Debating Gender Eliminativism in Feminist Metaphysics

by

Eloy Francisco Rodriguez LaBrada

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Philosophy

University of Alberta

Abstract

In this thesis, I give critical consideration to *gender eliminativism,* or the metaphysical view that gender (in a sense to be specified) is unreal and/or the normative view that gender (in a sense to be specified) ought to be purged from our social dealings. I evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of eliminativist proposals for contemporary feminist theory and activism (with particular implications for scientific and healthcare contexts). I ask whether, and why, a certain theory of gender eliminativism and practice of gender abolitionism might ever be serviceable for feminist purposes: In which contexts *might* eliminativism be effective as a "regulative ideal" for our theorizing and acting (and why)? In which contexts *would* it be normatively important to endorse eliminativism (and about what)? In short, were we to endorse eliminativism, which kind of eliminativism should—and could—we? While I contend that the metaphysical component of eliminativism is philosophically question-begging and politically impractical, I float the idea that the *normative* component of eliminativism—called "abolitionism"—might be defensible as a "regulative ideal" for some feminist theorizing about gender talk (Hussein). Following what Sally Haslanger calls an "ameliorative approach," I suggest that understanding gender eliminativism/abolitionism in terms of our "pragmatic" political objectives—rather than in terms of their conceptual or metaphysical truth—might yield a resource for feminist theorizing and activism.

A plausible, defensible version of eliminativism/abolitionism, I argue, would center on selective contexts and particular manifestations of hetero- and cissexist, *objectifying* gender talk and habit (Butler, Bettcher). In Chapter One I show why metaphysical eliminativism is philosophically implausible on conceptual grounds. In Chapter Two I demonstrate why metaphysical eliminativism sheds no light on the normative and ethical considerations any study of gender must include. In Chapter Three I explore how a regulative, normative, and abolitionist version of eliminativism could

be plausible and useful in a medical, health-care context in the service of precluding trans*exclusion. I substantiate the claim forwarded by Matthew Andler and Talia Bettcher that, in a medical context, it is not always requisite to gender bodily organs, even while acknowledging physical differences (e.g. we can say that this "person" "has ovaries" without saying "this *woman* has ovaries," to avoid cissexism). A part of the thesis is thus "deconstructive," showing why metaphysical eliminativism is unjustified, while the other is "reconstructive," examining the kind of normative eliminativism or abolitionism which might be defensible, if not useful.

Preface

Select portions of the Introduction, Chapter One, Chapter Two, and Chapter Three originally appeared in abridged and altered form in LaBrada, Eloy. 2016a. "Categories We Die For: Ameliorating Gender in Analytic Feminist Philosophy," *PMLA* 131 (2): 449-459 and LaBrada, Eloy. 2016b. "Unsexing Subjects: Marie de Gournay's Philosophy of Sex Eliminativism." In Claudia Brodsky and Eloy LaBrada, eds. *Inventing Agency: Essays on the literary and philosophical production of the modern subject*. New York: Bloomsbury. 51-79. Some formulations of eliminativist and fictionalist claims reprise phrasings originally appearing in abbreviated, altered form in LaBrada, Eloy. 2016c. "Unlivable Loves: Hélisenne, Nietzsche, and the Metaphysics of Love." *JNT* 46 (1): 1-38.

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my profound gratitude to Dr. Cressida Heyes for her supervision of this project, for her incisive commentary, and for her professional guidance. Dr. Chloë Taylor deserves my heartfelt thanks for her exceptional collegiality and wisdom, as does Dr. Marie-Eve Morin for her counsel and support. The scholarship and mentorship of these philosophers have both inspired and clarified my thinking about feminist ontology and meta-ontology. Dr. Taylor in particular has shown me what it is to be a mentor: both professionally and personally, I would never have survived here without her consistent support, aid, and teaching. Stephanie "Eeden" Dover, my friend and colleague, made the trip to this frozen tundra worth the while: I continue to learn from, and enjoy, the philosophy and practice of questioning gender that this "top-shelf human" undertakes.

This work was funded by a Recruitment Scholarship from the Department of Philosophy. I have Dr. Amy Schmitter to thank, both for the award and for supporting my candidacy all throughout. I would also like to thank the Department of Women's and Gender Studies for which I was both a visiting scholar and contract instructor. I am especially grateful to Dr. Taylor's assistance in obtaining the visiting scholar position and for her unwavering encouragement. The students of my Fall 2016 seminar on social ontology and the philosophy of gender and sexuality (WGS440: "Body Politics") are also deserving of my warmest thanks for their insights, curiosity, and enthusiasm. Dr. Catherine Kellogg also offered insightful, intelligent critique as well as precious aid when it was most needed.

