



## GENDER IDENTITIES AND FEMINISM

## IDENTIDADES DE GÉNERO E FEMINISMO

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**Abstract.** *Many feminists (e.g. T. Bettcher and B.R. George) argue for a principle of first person authority (FPA) about gender, i.e. that we should (at least) not disavow people's gender self-categorisations. However, there is a feminist tradition resistant to FPA about gender, which I call "radical feminism". Feminists in this tradition define gender-categories via biological sex, thus denying non-binary and trans self-identifications. Using a taxonomy by B. R. George, I begin to demystify the concept of gender. We are also able to use the taxonomy to model various feminist approaches. It becomes easier to see how conceptualisations of gender which allow for FPA often do not allow for understanding female subjugation as being rooted in reproductive biology. I put forward a conceptual scheme: radical FPA feminism. If we accept FPA, but also radical feminist concerns, radical FPA feminism is an attractive way of conceptualising gender.*

**Keywords:** *feminism, gender, identity, sex, transgender, non-binary.*

**Sumário.** *Muitas feministas (por exemplo, T. Bettcher e B.R. George) defendem um princípio de autoridade na primeira pessoa (FPA) sobre o género, ou seja, argumentam que não devemos (pelo menos) desautorizar as auto-categorizações de género das pessoas. No entanto, há uma tradição feminista resistente à FPA sobre género, a que eu chamo "feminismo radical". As feministas desta tradição definem categorias de género através do sexo biológico, negando então as auto-identificações não binárias e trans. Usando a taxonomia de B. R. George, começo por desmistificar o conceito de género. Também podemos usar a taxonomia para modelar várias abordagens feministas. Torna-se mais fácil ver como as conceptualizações de género que permitem o FPA muitas vezes não permitem compreender a subjugação feminina como estando enraizada na reprodução biológica. Proponho um esquema conceptual: a FPA do feminismo radical. Se aceitarmos a FPA, mas também as preocupações feministas radicais, a FPA do feminismo radical é uma forma apelativa de conceptualizar o género.*

**Palavras-chave:** *feminismo, género, identidade, sexo, transgénero, não-binário.*

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## o Introduction

Many people identify their gender as being non-binary, so consider themselves to be neither (wholly) men nor women (Titman, 2014). Mainstream western society generally does not recognise non-binary identities,<sup>1</sup> and non-binary people are often subject to *misgendering*, i.e. they are categorised as a gender they do not identify as. Talia Mae Bettcher (2009) argues that misgendering is a form of transphobia, involving a refusal to recognise trans people (including non-binary people) as who they claim to be. Generally, trans people suffer greatly in western society, often facing harassment, discrimination and violence, in addition to social exclusion, high levels of stress and mental health problems (Diamond, Pardo, & Butterworth, 2011). It is therefore imperative that we listen to, think with, and be empathetic towards trans people's diverse lived experiences.

However, some radical feminists have problematised aspects of non-binary and trans identities (Cox, 2016; Reilly-Cooper, 2016). Many radical feminist critiques are relatively easy to answer. For example, they have problematised the notion that non-trans women are more privileged than trans people, and, as a result, have problematised assigned male at birth (AMAB) trans women and non-binary people having access to feminist/women-only spaces. Trans people are also thought to transition for dubious (either mistaken or menacing) reasons. For example, trans people have been thought to misunderstand their own desire to transition, or to desire transition in order to hurt individual women and/or the feminist cause. Such arguments have been addressed comprehensively (primarily on the subject of trans women) by Sandy Stone (1991), Emi Koyama (2003), and Bettcher (2014).

Other radical feminist arguments are have not been satisfactorily addressed. Such arguments hold that, if one accepts the radical feminist claim that women's

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<sup>1</sup> There are some notable legislative exceptions and efforts to change this, some of which I will note here. In Australia, there is a legally sanctioned "X" category for indeterminate sex category, which some are trying to get re-defined as meaning non-binary gender (Ansara, Webeck, Carpenter, Hyndal, & Goldner, 2015). As of 2017, Canada allows for non-binary gender identification on legal documents (Busby, 2017). Germany's Federal Constitutional Court ruled in 2017 in favour of recognising non-binary gender identity (Bundesverfassungsgericht, 2017). In the UK, the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee's 2016 report on Transgender Equality concluded that non-binary gender identities should be legally recognised (House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 2016).

oppression stems from female sexual biology, then gender self-identifications are not authoritative. They hold that non-binary identities are based on a flawed understanding of gender, and that the social and political recognition of non-binary identities undermines women's liberation.

I will engage with a number of radical feminist criticisms in order to develop an account of gender that listens to both radical feminist concerns and accepts trans identities as legitimate. I call this account radical first person authority (FPA) feminism.

## **1. Trans Terminology**

Terminology used when discussing trans issues is often contested. §I of (Bettcher, *Feminist Perspectives on Trans Issues*, 2014) is a useful explainer. Here I will attempt to give a *relatively* neutral illustration of some key terms, many of which will be re-examined in §3.

Trans people are those who do not identify with the sex/gender they were assigned at birth,<sup>2</sup> e.g. transsexual, transgender, and non-binary people (Vincent, 2016). Someone's being trans does not indicate anything about their sexual orientation, biology, or whether they have had (or want) gender-affirming medical intervention. Non-trans people are sometimes referred to as being cisgender or cis. For example, a cis woman is someone assigned female at birth (AFAB) who identifies as a woman.

Non-binary people do not identify themselves as being men or women,<sup>3</sup> and thus do not identify with the binary sex/gender they were assigned at birth (Vincent, 2016). "Non-binary" functions as an umbrella term. It encompasses those who identify as genderfluid (switch between genders), agender (no/neutral gender), bigender (both man and woman), as a demi-boy/girl/man/women (predominantly boy/girl/man/woman), or as some other sub-category (Vincent, 2016). Some identify with a sub-category yet not as "non-binary", or may prefer to be called genderqueer. Many non-binary people have a preference for gender neutral pronouns, most commonly they/them/their.

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<sup>2</sup> I will discuss the sex/gender distinction in §3.

<sup>3</sup> Non-binary people may identify as being men and/or women to some degree, but do not identify with either exclusively.

Stone (1991) argues that all transsexual people are beyond the gender binary. However, non-binary people (in the sense I am discussing here) are non-binary due to their non-binary gender-identities, not on the basis of any medical intervention or condition. I will discuss the nature of gender-identity in §3.

## **2. Feminist Principles**

There is division within feminism between those who accept trans women's self-identification as women in certain politically important ways, and those who do not. A similar division occurs on the issue of accepting the legitimacy of non-binary self-identifications.

My explication of both "sides" oversimplifies diverse traditions, but for my purposes these sketches will suffice.

### **2.1 First Person Authority Feminism**

I will refer to feminists who accept trans self-identifications as first person authority (FPA) feminists, as they believe that people have a kind of authority over their own gender categorisation.<sup>4</sup> At a minimum, they hold that other people should not disavow trans people's self-identifications. FPA feminists do not necessarily agree on what someone's gender is constituted by, and most do not give explicit outlines of the metaphysics of a subject's gender or how this relates to their self-identification. What unites FPA feminists is agreement that we should generally defer to people's first personal statements about their own gender.

Bettcher (2009) argues that people should have ethically justified FPA over their own gender categorisation. She notes that consensual gendering already happens in trans-friendly subcultures. In such contexts, when someone is asked their gender they are expected to respond with a statement about who they believe they are, in some deep existential sense. One does not "have FPA over being a woman but only over one's *believing* one is a woman" (p.111). As a result of this practice, it is not ethically permissible to question someone's stated gender, as one does not have the ethical authority to deny other people's avowals

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Bettcher (2009), B. R. George & R. A. Briggs (2016), Katherine Jenkins (2016), and Emi Koyama (2003).

about their own mental life. To do so would be controlling, invasive and potentially harmful.

