kinds with which they identify: He thinks that men and women have necessarily been socialized as such from birth, and in fact few or no trans people have this experience.[59] However, I think we can easily modify this view to include trans people. Although trans women are not "made women" through the very same processes which cause cisgender women to be women, it's clear that their gender-making features are also substantially created by culture. Like cis women, transgender women learn about womanhood from friends, relatives, pop culture, religion, and countless other channels. They understand female norms as being relevant to themselves, and they make choices about whether to take up or to consciously resist those norms.[60] Unlike the swamp woman, whose features are only coincidentally similar to those of historically situated "women,"

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[58] Bach (2012: 246).
[59] Ibid., 260.
[60] See again Jenkins (2018).

transgender women take up roles that actually exist within their societies, and which have

included transgender women for some time. By doing this, they enter into the same historical

lineage as cis women do, although at a later stage in their lives.[61]

Although I reject that there is a specific set of criteria for someone to have a male,

female, or nonbinary identity, I think that we can make sense of claims like these by describing

the relationship between a particular person's narrative-gender and historical gender concepts. To

say "I am a woman" could mean something like, "I understand myself as a member of this

historical lineage," which is no more circular than a statement like, "I am an American." Of

course we shouldn't expect a definition of "American" to avoid reference to the United States;

since the United States is a particular historical entity, it's impossible to define it any more

clearly than by saying when and where it exists and describing it in other particular ways. Once

we establish the existence of the United States, then we can explain how particular people relate

to it—as citizens, expatriates, green card holders, etc. I think we should take a similar view

toward historical genders. Rather than attempting to give conceptually precise definitions of

"man" and "woman," which I think is unlikely to succeed,[62] we can observe gendered

phenomena throughout history and describe how they fall into patterns. The most historically

pervasive patterns are "man" and "woman," but there are other lineages as well, such as

"genderfluid," "hijra," and "two-spirit." If we have enough information to describe someone's

narrative-gender, then we can non-circularly explain their relationship to any of these kinds. I

think this strategy also works for people who don't have access to any gender concepts that align

with their sense of self. The Public Universal Friend was an 18th century Quaker evangelist who

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[61] Bettcher (2009) and Dembroff and Saint-Croix (2019) describe processes by which people can volitionally take up social identities.

[62] Haslanger (2012b) explains the difficulty of defining "woman" in a way that includes precisely all prima facie women. Feminist philosophers recognized this as a problem even before many authors included trans women in their analyses.

claimed to be neither a man nor a woman.[63] Although the Public Universal Friend did not have access to a concept such as "genderqueer," we can informatively describe their narrative-gender by explaining their resistance to inclusion in either available lineage.

The cogency of gender attributions does not depend on a set of rigid criteria by which we could designate any particular narrative-gender to be male, female, or nonbinary. Here I follow Robin Dembroff in taking some queer communities to be a model for society.[64] In many queer social groups, people use gender terms loosely and impressionistically, even as they use those terms to communicate something substantive and specific about their identities. A friend once explained their gender to me by typing it out as "nonbinary boy," boy in black, nonbinary barely standing out against the white background. Comedian Eddie Izzard once described herself as "a complete boy plus half girl."[65] Of course, these claims are not metaphysically rigorous. If I were to unpack Izzard's claim in metaphysical terms, it would be erroneous to start with an analysis of "girl" and "boy" as categories, since Izzard's claim does not seem to be literal. At the same time, it would be unreasonable to reject Izzard's description of her identity only because her phrasing was metaphysically imprecise, or because we don't yet understand the metaphysics underlying her identity. In many queer networks, people deftly describe their subjective experience more accurately than is possible with established language and norms, and they often do this without positing the existence of precise identity categories. If a concept such as narrative-gender became widely accepted, then my hope is that this would become a more common way of describing and understanding gender.

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[63] Bronski (2011).
[64] This is not an appeal to authority, as though queer people *necessarily* have better ideas about how to run a society; it just happens that they often have good ideas. Dembroff (2018).
[65] "Eddie" (2004).

