

Gender Dysphoria

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Beyond the Sex/Gender Binaries

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- So I'll try to define terms more inclusively than is commonly done.

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- sex hormonal systems (e.g., Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS)),
- secondary sex characteristics, and
- brain structure as influenced by prenatal sex hormones.

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- Fausto-Sterling: 1.7% of population are intersexuals.
- Including brain structure: 10-20% of population are intersexuals.
- Doctors are charged with assigning a binary sex to each baby.
- Most of us are blind to sex diversity.

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- conversational style,
- body language,
- dress style, etc.

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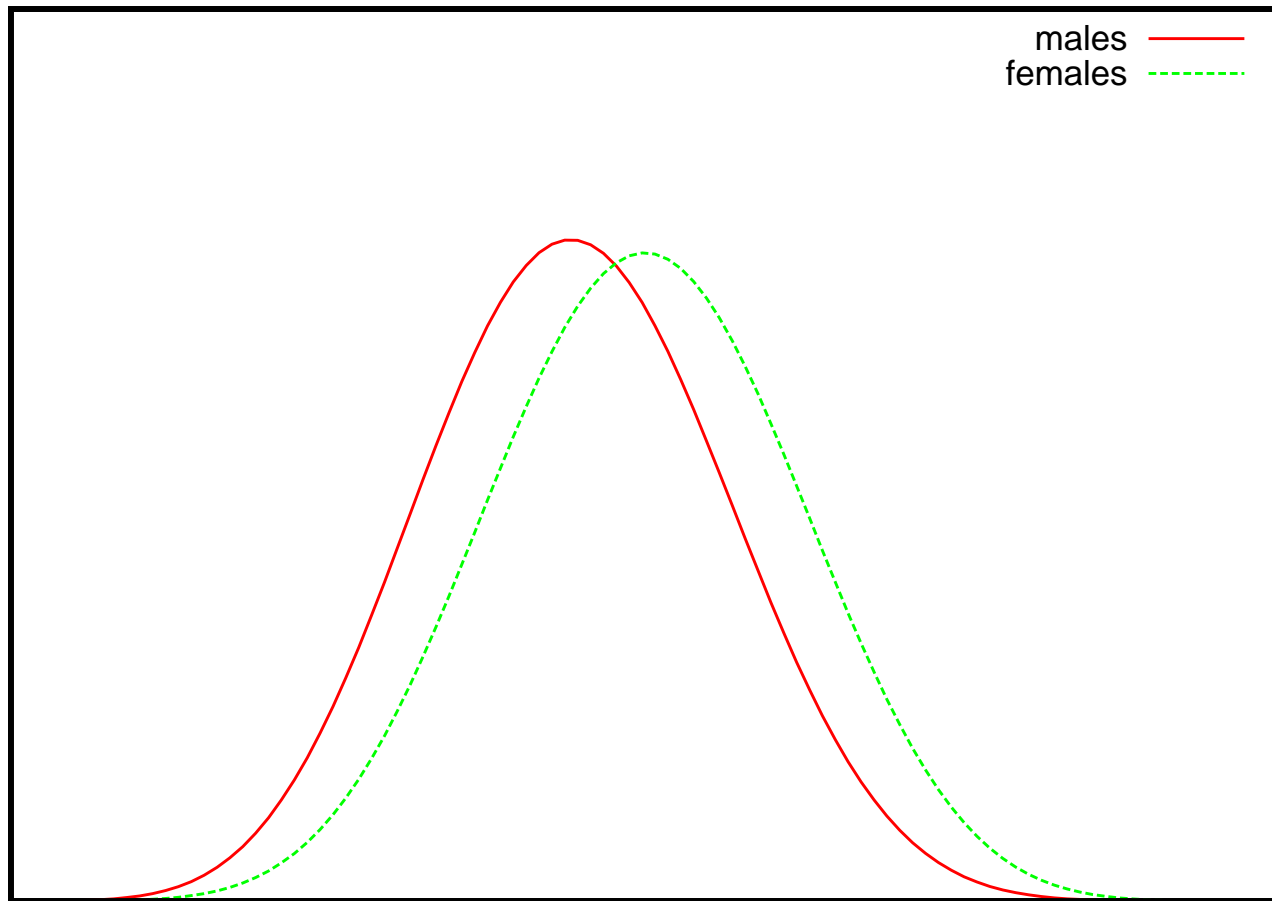
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- List of attributes is culturally determined (e.g., is affinity for certain colors included?).

Gender Diversity (Cont.)

- Male and female (based on assigned sex) bell curves for most traits almost completely overlap—there is much more intra-sex difference than inter-sex difference.



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- Thus gender is multi-dimensional.

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- Branding is both positive and negative.
- Branding has a major impact on our lives.

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- So developing a gender identity is a social process, even though gender is partly determined by sex.
- But with gender branding, even more socialization is needed.
- If brought up by aliens, how could a baby have a sense of being “male” or “female”?
- As children, we intuit/learn our gender identities by comparing ourselves with others, consciously or unconsciously.

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- But it could be more open-ended process of paying attention to someone, more fully understanding who they are, what their gender attributes are.

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- If we acknowledged gender complexity, it would be much harder to assign fixed gender roles.
- A person's actual *gender expression*—the way sie expresses hir gender—may be inconsistent with hir assigned gender role.

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 - (real/attributed/assigned) sex.
- *Transsexualism* is
 - gender dysphoria,
 - coupled with a desire/plan to make physical and/or social changes to ameliorate that dysphoria.

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- Which in turn can lead to discomfort because of how sie is seen by others or how sie sees hirself.

Origins of Gender Dysphoria: How Others See Us

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- But in our branded system, people may attribute gender brands to us that neglect or ignore our actual gender aggregates, using assumed binary sex to infer a gender brand.
- We may be uncomfortable with our own bodies because we think others will only see and relate to us as we wish if our bodies conform to their brand-based expectations, in which sexes and genders must go together.

Origins of Gender Dysphoria: How We See Ourselves

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- This is like other body image problems, can cause intense emotional pain, and has a purely social cause.
- A baby brought up by aliens wouldn't develop a feeling of having the "wrong" genitals, with no access to human role models.

Ameliorating Gender Dysphoria: Recognizing Gender Diversity

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- Recognizing gender diversity would encourage the breakdown of gender branding.
- Having our genders recognized would lessen gender dysphoria.

Ameliorating Gender Dysphoria: Transformation

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- To a limited extent, these changes alter a person's sex (only some parts of the sex aggregate can currently be changed).
- But some people find making such transformations impossible, impractical or undesirable.

Ameliorating Gender Dysphoria: Living Outside the Gender Binary

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- Linguistic problem: **pronouns** (gendered pronouns put intergenders in boxes).
- Logistical problem: **public restrooms** (going into a restroom brands a person).
- How are we to **recognize** intergenders, so we can **support** them?

Ameliorating Gender Dysphoria: Expressing Allegiance to a Gender Brand

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- How far this can stretch is debatable—if a feminine person with a masculine body uses gender expression to express a female gender identity, could people relate to her appropriately?
- But already some transsexuals who can't or don't want to pass are finding more acceptance in society by expressing their allegiance to a gender brand.
- Fortunately, many transsexuals and their partners find that genitals and secondary sexual characteristics are far less relevant than how we use and think about them, and than our gender aggregates.

Slides and Feedback

The slides for this talk are available at:

<http://people.cis.ksu.edu/~stough/cultural/>

And feedback or questions about this work can be communicated to me at:

stough@cis.ksu.edu