Bettcher further argues that this subcultural practice is superior to mainstream practices, in which questions about gender status are answered on account of genitalia. Bettcher holds that the culturally enforced mandatory admission of genitalia is tantamount to sexual abuse. Rather than sharing facts about our sexual biology, gender labels should communicate our self-understanding. Dominant gender practices may also be deemed immoral for avowedly feminist reasons: dominant gender practices involve subjugating women, and so should be rejected wholesale (Bettcher, 2012).

Burkay Ozturk (Forthcoming) has argued that Bettcher's notion of ethical FPA is too strong, and that there are circumstances in which one can reject someone's self-identification. He argues that if someone rejects a person's self-identified gender without harming them, without violating their privacy, and without denying their "negotiative dignity," such a denial can be permissible.

Nevertheless, consistent with Ozturk, there is good reason for *generally* deferring to gender self-identification. For example, feminism often aims to take people's lived experience seriously. Many trans people have testified that misgendering is a harm to their mental health, and that this is a harm that cannot be otherwise avoided. These testimonies should be taken seriously, especially as they are corroborated by clinicians (Wiseman & Davidson, 2011). Avoidably harming other people's mental health is not morally permissible, all things being equal, so we should avoid such harm by accepting people's gender self-identifications.

According to Iris Young's (2009) account of oppression, misgendering is oppressive. Misgendering is a form of cultural imperialism: society's "dominant meanings" make the trans community's perspective "invisible", while simultaneous stereotyping its members, and making them "the Other" (p.66). Mainstream society systematically and coercively subjects non-binary and trans people to its norms. The dominant culture assigns gender-category on the basis of genitalia, which systemically erases non-binary and trans self-understanding, as well as positioning trans people as freakish outsiders. Additionally, Young considers violence to include "incidents of harassment, intimidation, or ridicule

simply for the purpose of degrading, humiliating, or stigmatizing group members” (pp.67-68). Non-binary and trans people frequently experience such abuse, which may come in the form of purposeful misgendering (Diamond, Pardo, & Butterworth, 2011).

Furthermore, there is uptake of FPA about gender in progressive circles (George & Briggs, 2016). Many people hold that a person’s self-identification is the most ethically sound, or socially viable, indicator of their gender. At the very least, it is worthwhile to see how good a theory consistent with gender self-identification can be. Following Sally Haslanger’s (2012) methodology of ameliorative analysis, I hold that analyses should be done on the basis of political usefulness: a theory of gender should support feminist aims.

## **2.2 Radical Feminism**

Feminists who do not accept self-identifications as authoritative often self-identify as radical feminists, which is how I will refer to them.<sup>5</sup> Radical feminists argue that trans people’s self-identifications should not be authoritative, regardless of social or medical transition. Their approach to trans issues is predicated on their theory of gender, which I will summarise in relatively neutral language.

Most babies are assigned male at birth (AMAB) or assigned female at birth (AFAB) in accordance with their genitals.<sup>6</sup> As children grow, they learn gender roles from their parents and wider society. Divergent norms are instilled in them: AMAB are trained to be masculine men, i.e. domineering, individualistic, and aggressive, while AFAB are trained to be feminine women, i.e. submissive, cooperative, and kind. Radical feminists understand “men” and “women” to be the two sex-classes/castes/roles in the patriarchy, i.e. the dominant gender system. These categories may be referred to as “gender- classes/castes/roles”, or “genders”.

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<sup>5</sup> E.g. (Raymond, 1994), (Jeffreys, 2014) and (Reilly-Cooper, *Sex and Gender: A Beginner's Guide*, 2015). Of course, many FPA and/or trans feminists may be radical feminists in the broader sense, or self-identify as radical feminists too. Many canonical radical feminists, e.g. Catherine McKinnon, accept trans identities (Williams, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Radical feminists rarely use terms such as AFAB or AMAB, as many believe categorisation as male or female is non-problematic and assignation independent.

The sex-classes are hierarchical: men are privileged and women are oppressed. Because of their sexual biology, women are expected to be available for male sexual satisfaction, gestate children and raise them. Heterosexuality is compulsory. Women are expected to perform domestic labour and raise children without formal remuneration. This inequality in domestic labour division continues despite women joining the formal workforce (Jones, 2016). Women's oppression is intrinsically linked to being AFAB: it is the recognition (or assumption) of their sex organs that lead to membership in the subordinate sex-classes/genders.

Gender membership is seen as imposed and inherently oppressive. Radical feminists aim to decouple assigned sex from gender roles. Slogans such as "biology is not destiny" communicate that female people need not occupy traditional roles, and should not be forced or coerced to do so. Distinguishing being AFAB/classed as a woman from performing a women's role/acting in a feminine way is of central importance to radical feminists.

Although I do not have space to investigate the claims made by radical feminists, I will take understanding female subjugation as stemming from traditional reproductive roles to be (at least) useful for feminism: This analysis seems to have advanced women's liberation, and it seems likely that it will continue to do so.

### **3. Unpacking Gender**

Central to the issue of trans/non-binary identities in feminism is the notion of gender. The category "woman" is often seen to be some social category, i.e. a gender, and not a biological category, i.e. a sex. The sex/gender distinction has been problematised by many feminists (notably Judith Butler (1990)), but here I will assume that it is, at least, useful. Even if there are many people with a variety of intersex conditions, the vast majority of people are unproblematically assigned a sex at birth. Even if the biology of sex assignment is post-discursive, socially constructed and culturally informed, it is dependent on different sets of facts from gender (e.g. genitalia and/or chromosomes vs. pronouns and/or gendered clothing), and it is thus distinguishable from whatever "gender" is.

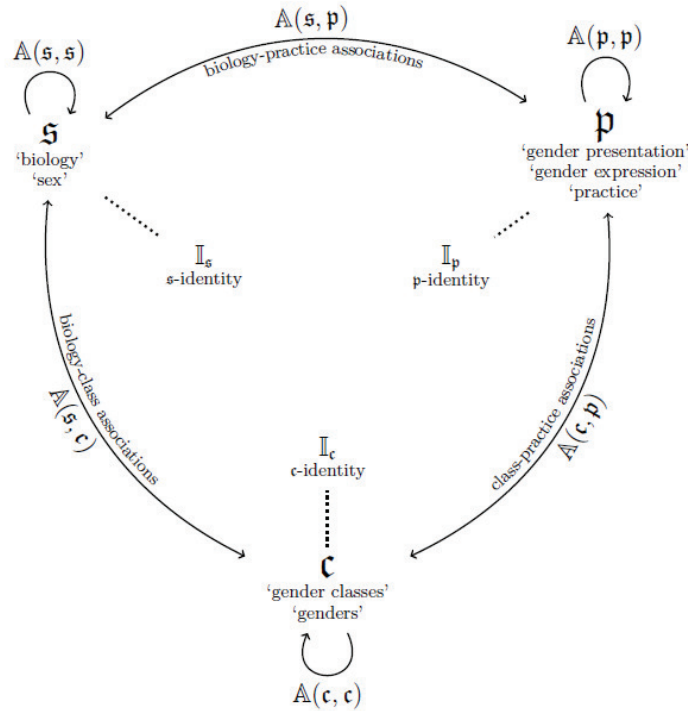
Radical feminists define genders as a class/caste related to biological sex, but trans people hold that their “gender” is not determined by their biological sex. Trans people make another element of gender salient: gender-identity. Some FPA feminists claim that it is gender-identity that *makes* one a woman, or non-binary, or a man (Cohen, 2017). Additionally, the notions of gender expression, performance or presentation are important. These notions capture what an individual *does* that is gendered, i.e. how they dress or to act in gendered ways.