This account also resolves a problem in explaining cisgender identity. Most cis people believe that they have always been "the same gender," even when they were very young. This is initially problematic since, in the vast majority of cases, an adult's perception that they are a man or a woman includes psychological or social information which cannot be true of babies.[66] Ordinary speakers frequently switch between different conceptions of "man" and "woman" without realizing it, and this messy application might threaten the coherence of identity claims such as "I was born a girl," where this implies continuity with one's current gender. On the narrative account, this claim is coherent because it expresses the speaker's perception that her birth sex aligns with her current identity. As with trans people, an adequate explanation of a cis person's identity does not depend on their placement within gender kinds.

3.3 Distinguishing Genders from Other Lineages

Gender is not the only form of group membership which can be well described as a lineage. I suspect that it would be possible to give analogous accounts of races, religions, secret societies, and the students who attend a particular university: To be Anglican is to take up a role in the Anglican lineage, for example. In this section, I explain why lineages like "woman" and "nonbinary" are genders while identities like "Fordham students" are not.

A gender is a group-level social identity which meets either of the following criteria:

1. People generally associate the identity with some reproductive role, regardless of whether they expect individual group members to fulfill that role
2. For members of some group, the identity occupies the same "node" as an identity of the first kind

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[66] A proponent of the biological view would say that this is true because a person's sex remains stable throughout their life, and sex determines gender. I will not attempt to rebut biological realism here, but as you would expect, I think there are good reasons to reject this view.

In saying that the identity is group-level, I mean that it is the kind of identity which is open to being shared with others. An identity can be group-level even if no one else actually shares it. Consider the following case:

> A teenager in a provincial community decides to stop eating meat on ethical grounds. They have never learned a term like "vegetarian," and they have never heard of another person who abstains from eating meat; nevertheless, this abstention becomes an important part of their self-image. Years later, they move to a city to start college. At freshman orientation, they learn that many other students also abstain from eating meat, and that these students identify as vegetarians. The teenager immediately identifies as a member of this group, and can truthfully say that "I've been a vegetarian since I was fifteen."

Although this person did not previously believe that they belonged to a group of "vegetarians," their unnamed vegetarian identity turns out to be group-level because it allows them to identify as a member of a group, given that the group exists. Abby Stein describes a similar experience regarding her identity as a transgender woman: She perceived herself as a woman who had been wrongly placed in a male body, but she had never heard of the concept "transgender."[67] When she learned this concept, she quickly came to identify with other trans people. Since her unnamed transgender identity fit well with the existing group, the identity was revealed to be group-level.

Some identities fall short of the group level because people do not experience them as group-defining features. Consider the differences between "identifying as shy" and "identifying as an introvert." "Shy" is not usually a group-level identity; I might recognize that I and some other person are both shy, but this will not usually cause me to perceive that I belong to some *group* that includes both of us, and which excludes bold people. By contrast, a group mentality is built into the identity "introvert." If I identify as an introvert, then I place myself in a group with

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[67] Stein (2019).

other introverts, and I perceive extroverts as belonging to a markedly different group. Racial

identities also include a group mentality: To identify as white is to see oneself as part of a group

that includes other white people, and which excludes people who are not white. In calling some

lineage a "gender," I mean that people within that lineage form a group which demands to be

thought of as a group, and not as a loose property of individuals. (This group might, however, be

ill-defined.)

In saying that people "generally associate" the group with a reproductive feature, I mean

that people hold this perception of the group in the abstract. It is possible to give an account of a

group without describing its membership conditions, as in the case of explaining Christianity

without giving an account of "being a Christian."[68] In saying that people broadly associate men

with the "male" reproductive role, I do not mean that people think *each man* performs or is able

to perform that role. "Men" uncontroversially includes some people who are unable to

reproduce, or who will choose not to reproduce. Many men and boys are not able to perform this

sexual role, but all men and boys belong to a lineage which people generally associate with that

role. Likewise for transgender men, since (as of this writing!) it is impossible for a trans man to

perform the same reproductive role.

By an identity "node," I mean a level identity at which a person might be identified as

one among a range of options.[69] If a node is mandatory within some context, then people in that

context will normatively expect everyone to have some identity which fills that role. We expect

everyone to belong to some race and some gender, even if their explanation of this identity is

complicated or vague; we cannot opt out of these identities without giving some account for

them. By contrast, I can easily opt out of identities which are genuinely optional in my social

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[68] Dembroff (2020: 12).