For sharing their drafts and forthcoming material, I'd like to thank Christine Overall, Rima Hussein, Marguerite Deslauriers, Charlotte Witt, and Esther Rosario. I owe special thanks to Christine for discussing the philosophy of gender with me, to Margot Challborn and Renee McBeth for our discussions regarding gender and politics, and to Esther for our discussions concerning Roughgarden and sex concepts in biology.

For their magnanimity, care, and "soul sustenance," I wish to thank Helena María Viramontes, Carolyn Marie Sinsky, Stephanie Dover, Eloy Rodriguez, Jane Wiley, Genevieve Arlie, Xavier Fontaine, Daniel Hoffman, and Timothy DeMay. To borrow from Judith Butler: this work, as all my work, is for you, as this writing, and this writer, "could never be without you."

Table of Contents

0. Introduction

0.1 Feminist Ontology

Contemporary analytic work on the ontology of gender has explored "what grounds gender"—that is, what social and metaphysical dependence relations must be in place for something like gender to be what it "is" (Griffith forthcoming; Jenkins 2016b; Schaffer 2016; Mikkola 2016b, 2015b; Barnes 2014; Haslanger 2012, forthcoming; Ásta Sveinsdóttir 2013; Witt 2011; Haslanger and Ásta 2011).[1] Broadly construed, these feminist metaphysical investigations have sought to explain in virtue of what gender "is," or in what gender "consists," by asking whether gender has an essence or not (Witt 2010 and 2011; Ásta 2013; Mason 2016; Griffith forthcoming); whether gender "ontologically depends" solely on "social conventions" or not (Mikkola 2011; Butler 1999; Bach 2012, 235); whether gender is elected by free will or predetermined by biology or culture (Behrensen 2013); whether there are necessary conditions, gerrymandered traits, or assemblages of family-resembling features that dictate or direct the application of gender concepts (Witt 2011, 13n1; Stoljar 2011; Heyes 2000); and what establishes the nature of "structural," "systematic" gendered injustice and its "wrongfulness" against gendered groups (Mikkola 2016b; Barnes 2016b; Taylor 2016). Feminist meta-metaphysics, for its part, has asked what feminist philosophy can contribute to meta-ontology and social ontology (Mikkola 2015b, 2016d; Barnes 2014), as well as what political usefulness and relevance, if any, these first-order metaphysical debates have: do these debates just constitute "theoretical bookkeeping," as Stoljar (2011) puts it, or do they constitute a grave diversion from "effective feminist politics," as Mikkola phrases it (2007, 2009)?

Recently, one theory that has impacted the critical scene in feminist ontology and meta-ontology is that of *gender eliminativism,* or the metaphysical view that gender (in a sense to be

[1] Other questions concern whether gender is fixed or whether one can change genders over time (Gilbert 2009; Overall 2016, 12); whether gender is intrinsic or essential (Witt 2010; Witt 2011); whether there is any free will in choosing or eschewing gender (de Beauvoir 1970; Overall 2003); whether gender exists agent-relatively or exhibits mind-independent reality (Butler 1999, 1993; Ásta 2011; Haslanger 2012); whether there might be many genders or no genders (Barnes 2014, 343; Gilbert 2009); whether there are gender "facts" or gendered "states of affairs" that obtain and why (Mikkola 2016b; Thompson 2014); whether gender terms actually, "aptly," or "correctly" refer to gender facts or not (Saul 2012); whether gender is a mereological sum, a disjunctive miscellany of parts, or a composite whole (Witt 2011; Barnes 2016; Mikkola 2016b); whether gender is caused or constituted by nature or nurture, whether there are any membership conditions for belonging to gender for realist or antirealist reasons (Mikkola 2016a and 2016b, 42; Spelman 1988); and whether gender concepts are aptly picking out or "marking off" gender kinds (Mikkola 2007, 2016b; Stoljar 1995). Eliminativism and abolitionism, which concern me here, ask whether gender exists at all and if so (or if not) whether it ought to be expunged [Wittig 1992]).