B. R. George (2016) clarifies many ambiguities within gender talk with a taxonomy of gender concepts. It notates the loose clusters of characteristics, behaviours and labels important to our notion of “gender”, and the relations between them. There are three nodes: sexed-biology (**s**), gender-practice (**p**), and gender-category (**c**). **s** unites the biological characteristics that a society takes to indicate reproductive roles, for example beards, ovaries and XY chromosomes. **p** is constituted by behaviours which a society takes to be gendered, e.g. raising children, wearing a suit, or being assertive. **c** contains the various sex/gender categories a society may place people in, e.g. female/male and woman/man, and also cisgender, non-binary, transgender, intersex, etc.<sup>7</sup> The distinction between these nodes can be messy: some theorists (such as Butler (1990) and Jennifer McKittrick (2015)) hold that gender-classes are in some way constituted by practice. However, it is possible to distinguish between category and practice, even if one is constituted by the other, and most of the theories explored within this paper do not hold that this is the case anyhow.

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<sup>7</sup> The notion of gender-category is distinct from the radical feminist’s sex-role/class/caste. It includes categories that they leave do not, and is not *necessarily* hierarchical. Thus, I call them “gender-categories”, not “gender-classes”.





**Figure 1. George's Taxonomy**

There are six families of associations, notated  $A(x,y)$ , which are stereotypes, norms or rules. Inter-node associations connect the three nodes.  $A(s,p)$  are associations connecting sexed-biology,  $s$ , to gender-practice,  $p$ . For example, “bearded people should be assertive,” or “people with ovaries should raise children.”  $A(s,c)$  are associations connecting sexed-biology,  $s$ , to gender-category,  $c$ . For example, “women have ovaries,” or “people with XY chromosomes are male.”  $A(p,c)$  are associations connecting gender-practice,  $p$ , to gender-category,  $c$ . For example, “people who are male should have short hair,” or “people who are sensitive are female.” There are also intra-node associations.  $A(s,s)$  are associations between different aspects of sexed-biology,  $s$ . For example, “people with testicles don’t have ovaries.”  $A(p,p)$  are associations between different gender-practices, e.g. “if you care for children you should not wear a suit.”  $A(c,c)$  are associations between gender-categories,  $c$ , e.g. “men are male” or “females are not men.” Associations are reflexive, i.e.  $A(x,y) = A(y,x)$ .

Additionally, there are gender-identities/inclinations, notated  $I_x$ , for each of the respective nodes ( $s$ ,  $p$ , and  $c$ ). Gender-identities are not about the recognition of other people’s perceptions or categorisations, but are instead about how one would, or would like to, perceive or categorise oneself, and be perceived and

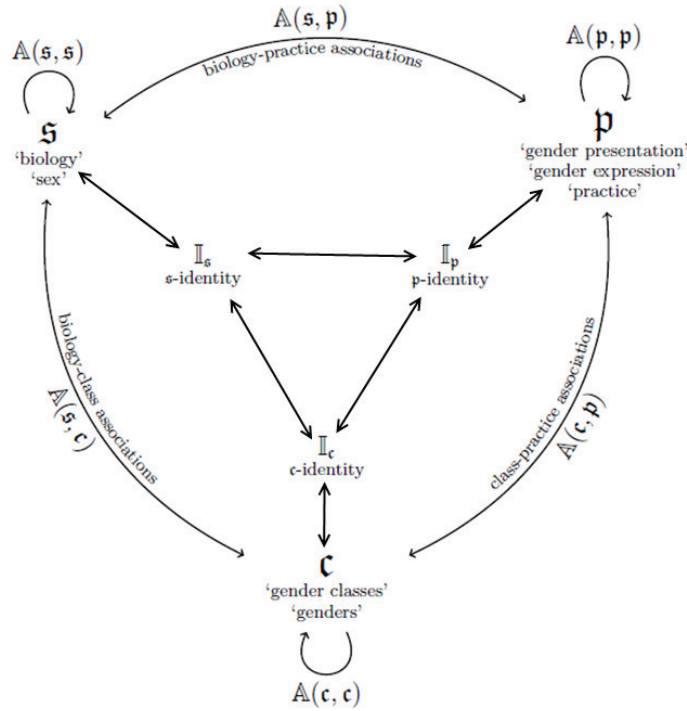
categorised by others. Sex-identity,  $I_s$ , involves attitudes towards or identifications with aspects of sexed-biology. For example,  $I_s$  includes wanting to have large breasts, or disliking one's penis. Practice-identity,  $I_p$ , contains attitudes/identifications with gender-practice. Wanting to be a nun or believing oneself to be assertive are examples of  $I_p$ . Category-identity,  $I_c$ , involves attitudes/identifications with gender-categories. Examples of  $I_c$  include identifying as male, wishing one were a woman, or feeling oneself to be agender. Category-identity is what I have previously been referring to as "gender-identity".

George's taxonomy omits associations between gender-identities, and omits associations between gender-identities and nodes  $s$ ,  $p$ , and  $c$ .<sup>8</sup> I include  $A(c, I_c)$ ,  $A(p, I_p)$  and  $A(s, I_s)$ , i.e. associations between category and category-identity, practice and practice-identity, and sex and sex-identity. Examples of these include: all those who identify as women are women, those who want to wear dresses should wear dresses, or that people should accept their sexed biology. I also include associations connecting gender-identities, such as  $A(I_c, I_p)$ , e.g. those who want to act effeminately should identify as women, or  $A(I_c, I_s)$ , e.g. those who want to have a penis should identify as men.<sup>9</sup> I include these additions in my revision of George's taxonomy, which I take to model mainstream gender practices:

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<sup>8</sup> §4.4 of (George, 2016) allows for such additions to the taxonomy.

<sup>9</sup> There are plausibly associations connecting gender-identities to other nodes, such as  $A(I_c, s)$ , but including them is unnecessary for my purposes.



**Figure 2. My additions to George's Taxonomy**

#### 4 Applying the Taxonomy

The notation of the taxonomy does not enable us to capture many dimensions of our experiences of gender, e.g. the difference between recognising the existence of an association and advocating an association, but it can nonetheless be used to clarify several things. When speaking about gender, people may be taking about any one (or combination) of the 3 nodes, 3 identities, and 18 associations.

I will use the taxonomy to illustrate the multiple possible dimensions of trans-ness, as I understand it, and to illustrate different models of feminist thought.

##### 4.1 Types of Trans

Trans activists differentiate between “body dysphoria” and “social dysphoria” to create a more fine-grained account of trans experience (Callahan, 2014). However, the taxonomy allows us to make sense of 3 different trans gender-identities, i.e. gender-identities that conflict with assigned sex/gender.

First, one's sexed-biology may include having certain biological traits (e.g. a vagina), with a sex-identity wishing to have different traits (e.g. a penis). This is what is meant by "body dysphoria", and I will call this trans-sex. Second, one may be raised to practice gender in a certain (e.g. feminine) way, but want to act in a different (e.g. masculine) way. This is a component of "social dysphoria", and I will refer to this as being trans-practice. Third, one may be assigned a certain sex/gender category from birth (e.g. be AMAB), while having a conflicting category-identity (e.g. identify as a woman, or as non-binary). This is another component of "social dysphoria" and I will refer to this as being trans-category.

When speaking about "trans" people, I have been speaking about trans-category people, and only trans-sex and trans-practice people insofar as they are incidentally trans-category. With my additional inter-identity associations (i.e.  $A(I_c, I_p)$ ,  $A(I_c, I_s)$  and  $A(I_s, I_c)$ ), one can see how social norms may lead pressure who are trans in only one respect to be trans in all respects. For example, it is plausible that some trans-category AFAB people who identify as men may feel the need to identify with trans-practice masculine activities in order to legitimise their category-identity in the eyes of wider society. This is not to pathologise trans experiences, but merely to note that trans people are subject to the same pressure to conform all three nodes and respective identities as cis people.