[69] Compare this to externalist social nodes, which are positions a person can hold within a social structure. See Haslanger (2012b) and Ásta (2018).

context. In some fan communities, there's a node of "being Team Edward or Team Jacob," where Edward and Jacob are romantic rivals in the *Twilight* franchise. People who identify as members of Team Edward strongly believe that Bella, the protagonist, should date Edward rather than Jacob. If I wanted to, I could read the *Twilight* series, develop a strong opinion about Bella's love life, adopt this opinion as part of my identity, and then join fan communities where people ask me "Are you Team Edward or Team Jacob?" with confidence that I will be able to answer that question. (At least, I could have done this in 2005.) Since I in fact have no opinion about this love triangle, I do not have an "Edward or Jacob" node.[70]

"Man" and "woman" obviously satisfy the first condition for being genders, since they are group-level identities which people associate with distinctive roles in reproduction. They also occupy a particular identity node. In my cultural context (and I suspect every other), the gender node is non-optional; in order to make myself intelligible to others, I must be able to give some account of my gender. In contexts where nonbinary concepts are either absent or sufficiently marginalized, "man" and "woman" are the only answers which others will generally accept.[71] In cultures with established "third genders," such as the hijra in some South Asian cultures, the third gender may exist alongside the binary genders in this way: A person is a man, a woman, *or* a hijra, and any of these three will satisfy an inquiry into that person's gender. Since "man" and "woman" satisfy the reproductive condition, and "hijra" fills the same node as they do, hijra is a gender. Likewise, in modern anglophone contexts, nonbinary genders fill the same node as "man" and "woman."

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[70] Another good example is the Hindu caste system. In some cultures, this node is mandatory, as one cannot fail to belong to a caste; in my culture, the node is inaccessible, and I could not adopt a caste-identity if I wanted to.

[71] The comment about sexed norms is similar to Ásta's (2018) account of gender.

By default, I have no perception of whether other people belong to Team Edward or Team Jacob; it doesn't enter my thoughts, so I effortlessly fail to perceive them as either. Yet we can't, in the current context, effortlessly fail to perceive others as gendered. I either perceive someone as a man or a woman, or else I am aware of perceiving them as something else, or else I am aware that I am unsure. For this reason, nonbinary people cannot simply withdraw from gender classifications. To escape being understood as a man or a woman, they must posit a new identify which fills the same node: "I'm not a man, I'm _____." A distinctive feature of genders is that they are capable of filling this node. By adopting a male or female identity, a person can signal that they want others to perceive them in certain ways or to treat them according to certain norms; by adopting a nonbinary identity, a person attempts to *displace* certain perceptions or norms. Other kinds of identities—those belonging to different nodes—cannot perform this function: If someone asks, "Are you a man or a woman?", it's coherent to say "I'm nonbinary," but you can't respond "I'm Catholic." "Nonbinary" is a gender because it can fill the role that "man" and "woman" usually fill in a person's social identity.

3.4 Third-Personal Narratives

My account of narrative-gender yields an analogous account of *third-personal narratives,* which are mental narratives which one person holds regarding another's gender. Third-personal narratives are important because they have political consequences--our beliefs about others' past and future genders tends to shape our views about, among other things, which resources they have a right to access. They are also important because they affect the quality of interpersonal relationships. Third-personal narratives cause harm in relationships where one person's expectations are a poor fit for the other person's needs, such as when a parent expects their queer

child to be heterosexual and cisgender. I will give a brief account of third-personal gender in the

hopes of starting a larger discussion on this topic.

The elements of third-personal gender perception are analogous to the elements of

first-personal gender identity. Sensed-gender is analogous to *gender snapshots,* the perception of

a person's gender at a specific time. Narrative-gender is analogous to *projective gender,* by which

one person forms a mental narrative about someone else's gender.