specified) is unreal and/or the normative view that gender (in a sense to be specified) ought to be purged from our social dealings (Bauer 2011, 119; Mikkola 2011). The metaphysical view assumes that gender is wholly an ideological effect or an illusory fiction (a result of our misguided beliefs that something like gender exists [ibid and Haslanger 2012, 152-3 on Wittig and Butler]), while the normative view assumes that gender is constitutively "hierarchical" and "harmful" (so it ought to be vaporized [Overall 2016; Haslanger 2012]). Already this theory—or array of theories—faces a conceptual difficulty: if gender is metaphysically unreal or nonexistent (i.e. gender doesn't "actually" exist, we only misconceive that it does), then how can gender also be constitutively hierarchical and harmful? That is, how can something that is purportedly unreal and nonexistent also be that which retains "real" properties and effects (like being harmful and hierarchical)? Wouldn't gender have to minimally exist in the world in order for it to be eliminable or excisable, thus rendering the metaphysical view incoherent? And, second, this view faces a political worry: if gender is fundamentally unreal, then wouldn't this imply that there is nothing to get rid of since gender doesn't in fact exist, thus rendering the normative incoherent? All of this would seem to throw the eliminativist view out of court. At the same time, the metaphysical and normative elements of this view have been backed by many feminist philosophers, raising the question as to whether there might be something salvageable for "pragmatic" purposes in the cluster of views denominated as "eliminativist": which version of eliminativism, if any, might be philosophically plausible and politically practical (Mikkola 2016b, Overall 2016)?

In this thesis, I consider those feminist theories called "eliminativist" (either due to their metaphysical commitments or due to their normative implications), and I evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of eliminativist proposals for contemporary feminist activism (with particular implications for scientific and healthcare contexts). My purpose is not to devise or discover an eliminativist theory that would be metaphysically "true." Rather, I want to query whether, and why, a certain theory of gender eliminativism and practice of gender abolitionism might ever be normatively *useful*.[2] My questions are: what *would* get eliminativism off the ground? In which

[2] Here I am following a methodological point forwarded by Kate McGowan (2005) who, when analyzing MacKinnon, states: "I am not interested in arguing for the *truth* of MacKinnon's constructionist claims…I aim only to show both that and how her claims *could be* true" (23). I am also endorsing (as I explain later) Haslanger's "ameliorative" approach, "not [to] capture what we do mean [by gender], but how we might usefully revise what we mean for certain theoretical and political purposes" (Haslanger 2012, 224), which deals with "the pragmatics of our talk." In many

contexts *might* eliminativism be effective as a "regulative ideal" for our theorizing and acting (and why)? In which contexts *would* it be normatively important to endorse eliminativism (and about what)? In short, were we to "pragmatically" utilize eliminativism, which kind of eliminativism should—and *could*—we vouch for (Mikkola 20110, 2016b)?

While I argue that the metaphysical component of eliminativism is philosophically question-begging and politically impractical, I float the idea that a more modest, context-dependent and pragmatic variation of its *normative* component—called "abolitionism"—might be defensible as a "regulative ideal" for some feminist theorizing about gender talk (Hussein MS). This is very similar to what Haslanger calls an "ameliorative approach," according to which we don't ask "what is gender, really?" but query "what, if anything, we want [it] to be," based on our objectives for realizing social justice (2012, 246).[3] Taking my cue from Haslanger and Rima Hussein, I argue that gender eliminativism and abolitionism might be plausibly *amelioratively* reformulated as a regulative ideal. On my fictionalist reworking of Kant's formulation, a regulative ideal does not assume that it presents a set of concepts and states of affairs as they really or truly are, but proceeds "*as if*" the concepts and states of affairs are as the theory presents them, in order to make headway in theoretical explanation and practical action (Madva and Gasdaglis MS). One proceeds "*as if*" the theory's posits were true, for the worldly state of affairs that the theory purports to limn and explain might always remain fundamentally vague, might diverge from how it is conceived in the theory, or might even turn out to be ultimately "unknowable" by the theory (cited in Friedman 1992, 73; Hussein MS).[4] Regulative ideals operate *as if* the world is as it appears to us within the terms of the theory, but they do not claim to represent the world as it "really" is in and of itself. Hence, we can proceed *as though* the theory were descriptively true and its concepts apt, either for

---

ways, my "pragmatic" focus falls within Richard Rorty's call to privilege "solidarity" (questions of ethics and community) over "objectivity" (questions of metaphysical realism and "truth" [1979, 1991, 2010]).