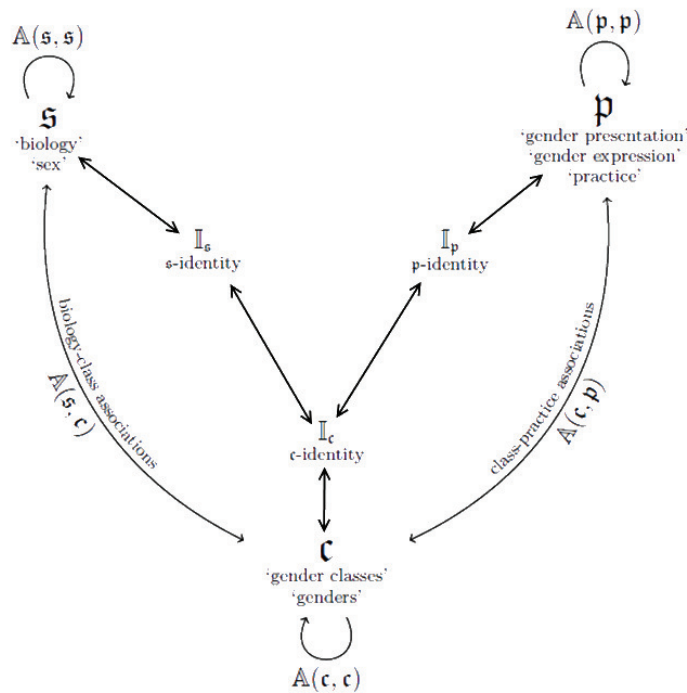
Under my definitions, many people potentially count as trans who would not under most conceptualisations of trans-ness (Overall, 2012). For example, cis-men who want penis enlargement surgery and cis-women who receive breast reduction surgery have trans-sex traits, while all non-heterosexuals have trans-practice traits. This difference between my conception and the more ubiquitous, exclusive conceptions of trans-ness may appear to be a weakness of my approach. However, under my approach we are best able to recognise and respect the nuanced multiplicities of self-reported trans-experience, whilst simultaneously allowing for a more fluid, scaling and less othering relationship between those who are generally understood to be trans, and those generally understood to be cis.

I do not have space to explore the relation between people's trans-x traits and their status as being trans-x. Most people are trans-x in some way, to some degree. Few people are happy with *every* aspect of their sexed-biology or assigned

sex/gender. However, in this essay, I am interested in people who are trans-x to a high degree.

### 4.2 Types of Feminism<sup>10</sup>

The taxonomy can help us model a variety of possible feminist approaches. As understood here, feminism is united in rejecting  $A(s,p)$  and  $A(I_s,I_p)$  associations connecting sexed-biology with practice. It is uncontroversial (as a feminist) to hold that reproductive biology should not determine social-roles, behaviours or dress codes (or, indeed, the reverse). However, if we were to attempt a minimalist feminism and *only* reject  $A(s,p)$  and  $A(I_s,I_p)$ , then sex would still determine practice. This is due to the combination of  $A(p,c)$  and  $A(s,c)$ : even if we dispose of the norm “people with testicles should be dominant”, by retaining the norms “people with testicles are men” and “men should be dominant”, we are left with the same result. I call this the Problem of Transitivity. In order for an effective feminism, it must be overcome.



**Figure 3. Minimal Feminism**

<sup>10</sup> These models are oversimplified caricatures, constructed for primarily discursive reasons. I do not mean to imply that everyone I link to a type of feminism advocates every aspect of that type. Additionally, it is worth noting that (likely) all feminists would agree that the diagram at the end of §3 (for the most part) correctly *describes* current practices. The *key* differences between the feminisms I present are which associations they *prescribe*.

All feminists would celebrate trans-practice rejections of  $A(s,p)$  associations – the freedom to be trans-practice is an essential aim of feminism.<sup>11</sup> However, radical feminists reject trans-category people's claims that they *are* members of their preferred categories. Some radical feminists have also criticised trans-sex people, but this has only been insofar trans-sex people have used biological/medical changes to legitimise trans-category identities.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, trans-practice people have been problematised for using practice to legitimise trans-category identities.

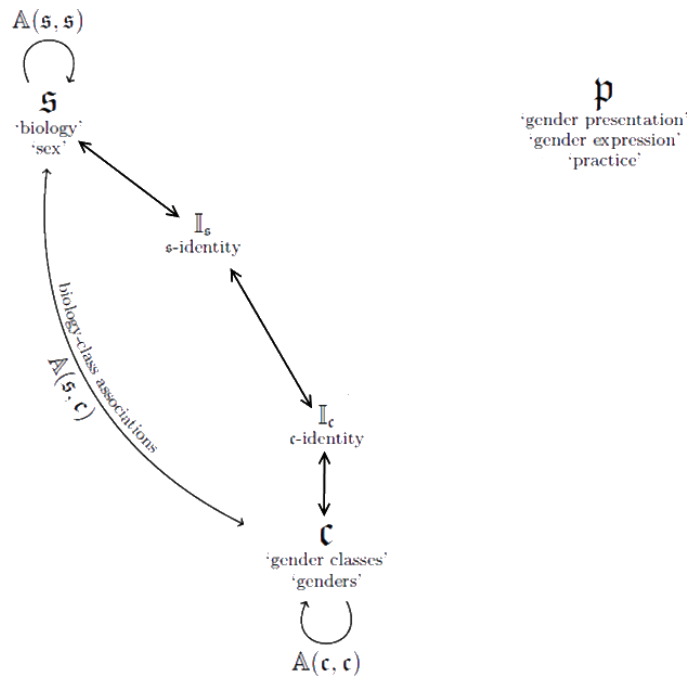
#### 4.2.1 Radical Feminism in the Taxonomy

Radical feminists solve the Problem of Transitivity by rejecting  $A(p,c)$  norms connecting category and practice. Radical feminists retain  $A(s,c)$  associations connecting biology and gender-category, e.g. women produce ova, males have testicles, etc. They do so because they believe that women are identified and thus oppressed on the assumption of their reproductive role. Babies are assigned membership in the subjugated “woman” gender-category on account of their genitals. If womanhood is detached from biology (or assumed biology), then issues relating to female reproductive roles (concerns such as contraception, abortion, tampon-taxes, childcare, etc.), can no longer be conceptualised as “women’s issues”. Therefore, they hold that correct analysis of patriarchal society recognises the existence of norms defining womanhood via reproductive biology.

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<sup>11</sup> Rejecting  $A(s,p)$  associations is implicitly trans-practice, because gender-practices are imposed on people on the basis of their sexed-biology.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Sheila Jeffreys (2014) and Janice Raymond (1994).



**Figure 4. Radical Feminism**

Many radical feminists see  $A(s,c)$  associations as being non-normative matters of definition – females are defined as those with certain biological features, and women are, by definition, adult females (Jeffreys, 2014; Reilly-Cooper, 2015). This definitional approach has been criticised for not accounting for the social aspects of womanhood (Bettcher, 2009; George & Briggs, 2016). A radical feminist may respond that they do account for such aspects, but that these aspects are what they are fighting to abolish. If traditionally feminine, subordinating practices are contained within the concept of womanhood, then there can be no free women. This approach has famously been taken by Haslanger (2012), but notably her use of “female” would similarly come under attack for not accounting for the social aspects of female-ness.

Anyhow, the radical feminists stipulating a definition of “woman” that tautologically determines the outcome of a political debate is suspicious, even when it is ostensibly “non-theoretical”. Radical feminists are better off staking a claim in the political debate, rather than pretending that it does not exist. It is most charitable towards radical feminism to understand the radical feminist

holding of  $A(s,c)$  as politically motivated: the motivation is addressing the connection between women's oppression and their reproductive biology, class consciousness must centre the means of reproduction. Many radical feminists aim to eventually dismantle gender-categories altogether, and thus create a wholly non-binary society:  $A(s,c)$  associations are pragmatically and temporarily advocated as a means towards this end. Until this end is met, radical feminists advocate a clear grasp on who is where in the gender class system, and they argue that this is determined on the basis of sexed-biology.