> I form a gender snapshot of a person if any of the following are true:
> 1. I directly perceive that this person is a man
> 2. I directly perceive that this person is a woman
> 3. I directly perceive that this person is difficult to categorize as a
>   man or a woman

In saying that we perceive someone's gender "directly," I mean that we hold this

impression without exercising any deliberate thought. This could happen instantaneously, as

when I meet a stranger and immediately perceive him as a man. It could also be an impression

that we develop through conscious effort, but which then becomes effortless: I viewed my friend

as a man for several years, but when I learn that they identify as nonbinary, I intentionally

cultivate my impression that they are nonbinary. As I practice this, it becomes effortless for me

to perceive them as nonbinary, and my gender snapshot becomes more similar to their

sensed-gender.

> I form a *projective gender* of a person if I have a gender snapshot of them, and
> any of the following are true:
> 1. Based on the snapshot, I form expectations for their future
> 2. Based on the snapshot, I make assumptions about their past
> 3. In light of the snapshot, I perceive some events in their past as
>   especially relevant to their current identity

In the last section, I argued that a full description of someone's narrative-gender would

also completely describe "who they are" with respect to gender. By contrast, projective genders

vary widely in their completeness. In some cases, I might develop an elaborate mental narrative

about another person's life: I have detailed beliefs about how my husband developed from a boy into a man, and I have expectations (hopes, anxieties) about how he will age. Usually, these expectations involve the implicit understanding that his identity, social performance, and gender expression will either remain stable or progress along a particular path. Some projective genders are much less complete: Perhaps a man I've never met makes an antifeminist argument, and I think, "You don't know what it's like to experience sexism." Based on my impression that he is a man, I make an assumption about his past experiences. Just as narrative-gender is a conceptual tool which a person can use to thoroughly describe their gender identity, we can describe a vast range of projective genders using this basic concept.

In this section, I have started to explore the implications of my account of gender identity for externalist projects, which describe gender in terms of objective features of the world rather than subjective experience. My perception of another person's gender is not (always) limited to a single moment in time, but rather contains information about their past and future as well. When many people share the same perception, it may become a norm, as when the members of a community broadly assume that young boys will eventually marry women; this norm then privileges those who align with it and disadvantages those who disalign with it. Since the first- and third-personal experience of gender reflects an awareness of change over time, externalist accounts should be able to describe and evaluate cases where a person moves across groups. In the next section, I modify Sally Haslanger's account so that it can more fully describe movement across gendered social positions.

4. Social Position Accounts

On Sally Haslanger's account, a person is a "woman" if they are for the most part subordinated on the basis of presumed female sex characteristics, and they are a "man" if they are for the most part privileged on the basis of presumed male sex characteristics.[72] These terms describe positions within social structures, where social structures are (on one reading) theoretical entities that can provide the basis for structural explanations.[73] Haslanger's account helps to explain patterns of subordination across wildly different societies; it reveals similarities across these cases without falsely equating them, and is thus useful for a broad range of theoretical projects. Despite its broad applicability and descriptive power, Haslanger's model does not directly describe change *across* gender categories. I propose to amend her account with the concept of *social trajectory,* which describes a person's movement (or lack of movement) between social positions. Social trajectory comprises two features, *social history* and *stability*. Information about a person's social history and social stability will together answer the questions "Where has this person been?" and "Where do they seem to be going?" This approach will allow us to describe some forms of oppression and privilege which would otherwise remain obscure.

Haslanger's account already implicitly allows for gender change in a number of cases. Trans people who "pass" as cis can fully move from a male position to a female one, or vice versa.[74] On a modified version of this account, we could also describe people who are *not* presumed to have cisnormative sex features, but who nevertheless consistently function as

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[72] Haslanger (2012b: 234).

[73] Haslanger (2015: 114). Haslanger explains this concept differently across different papers; see Barnes (2017) for an interpretation of Haslanger as a realist about social structure. I have emphasized the theoretical interpretation so that my account will be more metaphysically lightweight. However, my arguments are compatible with both readings.