[3] Hussein describes "regulative ideals" thus: "The talk of a *regulative* metaphysical claim is borrowed from Kant's solution to unknowability scenarios. Like in the case of the Kantian antinomies, our situation does not allow for any certainty in assuming that our gender concepts can represent the subject of feminism. Both the idea that our concepts should aim toward full inclusion of an already given set of people and the idea that our concept undercuts the representation of this set of people are defensible but unproven positions" (MS, 19). I am following Hussein's (as well as Madva's and Gasdalis') call to conceptualize some feminist insights as regulative ideals (hers is intersectionality, mine is eliminativism).

[4] These are Kant's words, cited in Friedman (1992, 73): "[a regulative idea] indicates, not how an object is constituted, but rather how we, under its guidance, are *to seek* the constitution and connection of the objects of experience in general."

motivational reasons (to spur normative action and inspire affective engagement), or for explanatory ones (to more clearly conceptualize a given problem and clarify our political aims [Haslanger 2016b; Hussein MS]).

When applied to the matter at hand, I will suggest that we will be unable to irrefragably ascertain whether eliminativist metaphysical theories of gender are veridical about the ultimate nature of gender—and, indeed, it probably doesn't matter one way or the other (Mikkola 2016b). For we can still pursue what can be done with some kind of idea of normative eliminativism, understood regulatively as a "heuristic," that is, understood as a "pragmatic" approach to ameliorating gender concepts and relations rather than as a metaphysical approach aspiring to determinately limn what gender kinds "are."[5] The regulative ideal of eliminativism and abolitionism would sound something like this: if gender (norms, codes, behaviors, etc.) is not as obligatory, modally fixed, or "cut" at nature's joints as we think it is—if it could possibly be otherwise or even not at all—then what kinds of doings and identities would this make possible (Overall 2016; Rorty 1991, Antony 2016)? Can't thinking of gender as flexible, and even dispensable, rather than as "natural" and "necessary" enlarge our sense of what makes a "livable life" (Butler 2004; Butler 1999, 179-80)? What kind of world without gender hierarchy would we wish to make way for, and what kind of gender concepts should and can we modify or remove to render that world possible (Haslanger 2012; Barnes 2016a)? What is it like to imagine ourselves without gender arbitrating who we essentially or fundamentally are? If we reconceive of gender as what we won't always have to be or do (as we previously have), then can we begin to envisage ourselves otherwise than as we have currently envisioned ourselves to be?[6] Will we always be under obligation to bounden gender concepts?

I will thus explore in what sense, and in which contexts, one should and could oust gender concepts, depending on how gender is being defined, ultimately suggesting that the kind of gender eliminativism for which one could mount a plausible defense would be a very circumscribed form

[5] Cited in Friedman 1992, 73. See Hussein MS, Thompson 2014 on explanation, and Dembroff MS and Mikkola 2016b on deflating feminist metaphysics.

[6] This might even be framed as a form of fictionalism: *if* we were to take certain conceptions of gender as unreal, or *if* certain manifestations of gender could be "demolished," then what would that reveal about our contemporary situation and what futural strategies would it promise for the furtherance of social justice (Overall 2016)? As Antony (2016) suggests, feminism should argue against the "modal rigidity" (the "necessity" or inevitability of gender), but not investigate what gender "itself" is: we can still plausibly talk about gender "groups."

that centers on selective contexts and particular manifestations of problematic, heterosexist, *objectifying* gender talk and habit—namely, that kind of talk which figures gender as a static thing or substantial "gender core" that grounds one's nature (Butler 1999, 28-30; Bettcher 2009; Haslanger 2012; Leslie 2013). I will substantiate the claim forwarded by Matthew Andler (2015) and Talia Bettcher (2013) that, in a medical context, we need not gender bodily organs, even while acknowledging physical differences (e.g. we can say that this "person" "has ovaries" without saying "this *woman* has ovaries" to avoid cissexism [Bettcher 2013; Andler 2015]). It follows from this view that it shouldn't be mandatory to "assign sex" at birth, given that assigning "boy" or "girl" to a birth certificate is to already project "gender facts" rather than to record or register "sex facts" (Clune-Taylor 2016; Jenkins 2016b; Mikkola 2016b; Ásta 2011; Butler 2004).