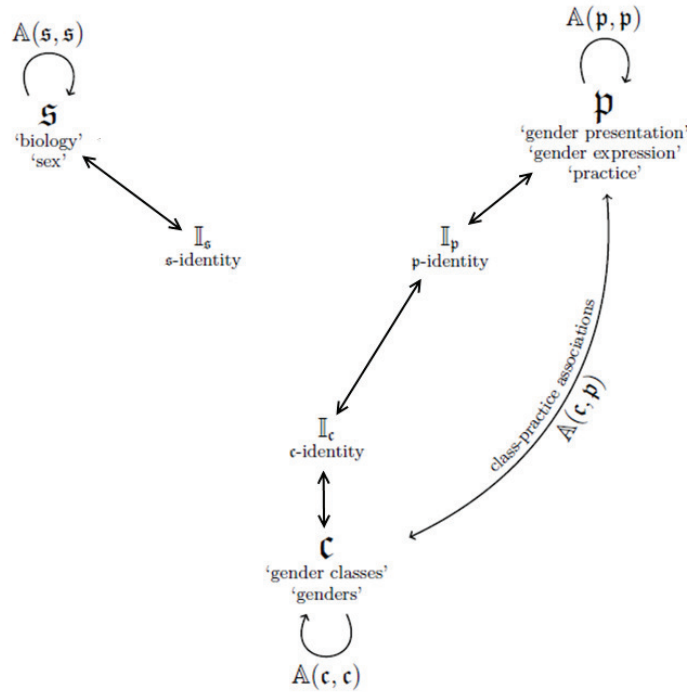
Radical feminism does not accommodate FPA about gender or the existence of non-binary genders. The only gender-categories to be recognised in their analysis are those imposed by society. So, as previously noted, radical feminism leads to misgendering. As we have reason to think that misgendering is problematic, we should attempt to find an alternative approach: FPA feminism.

#### **4.2.2 Associative FPA Feminism**

FPA feminism centres a norm of accepting gender-category self-identification, which is an  $A(I,c)$  norm. In order to respect trans self-identifications, all FPA feminists reject defining womanhood/manhood via  $A(s,c)$  sex-category associations.

It is *prima facie* plausible that for gender-categories to be politically meaningful, they must have some steady, politically potent attributes. As FPA feminists reject  $A(s,c)$  sex-category associations, some FPA feminists may accept practice-category norms  $A(p,c)$  and define "women" and "men" as categories demarcated by certain practices. Thus, they hold that men should be defined as those who (want to) act in a certain way, and women should be defined as those who (want to) act in a certain way. At their most extreme, they may conceptualise butch lesbians as trans men in denial, and effeminate gay men as trans women in denial (crashchaoscats, 2013). I call this position associative FPA feminism.





**Figure 5. Associative FPA Feminism**

Associative FPA feminism is the (arguably straw) position many radical feminists implicitly attribute to trans activists and FPA feminists. Some trans people have ostensibly endorsed this type of view autobiographically.<sup>13</sup> It is on the basis of associative FPA feminism that radical feminists make the first argument against non-binary identities that I will discuss.

Radical feminists argue that non-binary identities create a new binary between non-binary and binary gendered people (Cox, 2016; Reilly-Cooper, 2016). If, as associative FPA feminism holds, those who do not wholly subscribe to a binaristic gender practice should identify as non-binary, then those who identify with a singular, binary gender are normatively constrained by their identification with that gender. The non-binary category implies that *only* non-binary people may escape binary gender norms – everyone else must be a traditional man or woman. In particular, AFAB non-binary people have been thought to be motivated by an attempt to escape the oppressive norms of womanhood. If non binary people’s non-conformity with their assigned

<sup>13</sup> For example, Tyler Ford (2015) and Jack Monroe (2015).

sex/gender is not coupled with identification as that sex/gender, they do not challenge gender norms. Instead, non-binary identities multiply the number of gender-categories without challenging their normativity.

An associative FPA feminist may counter that they *are* feminist despite accepting  $A(p,c)$  norms. They avoid the Problem of Transitivity by rejecting sex-category associations, and therefore do not hold that sex dictates destiny. Thus associative FPA feminism allows anyone to do whatever they want, as long as they choose the correct category-identity. In an ideal associative FPA feminist world, AMAB people, intersex, and AFAB people are equally able to choose between male, female and non-binary gender-identities, and thus are free to live whatever lives they want, in whichever way they wish.

However, something about associative FPA feminism is not right. People are not allowed to simply live within their assigned gender while not conforming to it. In the associative FPA feminist world, one cannot unproblematically be a woman while simultaneously being a short haired, muscular welder. Such a person would contravene the  $A(p,c)$  norms dictating that women should be traditionally feminine. If we are to believe (as many FPA feminists do) that gender-identities are not entirely voluntary, this is obviously problematic. Either people must opt for gender-identities that conflict with the one they actually feel comfortable with, or live up to norms that they may not affirm. Such an approach would misgender those who are trans-practice but not trans-category, such as butch women. Hence, associative FPA feminism doesn't fulfil its aims: it does not accept people's category-identities, come what may.

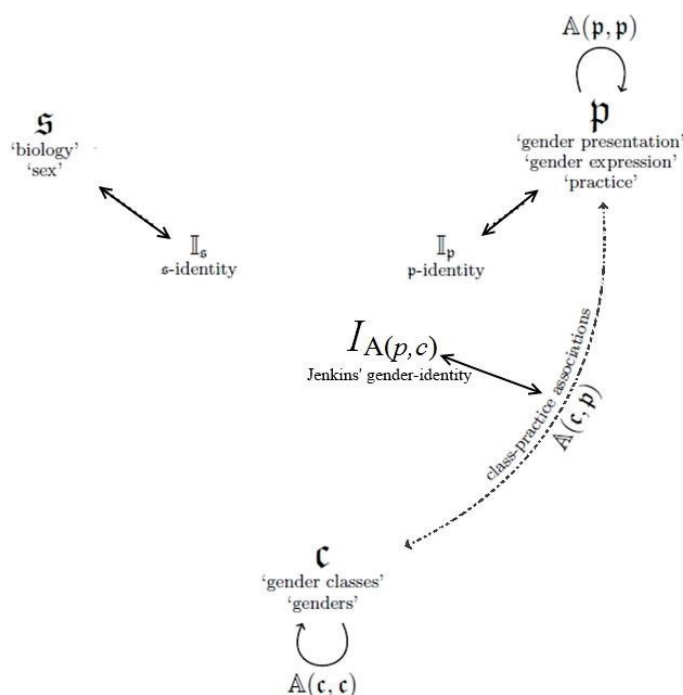
In response to the radical feminist argument, it is notable that non-binary people are likely aware that "coming out" will increase their tension with prevalent gender norms, rather than ease their lives under the patriarchy. Additionally, some non-binary people report not feeling "trans enough", and therefore feel they are failing to uphold norms associated with *their* genders (Vincent, 2016). It seems that being non-binary is not a way of escaping gender roles, as non-binary people may still feel constrained by certain gendered expectations. These points illustrate that associative FPA feminism is flawed, but also that the radical feminist argument against non-binary identities is misguided.

### 4.2.3 Jenkins' FPA Feminism

While some trans people may define their category-identities via association with their gender-practice, this is not a necessary facet of being trans. Some non-binary people practice gender in a seemingly cisgender fashion, e.g. there are non-binary AMAB people who dress in a masculine way. One's gender-identity and practice may diverge: a trans man, by which I mean someone who is AFAB and identifies as male, may dress and act in a traditionally feminine manner.