[74] As Jenkins (2016) notes, Haslanger's model is inapt for trans people who do not pass.

members of the gender with which they identify.[75] In these cases, Haslanger's account successfully describes trans men who are privileged as men and trans women who are subordinated as women. By incorporating *social history* into our analysis, we can explain these cases more deeply, acknowledging the role of the person's past social positions in their current subordination or privilege. Suppose a transgender man transitions in his forties, and thereafter stably occupies the male social position. Compared to cisgender men, he is likely to be less privileged in various ways as a result of having occupied the female role for several decades. If he lost professional opportunities, suffered misogynistic violence, or internalized sexist norms, then these events may continue to afflict him even after transition. The concept of social history allows us to explain why this person is more disadvantaged than cisgender men who are otherwise similarly situated. In other cases, a person's social history may be a source of privilege. Lilly and Lana Wachowski had not yet transitioned when they directed *The Matrix* in the late 1990s, and they were able to prove themselves as filmmakers at a time when very few women were granted control over expensive film projects. It seems unlikely that they would have been able to make the film if others had perceived them as women at that time, and yet their work on that project conferred professional benefits which have endured long after their transitions. If we wanted to explain the Wachowskis' place within systems of subordination and privilege, I think it would be a mistake to overlook the material benefits they received while they passed as men.[76]

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[75] For example, we could substitute perceived maleness/femaleness for perceived male/female sex features. This would include, e.g., non-passing trans women who are victims of misogyny. See Dembroff (2019).

[76] I do not claim that the Wachowskis are more privileged *on the whole* for having occupied the male position, but rather that they continue to benefit *in some way* from having occupied it. I should also note that trans women are practically always less privileged than cis women in similar circumstances, since "residual male privilege" almost never outweighs the costs of transphobia.

The corollary to social history is *stability,* which describes a person's ability to avoid descending into a lower social position. Haslanger says it is possible that a person's gender could "not be entirely stable," meaning that some people who are generally privileged on the basis of imagined male sex features could be denied this privilege in certain contexts (likewise for women who are exempt from subordination in some contexts).[77] Haslanger gives the example of a Black man who is sometimes more vulnerable to subjugation because of his perceived male sex features—for example, because white people perceive him as dangerous.[78] In Haslanger's language, this person is a man, but he does not *function* as a man when the social perception of his sex contributes to his subordination. I read Haslanger as saying that a person's gender is unstable if they *actually* fail to function as a member of that gender at certain times, but I propose a revised version of this concept which emphasizes the *risk* of failing to function as one's gender. To continue Haslanger's example, it is not as though Black men are typically secure in their privilege, and only occasionally thrust out of it. Rather, white supremacy poses a continuous threat to Black men's status as "men," which negatively affects the privilege of any particular Black man. A particular Black man will occupy the male position less stably than a similarly situated white man even if there is no time at which he "fails to function as a man." Likewise, even if a transgender man functions as a man practically all of the time, his position will be more precarious than that of cisgender men: He could lose his position if he is "outed," if social attitudes change, or if he enters a community which rejects transgender identity. By contrast, cisgender men are never subordinated precisely *because* they are cis, nor is anyone

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[77] Haslanger (2012b: 234-5).
[78] Ibid., 234.

made less of a "man" because he is white, nondisabled, or financially secure. Stability is a

measure of privilege, and instability is a measure of subordination.[79]

Transgender women who have not yet transitioned will typically occupy the male social

position, but they are likely to have beliefs and experiences which threaten their stability within

that role. Cisgender men can plan the course of their lives with the implicit awareness that they

will *always* be men, but transgender women must plan for the possibility that they will become

targets of transphobic and misogynistic abuse. For example, a transgender woman might decline

to apply for a job because she knows that the working environment is sexist, and she is afraid of

experiencing sexism if she transitions while she works for that company. She might also be

psychologically vulnerable in ways that cisgender men are not, such that when she hears about

various forms of misogyny, she is frightened for her own safety after transition.[80] Even when she

"regularly and for the most part" functions as a man, these anxieties may affect her attitudes

toward her current privileges: Perhaps she walks alone at night, not at all concerned for her

safety, and thinks, "I had better enjoy this while I can." All of this is compatible with the claims

that she occupies a male social position and that she "functions as a man" in various ways. By

incorporating persistent insecurity into the social position account, we can describe a broader

range of her experiences within the social position account.[81]

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[79] My use of "stability" also departs from Haslanger's here. I think Haslanger would say that a
woman who sometimes functions as a man does not have a "stable" gender, even though she is
more privileged than women who are stable. My use is more similar to "financial stability,"
where a person is unstable if they are at risk of descending to a lower class, but stable if they
have a chance of ascending to a higher one.
[80] Haslanger (2012b) says that women are subordinated partly because of norms which they have
internalized. I think it is reasonable to extend this to include fear and anger which results from
sexual subordination.
[81] One might speculate that the opposite would hold for pre-transition trans men, such that they
would be privileged in some ways because they anticipate adopting a male role. This doesn't
seem to be true, though. It is generally much harder to acquire male privilege than to lose it.