Hence, a regulative eliminativism or pragmatic abolitionism might in certain contexts allow us to better center on and designate the kinds of gender concepts we wish to expunge. Furthermore, regulative eliminativism, when employed in concert with other social and critical theorizing, might furnish us with defeasible conceptual and normative resources to explain why we are justified in seeking to uproot problematic (or even gratuitous) gender talk.[7] In this sense, my project is less about discovering the ultimate metaphysical nature of gender or seeking the final truth of gender eliminativism, than it is an ameliorative inquiry into whether and how we might practically adopt, adapt, and apply certain versions of gender eliminativism and abolitionism as a kind of defeasible, adjustable, and revisable "regulative ideal" for some of our theorizing about circumstantially oppressive gender talk in certain folk and medical contexts (Hussein MS).

In the remaining sections of this introduction, I'll break down and regiment what gender eliminativist talk might mean (section 2); present which kind of eliminativism I allege would be defensible and practicable (section 3); unpack the methodological commitments guiding my inquiry (section 4); and explain how my analysis will unfold in subsequent chapters (section 5).

0.2 Eliminativism and Abolitionism about Gender

Thinkers like Monique Wittig, Colette Guillaumin, Christine Delphy, Sally Haslanger, Miqqi Gilbert, and Christine Overall (among others) have been called "eliminativists" or

[7] On the need to supplement philosophical accounts of gender with more normative and social critical theory, see Mikkola 2016b.

"abolitionists" because they claim that bigender concepts of *woman* and *man* are ingrained in constitutively "hierarchical" and "oppressive" social relations and structures such that our political objective should be the riddance of these relations and structures (and by extension the riddance of these bigender concepts themselves [see Mikkola 2011; Mikkola 2016b, 118-119; Barnes 2016, 31]). If, as Overall (2016) puts it, gender is contingent (we could live without gender), pernicious (obligatory gender norms aggrieve us), and predicated on untruths concerning biology (gender is not entailed from sex), then we should be working toward neutralizing the manifestation and embodiment of gender norms and behaviors by dissevering gendered "associations" and evaluations from particular acts and habits: "if gender as a social institution is outmoded, unnecessary, deceptive, and often outright harmful…It would seem to follow that gender ought to be demolished" (2016, 16; see also Gilbert 2009).[8]

While the project of obliterating the hierarchical and oppressive social conditions that underwrite iniquitous gender relations has long been one of feminism's objectives, what distinguishes eliminativist proposals is their claim that "after the revolution," as Haslanger remarks (2012, 69), we would not be restituting or rebuilding gender—it would cease to "be" (or at least it would no longer mean or pick out what it used to, but perhaps something else [Gilbert 2009; Overall 2016]).[9] Eliminativists imply that just "having to *be*" a gender is (by nature of the category's social grounds) oppressively and hierarchically structured, to recite anthropologist Gayle Rubin's famous assertion (1975, 204; also cited in Mikkola 2011, 70). While Wittig, Haslanger, and Overall (among others), are in disaccord when it comes to the metaphysical point of gender's reality—for example, Haslanger is a realist about gender kinds, while Wittig is not—all concur on the normative eliminativist (or "abolitionist") point that feminism should aspire to phase out gender (Haslanger 2012; see Mikkola 2016b, 118-119).[10] For if some gender concepts are "by definition" oppressive, as these philosophers sometimes seem to maintain, then our objective should be to eventually annihilate them (Mikkola 2011, 74; Jenkins 2016b).

---

[8] Throughout, I will be citing the powerpoint slides of Overall's unpublished conference presentation "What—If Any—Is the Value of Gender?" presented May 6th 2016 at the University of Alberta.

[9] As Overall claims, gender has no "value" other than, perhaps, historical or aesthetic value (2016). See Chapter 3 for an explication of Overall's views.

[10] Importantly, Haslanger explicitly rejects metaphysical eliminativism about gender (which she calls "error theory/eliminativism" but there are eliminativist metaphysical and normative elements in her proposals, as Mikkola (2011 and 2016a) points out.

Now, *eliminativism* in the philosophy of mind and philosophy of science generally betokens the nonexistence or unreality of some "unobservable" or unperceivable "theoretical" posit (pet exempla include phlogiston or witchhood) that was at one time erroneously conceived as anchored or entrenched in the fundamental goings-on[11] of our physical world (or at least were postulated by a popularly ratified theory to be thus), but which is now no longer so conceived (Johnson MS; Ludwig 2014; Ney 2014; Chakravartty 2016). Understood thus, eliminativism, at least as it is traditionally portrayed in mainstream analytic philosophy of science and mind, would seem to be *prima facie* incongruous, unsuitable, or even incompatible with gender: Gender is not usually thought of as an imperceptible, imponderable, or impalpable "theoretical entity"[12]—biological reductionists, for example, think that there are tangible anatomical features and visible behaviors that ground gender, and even gender essentialists presume that gender essences conspicuously manifest themselves in palpable physical features and discernable psychological properties.[13] Furthermore, gendered behavior is still presumed to appreciably exist in everyday social goings-on (indeed, it is sometimes presumed to have always existed in the course of human evolution). So what would *gender* eliminativism look like?