Associative FPA feminism is not the only conceivable FPA feminism. Katharine Jenkins (2016) argues that we should understand gender-identity to be a person's recognition that certain practice-category norms are applicable to them, even if they choose to reject those norms. For example, someone has a woman's gender-identity, in part, if they understand the norm that women should shave their legs to apply to them, even if they choose to reject it. Therefore, Jenkins allows for people to act in ways that are not traditionally associated with their gender-identity. Additionally, Jenkins argues that it is best to categorise people on the basis of their gender-identity, so her feminism is a kind of FPA feminism.

While Jenkins rejects  $A(p,c)$ ,  $A(s,c)$  and  $A(s,p)$  norms, her notion of gender-identity recognises the current existence of  $A(p,c)$  norms. Her notion of gender-identity is  $I_{A(p,c)}$ , i.e. an identification with a practice-category norm.



**Figure 6. Jenkins' FPA Feminism<sup>14</sup>**

However, there are problems with Jenkins' approach. According to Jenkins, a trans woman has a female gender-identity if she understands certain dominant cultural norms to apply to her. However, an essential element of these norms' content is *who* the norms are applicable to. The norms do not dictate that anyone should do *x*, but rather that some specific people should do *x*. As Bettcher (2007; 2009) notes in an argument Jenkins' theory relies on, in mainstream society "women" is elliptical for "people with vaginas". Norms directed at "women" by mainstream society are actually directed at those with vaginas. Therefore, a trans woman would be incorrect in understanding such norms to apply to them, regardless of their preferred gender-category. In accordance with mainstream practices, the target of the norm is individuated on account of their biology, not their self-conception. Jenkins' analysis, against her intentions, implies that there is something incorrect about trans gender-identities: the trans person who thinks that a norm directed at "women" refers to them has simply not understood the norm properly. This is problematic because FPA feminists do not wish to label

<sup>14</sup> This model is intended to *only* illustrate Jenkins' notion of gender-identity, and nothing about her understanding of other norms, gender-class or sex.

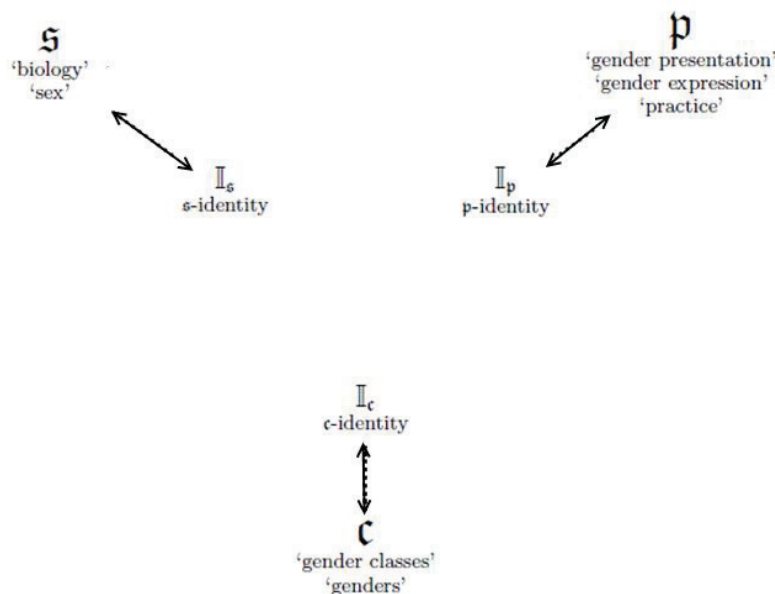
trans gender-identities as being incorrect – this would be a version of what Bettcher (2009) calls the “Basic Denial of Authenticity” (p.99), a fundamental form of transphobia.

Ignoring this, the association between category membership and practice in Jenkins’ account remains troublingly important. The account implies that the radical feminists’ argument in §4.2.2, that non-binary genders strengthen gender norms, is correct. If gender-identity is about gender norms in the way Jenkins argues, then becoming non-binary is a legitimate way to escape restrictive norms. And if becoming non-binary is the best way to escape such norms, then AFAB non-binary people really are throwing women “under the bus”, by identifying-out of the oppressed “women” category, instead of collectively counteracting those norms (Cox, 2016).

Furthermore, Jenkins’ analysis makes gender-identities dependant on  $A(p,c)$  practice-category norms. This means that without  $A(p,c)$  norms, which we have shown to be problematic, there is no gender-identity. So gender-identities are dependent on sexism. This is an unnecessarily strong claim, and a notion of gender-identity without this baggage would be preferable.

#### **4.2.4 Dissociative FPA Feminism**

Jenkins takes us just short of dissociative FPA feminism, which holds that gender-category and category-identity should be completely unrelated to gender-practice (Reading, 2014). Dissociative FPA feminism holds that gender-categories, e.g. “women”, “men” and “non-binary”, should not be demarcated on the basis of biology or practice: being a woman, man or non-binary person implies nothing about your biology, how you dress, or how you act. In terms of the taxonomy, it rejects inter-node associations between category, sex, and practice. It also rejects reflexive practice-practice, category-category and sex-sex associations, *and* the inter-identity associations between category-identity, sex-identity and practice-identity.



**Figure 7. Dissociative FPA Feminism**

The only prescribed associations are  $A(c, I_c)$ ,  $A(s, I_s)$  and  $A(p, I_p)$ , connecting nodes to their corresponding identities. These associations allow for norms supporting trans-practice, trans-sex and trans-category people. Under dissociative FPA feminism, being part of a gender-category has nothing to do with reproductive organs, clothing preferences or societal roles, and identifying yourself as part of a gender-category doesn't involve advocating any specific sets of norms about that category (other than  $A(I_c, c)$  ones).

Notably, *completely* ruling out  $A(p, c)$  norms is not practical for FPA feminism. FPA about gender-categories necessitates *some* category-practice norms. These norms connect categorisation with public self-identification, e.g. saying "I am a woman", or asking for non-binary pronouns. I take these elements of practice to be the minimal real-world manifestations of gender-category. I will speak of retaining *only* these minimal category-practice associations as equivalent to rejecting category-practice associations.

## **5. Radical Critiques of Dissociative FPA Feminism**

There are several criticisms radical feminists would likely aim towards dissociative FPA feminism (Cox, 2016; Reilly-Cooper, 2016). I will outline them here, before presenting an approach that aims to pacify these concerns: radical FPA feminism.

### **5.1 What are genders?**

If categories are not governed by norms connecting them to sex or practice, then in what sense are they “genders”? There are many different ways to categorise people, and, seemingly, gender-categories should have something to do with sex. If “non-binary”, “women” and “men” are not categories on the basis of biology or practice, it is hard to understand why we should consider them genders, or how they cohere into politically important groups at all. Categories cannot be defined by self-identification alone or they will fall victim to logical regress (Bettcher, 2009).

### **5.2 Innateness and Phenomenology**

According to dissociative FPA feminism, having a certain category-identity implies nothing about biological sexual characteristics, or about the acceptance or rejection of masculine/feminine gender practices. So what *is* the claim to a non-binary, male or female category-identity about? Some non-binary or trans people may explain or justify their gender-identity by stating that they do not “feel” like either a man or a woman. This problematically implies that all men and women “feel” a certain way. Radical feminists are sceptical of internal senses of essential gender, and are sceptical of claims that it is normal to be comfortable with one’s assigned gender. Similarly, some trans people claim that their gender-identity is innate, ostensibly implying that everyone has an innate gender-identity (Cohen, 2017). If this is true, then it seems to justify differences between genders, and thus the oppressive patriarchal system. Additionally, some radical feminists hold that any scientific basis for innate gender has been debunked (Fine, 2011).