By and large, the same trend holds within the female social position. Although Haslanger defines the female position as subordinated, this position in fact confers a modicum of privilege in that it protects "women" from being marked as uncategorizable; people who occupy this position less stably will tend to be more subordinated. "When a trans woman doesn't pass, it's not like society simply treats her like a man. No, you get treated as monster gender, pronouns it and spit, and male privilege is not a good description of that experience at all."[82] One cannot "fail upward" into male privilege; rather, people who are disqualified from recognition as women because of their gender expression, sexual orientation, or race are likely to suffer even more severe oppression.

With the modifications I've proposed, Haslanger's theory can account for long-term changes in a person's social position, but it still can't directly describe people who *frequently* switch between different social functions. There are some people who function as men and women at different times, but who do neither of these "regularly and for the most part"; what role do they play in social structures? I think that we can fill this lacuna by using elements of Ásta's conferralist framework. Like Haslanger, Ásta defines genders in relation to subordination and privilege—"constraints and enablements" in Ásta's language.[83] One important difference between these views is that, for Haslanger, constraints and enablements can ultimately place someone within a stable social position, whereas on Ásta's view these properties are entirely contextual and can change rapidly. Ásta describes a person who is "one of the guys" at work, a woman at home, a butch among femmes, and an "other" in heteronormative spaces.[84] If Ásta is right, then this person gains and loses genders several times over the course of a single day. I think it is fruitful to describe the trajectory-in-miniature of this person as they move between

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[82] Wynn (2019).
[83] Ásta (2018).
[84] Ibid., 74.

contextually variable genders: Their social history is defined by a pattern of rapid variation, and they are never quite stable in any role that they occupy. Even when this person momentarily functions as a man or a woman, their experience is defined by the fact of their regularly transgressing categories. We could say that this person has a temporally distributed property such as "tending to move between male and female positions."[85] By contrast, one of their coworkers might possess a temporally distributed property such as "generally tending to be a man." If two people are both men (in Ásta's sense) at a specific time, then we can ascribe some differences in their social privilege to their temporally distributed properties.

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[85] "Temporally distributed properties" describe the way things are over a period of time. Ross Cameron thinks that these properties can be highly specific, describing all events in the property-bearer's past; my claim is comparatively tame, since it only includes patterns which are repeated over time. Cameron (2011: 65-66).

Conclusion: Thinkable/Livable Concepts

I have argued (in Part 3) that it is unnecessary to posit precise definitions for gender kinds such as "man," "woman," and "nonbinary." Rather than proposing necessary or sufficient criteria for membership in those kinds, I argued that we should understand genders as historical lineages which people take to be deeply relevant to who they are. By taking this step, I rejected one way of framing this debate, according to which our central goal should be to figure out which people "really are" men or women.[86] I also modified Sally Haslanger's social position account, introducing concepts which make it possible to robustly describe a person's movement across social positions. I believe that these concepts will allow for more complete inclusion of transgender people in feminist theoretical projects.

Even if one accepts my concepts of narrative-gender and gender lineages, why think that this account can justify claims about which people are men and women? I imagine that some people will believe that I have failed to address the most important questions in this discussion. As Barnes (2020: 19) notes, gender terms usually admit of several coherent definitions, and statements like "trans women are women" will be true or false depending on which definition we apply. Although, for any given definition of "woman," there are truths about which people are proper extensions of that term, these truths say nothing about what, if anything, gender "really is." In taking these applications to be truth-apt, we are like the person who, in Nietzsche's example, "make[s] up a definition of mammal and then proclaim[s], after spotting a mammal, 'Look, a mammal.'"[87] If we want to compare a trans-exclusionary definition of "woman" with a trans-inclusionary definition, the discussion can't proceed from the assumption that one

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[86] This framing is more common in popular discourse than in philosophy, but I see Byrne (2020) as doing a project like this.