I want to underscore that answering this is already a difficult task, which puts the explanatory burden on the eliminativists' shoulders for at least three reasons. Drawing from Elizabeth Barnes (2016a) and Rebecca Mason (2016), we can suggest that the eliminativist would have to meet at least three definitional conditions for explanatory success: (i) *gender definition:* they would need to define gender in a non-circular way that also accounts for intersectionality; (ii) *sociality definition:* they would need to define the sociality of gender to figure out where gender is manifesting (to be eliminated); (iii) *reality definition:* they would need to specify in virtue of what

[11] I use Wilson's (2014, 536n3) broad terminology of "goings-on" which I find capacious enough to capture the various categories of relations, properties, propositions, facts, and worldly entities that might be at issue.

[12] The term "theoretical entity" is borrowed from Johnson's document on "Eliminativism and Fictionalism" (MS).

[13] And hence, as Ludwig points out (2014), the theory that was ontologically committed to that entity (which is no longer believed to be real or existent) would be falsified: the theory that was once fallaciously believed to be true would cease to be credible [Chakravartty 2016; Ludwig 2016; Ney 2014). As Johnson further adds, such theoretical posits are often empirically unverifiable but they hold an "indispensable" explanatory office in some theory, so once the posited entities are no longer conceived of as "quantifying over" real-world entities then so too is the theory discredited (MS; see also Ney 2014 and Ludwig 2016).

gender is unreal or nonexistent.[14] I'll briefly touch upon these here, and then explicate what eliminativism would look like if we were able to satisfy these three conditions (I go into further detail in Chapter 1). I'll do so in order to better clarify the kind of eliminativism I find most plausible and practical to defend.

So, let's assume we've decided to postulate a theory of gender eliminativism (I'll suspend for the moment what motivates our intent to postulate such a theory). First, we would have to specify what we mean by gender in a "non-circular" way, which is no mean feat (Barnes 2016a, 13). As Elizabeth Barnes puts it, the non-circularity requirement is necessary for explanatory success because it would be both "stipulative" and question-begging to conclude that *gender must and can be evicted or expelled* if we have presupposed a normative definition of gender that we have already deemed worth eliminating and which we have already defined in such terms that it *could* be eliminated (2016a, 11, 13). But this is fraught: if we define gender as, say, a thing then, yes, of course it is possible to remove things and so perhaps possible to remove gender (like throwing out the trash).[15] However, if gender is, as Joan Scott or Judith Butler would say, the label for a set of social relations, discursive practices, and symbols—a "mode of address" by which subjects are interpellated or "called into being," sometimes without their conscious awareness or consent—then it is not a reified "thing" that can be easily identified, located, and outrooted (how does one root out a set of "strategic" social "situations" and relations?).[16] Likewise, if we declare that gender *ought* to be eliminated, then this might seem to logically presuppose that we *can* eliminate it—but the Kantian "ought implies can" principle remains controversial and contestable (Talbot 2016). While plausibly we may argue that we *ought* to eliminate all forms of gender injustice, whether we *can* in fact target and disestablish gender when it is "social, systematic, and structural" is less certain (Mikkola 2016b, 188). After all, cars and guns harm people but it is often difficult (in a U.S. context at least) to convince people to renounce cars and guns ("cars and guns don't hurt people, people do!" is the

[14] As will become evident, I'm drawing here from Mason (2016), who writes that "social kind" talk must precisify both the ways in which the kind is "social" and the way in which it is "real" (or "unreal"). One of her examples is also gender. I am also drawing from Elizabeth Barnes' account of social ontological explanatory success (2016a)

[15] I thank Cressida Heyes (personal communication) for this insight.

[16] Here I'm rephrasing Foucault's (1974) definition of "power" and am drawing from Scott (1986) and Butler (2014), who describes gender as a relational mode of address or interpellation. Haslanger also adopts this view: "Gender is a relational or extrinsic property of individuals, and the relations in question are social" (2012, 41).

reply).[17] So wouldn't the same hold for gender, an objector might ask? Yes, some gender concepts and norms might be harmful, the objector could say, but surely that's not gender's fault; it's not *gender* that is baneful but the fact that we idolize some genders more than others and *this* is baneful (Mikkola 2011, 69)! It falls to the eliminativist to come up with a non-circular definition of gender to explain how to proceed.