### **5.3 Political Importance of Biology**

Reproduction divides humans into at least two arguably-vague-but-distinguishable groups and radical feminists argue that sex-based categorisation

is the foundation of the patriarchy. Thus an effective feminism cannot shy away from the importance of sexed-biology to women's oppression (Reilly-Cooper, 2015). Dissociative FPA feminism erases the ability for radical feminists to organise women on the basis of sex, and thereby leaves women unable to group together on the basis of the cause of their oppression. By removing the relationship between biology and gender-categories, dissociative FPA feminism obscures the fundamental axis of patriarchal oppression, muddying the waters for anyone wishing to tackle it. Only with a clear grasp on who is oppressing (i.e. "biological men"), who is oppressed (i.e. "biological women") and the means by which they are differentiated (i.e. their reproductive biology) can feminist aims be fully realised.

#### **5.4 Ethical Motivations**

If dissociative FPA feminism is correct, it seems that people want to be in arbitrary categories, for arbitrary reasons. If nothing defines the boundaries of "woman", "non-binary" or "man", why should we concern ourselves with who we verbally place in each category? Considering that radical feminists connect the word "woman" to female biology for legitimate, political reasons (i.e. because women's oppression happens on the basis of that biology), can FPA feminism be justified in brushing the radical feminist definition aside? It seems there must be some ethical motivation for choosing an FPA conception of gender over the radical one, especially as I have chosen the achievement of feminist ends to be a key desiderata in theory selection.

### **6. Radical FPA Feminism**

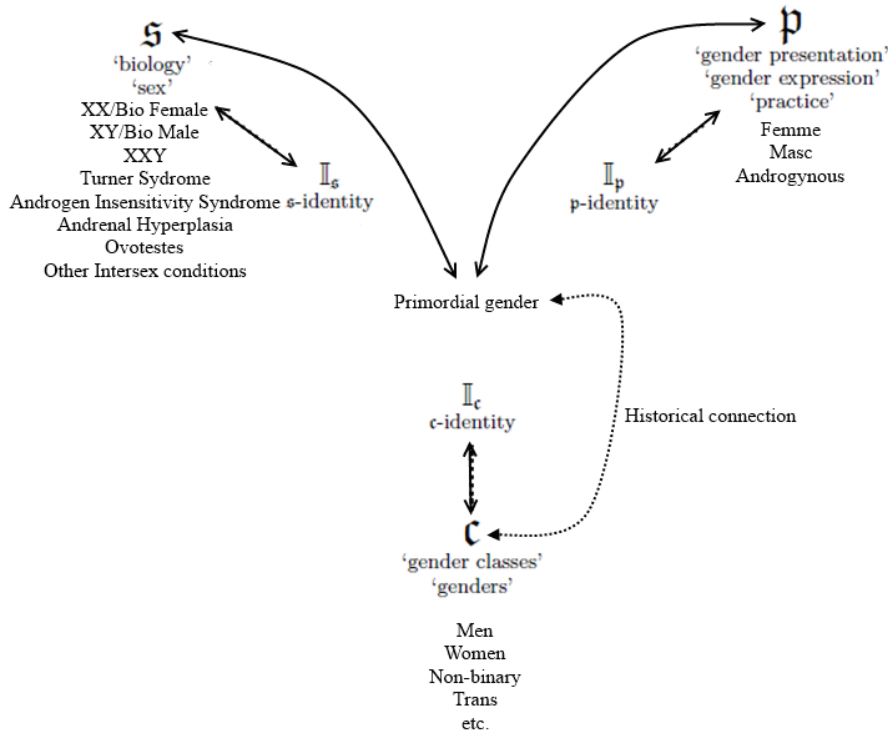
Here I give a brief outline of radical FPA feminism, which develops on dissociative FPA feminism in order to address the radical feminist worries.

#### **6.1 Categories are Historical**

We can demarcate gender-categories meaningfully, even without using normative or definitional relationships with practice or sex. B.R. George and R.A. Briggs (2016) have argued that categories such as "women", "men" and "non-binary" are genders due to their *historic* relation to sex-based categories. They argue that there are two Primordial Genders, with membership based on perceived sexed-biology. Our current binaristic gender-categories should be



considered to be Historical Genders, descending from these Primordial Genders. While the Primordial Genders have necessary conditions for membership on the basis of (perceived) biology, the Historical Genders that correspond to our gender-categories need not. Additionally, they need not have any necessary conditions for membership: the categories are individuated via their histories. Non-binary categories can be understood as Symbiotic Genders, which are categories defined primarily in terms of Historical Genders.



**Figure 8. Radical FPA Feminism**

Contra Briggs and George, radical FPA feminism demarcates gender-categories as those descended from Primordial Genders that are defined in relation to *both* perceived sexed-biology *and* gender-practice. Otherwise, non-human animals may have gender-categories. Additionally, this allows historic sex-based subjugation to be a defining element of the Primordial Genders. It is notable that this conceptualisation of gender is only broadly relevant for western cultures, as arguably some non-western societies have ancient non-Primordial Genders. Anyhow, to be a woman, man, or non-binary person today in the west, according to radical FPA feminism, is to be part of a historically individuated

gender-category, historically related to sex and practice. As the gender-categories do not have necessary conditions for membership, they allow for FPA.

Gender-categories under radical FPA feminism are politically potent. There are material circumstances connecting all self-identified women or non-binary people – ones that arise from identifying yourself as part of a historically individuated category. For example, the internalisation of stereotypes may affect all people self-identified with a particular gender (McKinnon, 2014).

It seems plausible that if all  $A(p,c)$  and  $A(s,c)$  associations are not only rejected, but also fade from memory, these categories would disappear. Unlike Jenkins' account, radical FPA feminism is not committed to this supposition, but it is compatible with it.

## 6.2 Innateness and Phenomenology

Radical FPA feminism is not committed to holding that gender-identities are innate or phenomenally distinct. Someone's gender-identity, at any one time, is simply their preference about which gender-category they would like to be identified as, at that time. Radical FPA feminism holds that we should, in general, treat people as being members of the gender-category they would like to be identified as.<sup>15</sup>

It is worth noting that many trans people have used narratives of innateness or "feelings" in order to legitimise their identities to the outside world (Stone, 1991). Such claims are somewhat dependent on the transphobic societies they take place within. Many trans people are critical of claims to innate gender-identities, and innate gender is not implied by trans or non-binary category-identities (Bettcher, 2014; Reed, 2013). Some people move between holding non-binary and binary category-identities, and so they would not claim innate or essential gender-identities (Vincent, 2016). Anyhow, beliefs in innate gender-identities are not particular to non-binary/trans people, cisgender people may hold that their gender-identity is innate. Thus, singling out non-binary people for holding this belief, or non-binary identities for propagating this belief, is suspect.

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<sup>15</sup> Whether one's gender-category membership is constituted by or dependant on this preference is a metaphysical question that I am not presently able to explore. Rather, this embryonic version of radical FPA feminism merely instructs us to treat people according to their preference.

Claims about “feeling” like/unlike a gender are epistemically unwarranted and politically unhelpful if taken literally. However, often such claims metaphorically communicate that a person does not feel *comfortable being described as* or *referred to as being* a woman/man. Rather than implying a widespread phenomenology of gender, such claims are about an individual’s reaction to a society’s particular gendering of them. The discomfort many cis people feel towards their gender is different: it is to do with the norms imposed on their category, not the gender-categorisation itself.

### **6.3 Practice-Based and Sex-Based Kinds**

In order to combat sex-based oppression, our language must be able to reflect sexual dimorphism. Additionally, grouping those with similar behaviours (e.g. effeminate people) may be useful in various struggles against oppression. While radical FPA feminism holds that gender-categories such as “women”, “men” and “non-binary” must not be defined in terms of sex or practice, it groups people who share biological or behavioural traits. I will call these groups “kinds”. According to my definition of gender-categories in §6.1, these behavioural and biological kinds are not gender-categories, because they do not have links to *both* sex and gender.