[87] Nietzsche (1873).

definition is true and the other false; I doubt we would ever find a nonmoral basis to prefer one over the other. Rather than seeking to create a "true" account of gender—whatever that would mean—my goal has been to create an account which is conceptually viable, that is, one that we can *think* and *live.*

I distinguish three properties of accounts: Usable, thinkable, and livable. Compare three accounts of "woman"

> **The Biological View:** A person is a woman iff they are an adult human female.
> **The Basic Identity View:** A person is a woman iff they identify as a woman.
> **The Narrative View:** There are no specific criteria for a person to be a woman; to say that someone is a woman is just to connect them to the historical lineage of women.

Say an account is *usable* if it yields clear rules for use in a significant number of cases. All three accounts are usable. The biological and identity views are usable because they almost always yield clear rules about which people to describe as women, and the narrative view is usable because it yields a procedure for situating someone in relation to concepts of "woman."[88]

An account is *thinkable* if it yields a stable, informative worldview. It is stable in that it is both internally coherent and compatible with data encountered in experience: A person could hold this view for a hundred years without encountering data that absolutely disproves it.[89] It is informative in the sense that it changes a person's perspective in more than a trivial way. The basic identity view is either unstable or trivial, so it is not thinkable.[90] The biological view and my own account probably are thinkable. It's very likely that best formulations of both views are informative, internally consistent, and compatible with any empirical information we could possibly discover. In this sense, they are both viable ways of thinking about gender.

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[88] I defend these and other claims more fully in Appendix B.
[89] Of course, this means that something which was once thinkable could become unthinkable, and vice versa. That isn't likely to happen in the case of genders, though.
[90] See Appendix B.

Of the concepts which are thinkable, only a smaller number are *livable,* by which I mean that they are conducive to the flourishing of some person or group. If a person can adopt an account without ruinous consequences, then the account is livable for that person. For most cisgender people, biological accounts are livable: Most cisgender men could flourish while believing that they are men in virtue of being adult human males.[91] For trans people, however, these concepts are corrosive. If a transgender man adopts a mental framework in which "a man is (primarily) an adult human male," then he is likely to experience serious distress as a result of seeing himself as inauthentic. He cannot peacefully coexist with this concept, nor can he adapt his psychology to accommodate it. If there is any thinkable, livable alternative to biological views, then he is justified in taking that up instead. I believe that the narrative account meets this standard, but if I turn out to be wrong about this—say, because the account proves to be either incoherent or harmful—then I nevertheless believe that this is the standard by which we should evaluate other theories. In order for the trans-exclusionary position to succeed, they would have to demonstrate that no trans-inclusionary account could *ever* be thinkable. In the meantime, trans people are justified in adopting apparently thinkable accounts which allow them to lead good lives. As I argued in Parts 2 and 3, the narrative account is well suited to the tasks for which trans people employ the term "gender identity;" for the same reasons, I believe that this account is livable for trans people.

The same interests motivated my adaptation of Sally Haslanger's externalist account. By modifying Haslanger's account, I have attempted to render trans experiences thinkable within this subset of feminist theory. Although Jenkins (2016) helpfully explains how Haslanger's

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[91] Aaron Griffith pointed out that this might be false for cisgender men who are morally concerned for trans people. That is probably true, but what I mean to say is that most cis men could adopt this concept *for themselves* without experiencing harm. Even cis people who respect trans identity may unthinkingly equate their own gender with their sex, and they usually don't suffer psychological harm as a result.

account would classify transgender women in a variety of circumstances (and we can easily

adapt her arguments to describe trans men), this modification does not allow us to describe trans

people *as* trans people. By contrast, my modification of Haslanger's account is able to describe

cases where a transgender person is positioned as a woman or a man while also modeling the

kinds of lives which trans people are most likely to lead. My hope is that this will serve a more

thorough integration of transgender oppression into feminist theory, and so uncover a deep unity

between transgender and feminist activism.

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