Most feminist philosophers agree that gender is constitutively and causally fashioned by social means rather than secured by biological properties, but this already raises several questions (Mikkola 2016a, 2011; Anderson 2015; Diaz-Leon 2013). Let's assume that we were able to agree upon what we meant by gender being "social"[18] and that furthermore we decided upon the kind of social construction at issue (be it discursive, causal, constitutive, etc. [Haslanger 2012; Diaz-Leon 2013, 5]). After we postulated that gender is in some sense social, we would then, secondly, be obligated to specify the differing scales at which it social: this could mean that gender is a *social kind*, *property, group, fact, object, event, experience, structure,* etc.[19] Assuming that we pinpointed what aspect of gender we were talking about, we'd then, third, have to precisify what we meant by "reality"[20] to make sense of the eliminativist claim that gender is in some sense unreal and non-existent and that our gender terms are irreferential (see Chapter One for why I find these difficulties insurmountable).

Assuming (again for the sake of argument) that we could and did settle these debates about gender's definition, its sociality, and its reality, then we could begin to regiment eliminativist talk in a coherent theory. We would have to distinguish a *metaphysical component* concerning the reality of gender from a *normative component* concerning what to do with gender (irrespective of its metaphysical reality). This distinction is important, insofar as the normative component of eliminativism is in many respects more feasible and serviceable as a feminist strategy than determining the metaphysical component (at least that's a contention I support). Gender

[17] I thank Cressida Heyes for this insight and example.

[18] See Mason (2016, 841-2) for what "social" means. Haslanger uses a minimal definition of the "social" as "coordinated activity" to deal with "access problems" for a "resource" (see 2012, 2016a and 2016b): "coordinated activity, whether or not the coordination is conscious," is also a definition I will employ (Haslanger 2012, 197n18).

[19] I am drawing up this list by building on Mason's (2016) distinctions: "There are various categories of social entities other than social kinds and social facts, including social objects…social events…and social properties…social groups…and social structures" (2016, 847 n2).

[20] Mason (2016) writes compellingly of the ways "real" is used in the social ontology literature (844-45). See Chapter 1 of this thesis for further details.

eliminativism would consist of the following claims (I'll retain the name *eliminativism* for the metaphysical component and use *abolitionism* to designate the normative one):

(i) ***Gender eliminativism***.[21]

a. ***Anti-realism about mind-independence:*** Gender is not a mind-independently "real" or "agent-independently" objective feature of the world (Mikkola 2016b, 130). Gender is "strongly pragmatically constructed," insofar as "social factors wholly determine our use of [gender categories] and [gender categorization] fails to represent accurately any 'fact of the matter'" (Haslanger 2012, 90; see also Mikkola 2016b, 130). Hence, gender constitutively depends on "beliefs, linguistic practices, [and] conceptual schemes" (Miller 2016).

b. ***Error-Theory about existence***: There are no "universal" or "natural" gender properties that all and only members of gender kinds bear or instantiate [Stoljar 1995, 275; Mason 2016; Khlentzos 2016]). Gender categories are void and gender terms are irreferential (Joyce 2015; Ekland 2015). We misplacedly believe in gender and atomic statements about gender ("S is gender G" [Joyce 2015; Miller 2016]) and kind assertions ("S is of gender kind G" [Ásta 2011]) are not literal reports of fact—they are, "strictly speaking," "false" (Chakravartty 2016; Joyce 2015; Miller 2016; Ekland 2015).

(ii) ***Gender abolitionism***:

a. ***Pragmatism***: Irrespective of the metaphysical bases of gender (whether or not it is fundamentally real), gender categories and norms are thought to be real and thus exert very "real" effects on our social lives (Ney 2014; Johnson MS; Ludwig 2014).

b. ***Normativity***: Some gender categories and norms are constitutively oppressive, always leading to psychological, political, and moral harms so we ought to abolish any and all manifestations of those kinds of gender talk and behaviors (Mikkola 2016b, 118-119; see Cudd 2006 on oppression).[22]

Notice, as Haslanger insists, that the metaphysical component is not just making the relatively "uncontroversial" anti-realist claim that conceptions or idea-constructions of gender are constitutively mind-dependent or conceptual-scheme-dependent.[23] For, as Haslanger and Hacking

[21] I am drawing from Miller here (2016), who describes the critique of metaphysical realism as either the refutation of an "existence" claim ("X exists") and/or of an "independence" claim ("X is what is is and how it is irrespective of or "independent of" our beliefs and conceptual schemes [Miller 2016]). He writes that refuting existence claims amounts to "nominalism" and "eliminativism," while refuting independence amounts to "idealism, subjectivism, and anti-realism" (2016).