It may seem that we should use “male”/”female” to refer to biological kinds, and “women”/”men” to refer to cultural kinds. This is unsatisfactory. “Male”/”female” and “women”/”men” are too linguistically intertwined for this kind of division of language to be graceful. “Woman” is defined as adult female; “man” is defined as adult male. Many sentences are rendered clumsy if the division takes place in this way, because “female” and “male” are taken to be adjectival counterparts to “woman” and “man”. The central concern of radical FPA feminism is for these gender-categories to *not* be associated with practice or biology, so we must find different means of categorisation. Here I will make some brief remarks about potential kinds.

Within the queer community, people who identify with traditionally feminine modes of practice are referred to (and often identify as) “femmes”, regardless of their biology or gender-category. Such classificatory tools would be useful in wider discourse – allowing us to describe those exemplifying a cluster of gender-practices without implying anything more. “Masc” is the opposing binary

label, and “feminine” and “masculine” the appropriate adjectives. Non-binararistic kinds must also be conceptualised. A kind such as “androgynous” is a starting point, but may be deemed inadequate for categorising all manifestations of non-binaristic behaviour. There are complex differences between some non-binary gender-categories, i.e. some are not merely on a spectrum between male and female but instead completely reject the spectrum. Analogously, “androgynous” indicates a set of behaviour on a scale between masculinity and femininity, so in order to conceptualise behaviour that does not fit on this scale more non-binary behavioural kinds may be necessary.

If we accept the radical feminist assumption about female oppression, we need a way of categorizing those with wombs, vaginas, and XX chromosomes, and their XY and intersex counterparts.<sup>16</sup> Possibilities include “biological females”, “female-bodied”, “female-read”, “AFAB”, “natal females”, “XX people”, and “vagina/womb-havers”. Each of these have pros and cons. Retention of “female” as a component part allows a neater, more practical continuation with current linguistic practices. However, such options are misleading. The terms “male” and “female” belong to a supposedly unrelated node of the gender taxonomy, i.e. gender-category. As I am holding that “male” and “female” should *not* be understood to be about biology, it is not clear what such phrases would even mean. According to radical FPA feminism, being AFAB or biologically/natally female implies nothing about whether someone is female. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, many trans people reject such labels (Yamaguchi, 2016).

Alternatively, there are the biology-referencing options, such as labelling one group “XX” or “uterus/vagina-havers”, another “XY” or “penis/testicles-havers”, with a number of intersex categories for those who have atypical chromosomes, genitals, or combinations thereof. However, some radical feminists have held that naming those with female sexual characteristics anything other than “female” is erasure, and that radical feminists’ self-identification as “female” (understood biologically) should be respected (Reilly-Cooper, 2015). As a result, it may seem that the “female” related labels may be better after all.

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<sup>16</sup> I take “intersex” to include trans-sex people who have medically transitioned in some way.

Puzzlingly, different kinds may be more suitable in specific contexts. “AFAB” and “female-read” recognises the social salience of other people’s categorizing judgements. “Biologically female” indicates that people are being grouped on the same basis as other organisms: reproductive biology.<sup>17</sup> In most contexts, however, it should be accepted that “female” refers to a historically individuated gender-category. I am not able to conclusively name sex-based kinds here: more research must be done to find appropriate labels.

As radical feminists argue, these kinds are politically significant. Those in (or assumed to be in) the “biologically female”, “XX” or various intersex kinds are systematically disadvantaged by the patriarchy. Those falling within these kinds have the right to organise amongst themselves and seek justice.

#### **6.4 Ethical Motivations**

There are many moral justifications for feminists to adopt radical FPA feminism. Radical FPA feminism is motivated towards fighting the oppression of both trans people and women. We have ethical reasons for accepting gender self-identifications, as explored in §2.1, which radical FPA feminism allows us to do. Additionally, radical FPA feminism enables us to meet central radical feminist concerns, and pointedly take on sex-based oppression. With radical FPA feminism we are able to avoid the conflation of sex-based oppression with oppression based on practice or category, and also able to understand oppressions stemming from specific gender combinations (e.g. the oppression faced by masc, AMAB, XY women or femme, AFAB, XX men). Furthermore, radical FPA feminism allows us to recognise that sex-based oppression historically precedes, is somehow more fundamental than, and/or causes the other gender-based oppressions, without having to define gender-categories via sex.

Furthermore, radical FPA feminism creates an obstacle for sex-based discrimination by removing the traditional properties of gender-categories. If cis women are subjugated on their assumption of their biology, making it so that one cannot tell one’s biology on the basis of one’s dress, name, pronouns, or stated

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<sup>17</sup> As an anonymous reviewer has suggested, this may have major implications on feminist theory and practice. For example, it would be pertinent for feminists to redress the oppression of biological females of other species (e.g. dairy cows), regardless of ethical attitudes towards non-human animals more generally.

gender, as per Bettcher, would plausibly make such discrimination more difficult (Bettcher, 2009). Increasing the numbers of women biologically unable to bear children (and the numbers of non-women able to bear children) strikes a blow to the organising logic of the patriarchal system. For example, in a radical FPA feminist society, if one wished to discriminate against those who may become pregnant, one would not be able to do so easily on the basis of dress, pronouns, stated gender, etc.

We can see radical FPA feminism as a potential step towards completely abolishing gender - a goal that many non-binary people, binary trans people, and radical feminists share in common. By ridding gender-categories of all-but-historical associations, they are able to potentially become obsolete. Therefore, radical FPA feminism can be considered part of the central radical feminist program of completely breaking the gender system. Radical FPA feminism is able to have a sex-based analysis of female oppression whilst simultaneously refusing to use the sex-based categorisations in day-to-day life. Additionally, radical FPA feminism is an affront to the compulsory heterosexuality that underpins the patriarchal order. The patriarchal promotion of heterosexuality is dependent on “men” and “women” being defined along reproductive lines.

Radical FPA feminism has further strengths. We can conceptualise the oppressive norm to have conformity between the three nodes and identities as *gender conformism*. Gender conformism is the combination of inter-node associations between category, sex, and practice, *and* the inter-identity associations between category-identity, sex-identity and practice-identity. Gender conformism leads to many problems within mainstream society, as well as leading both radical and associative FPA feminism to misgender people. Gender conformism leads to the marginalisation and invalidation of non-binary people, trans people, butch women and effeminate men alike. Gender conformism is toxic for both cisgender and trans people – enforcing masculinity on men and femininity on women. Trans and non-trans feminists alike should unite to tackle it.

Additionally, instead of only being able to discuss “male privilege”, “binary privilege”, and “cis privilege”, radical FPA feminists are able to discuss “AMAB privilege”, “cis-sex privilege”, “cis-practice privilege”, “cis-category privilege”,

“male biology privilege”, “manhood privilege”, “masculine privilege”, and “conformist privilege”. These are connected but distinguishable, and deserve individuated feminist scrutiny. Radical FPA feminism is uniquely placed to reject problematic gender conformist norms and analyse each of the above privileges, while simultaneously appreciating the historical connection between sexed-biology, gender-practice and gender-category.

## **7 Conclusion**

If we are to take seriously both a radical feminist analysis of female oppression and a norm of gender self-identification, the most plausible route is radical FPA feminism. I have explored a potential solution to this longstanding rift in feminist thought with the hope that trans and non-binary identities need not be untenable to those with radical feminist aims and methods.

There are, however, many alternative avenues to be explored. Indeed, it may seem that my solution has failed both radical and the FPA feminists. Radical feminists may take issue with gender-categories no longer being defined by their most politically salient features, i.e. practice and sex. FPA feminists may take issue with self-identification being unauthoritative for the (more politically salient) sex-based and practice-based kinds. Exploring these, and other, limitations of radical FPA feminism is beyond the scope of this paper. However, if radical FPA feminism is found to be overly problematic, we may have grounds for rejecting the radical feminist analysis and/or gender self-identification. If so, radical FPA feminism is akin to (for want of a less patriarchal allegory) King Solomon chopping the baby in half: if the result is untenably repugnant, then maybe one of those fighting for the proverbial baby should relent.

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