[22] These definitions are somewhat question-begging, to be sure, but I'm not so much forwarding a thesis about what gender eliminativism *is* right now as I am trying to capture the way eliminativism is explicitly and implicitly deployed, circulated, and presupposed in contemporary feminist ontology and meta-ontology. What I especially want to underline is that regardless of whether you espouse or eschew the gender eliminativisms I limn, this diversity of eliminativisms highlights the ways in which the metaphysical and the normative come apart.

[23] See also Diaz-Leon 2013 on "idea-construcionism," which I'm echoing here.

point out, the fact that our "ideas" and "concepts" about gender depend on "human agents," "history," and our cultural situation is less controversial than averring that "objects"—like gendered bodies and other physical features—are the result of human activity and action (2012, 116). The metaphysical eliminativist is not just advancing a mind-dependence claim but also forwarding the error-theoretic claim that gender "does not exist" or that gender properties "are not instantiated" (Miller 2016). On this view, while we *seem* to apperceive gendered people in our social world, there would be (in fact or at bottom) no overarching universal property of "Gender-ness" that all these people exemplify, making our perceptions a mistake of ideology (ibid; Joyce 2015; Stoljar 2000, 2011; Spelman 1988).

This initial definition in hand, we can track (at least) three ways in which eliminativism and abolitionism have been deployed, explicitly and implicitly, in feminist ontology:

(i) ***Folk gender eliminativism/abolitionism***: the gender kinds (concepts, categories, etc.) forwarded by *folk* theories are unreal or nonexistent and need to be uprooted from our scientific discourses and social doings;

(ii) ***Radical gender eliminativism/abolitionism***: the gender kinds (concepts, categories, etc.) forwarded by *any* theory (folk or feminist) are unreal or nonexistent and need to be eradicated from our scientific discourses and social doings;

(iii) ***Pragmatic gender eliminativism/abolitionism***: the gender kinds (concepts, categories, etc.) forwarded by feminist theories are existent/real—they can operate as an explanatory theoretical element in social scientific and humanistic discourse (Haslanger 2012). But some gender kinds (concepts, categories, etc.) need to be eliminated from our social doings because of the oppressive relations they "encode" and enforce (Mikkola 2016b; Haslanger 2012; Mikkola 2011).

Most (if not all) feminist philosophers are eliminativist in the first sense of *folk gender eliminativism*, arguing against folk conceptions of gender—such as biological reductionism, psychological essentialism, gender binarism, sexual dimorphism, etc.—and for their complexification (if not their obliteration). However, views then ramify into different and varying positions on how to proceed. Strong error-theories like those of Monique Wittig seem to hold the *radical gender eliminativist* view that any and all mention of gender (outside of a fictional context) is untrue and

that the conception of gender employed in our discursive practices needs to be torpedoed (1992).[24] Gender is like phlogiston and leprechauns, concepts that fall short of picking out worldly, existent, or real matters. Furthermore, there is no possibility of "redescribing the referent" of gender terms since there is no such referent for it at all (Ludwig 2014). Others, like Haslanger (2012) and Katharine Jenkins (2016) adopt the realist social constructionist view of *pragmatic gender eliminativism:* social categories like gender are metaphysically real—they are real to the extent that gender kind members are "unified" by objective features of the world and we can make "truth-apt statements" about them because gender terms do "reliably refer"—but the social conditions which produce and uphold them must be annulled (Haslanger 2012, 199, 202-3; Mikkola 2011). For Haslanger, we currently need some categories of gender (namely those we amelioratively or strategically develop for contextual feminist-informed political purposes) to diagnose contemporary gender injustice and create social scientific explanations of structural sexism, but metaphysically speaking gender is ultimately just a set of "sex-marked" social positions, as Mikkola phrases it (2016b, 81), within an inegalitarian and hierarchical social structure (Mikkola 2007; 2009; 2016a).[25] If having or being a gender just means holding an enfranchised or disenfranchised social position within a hierarchical and inegalitarian social structure (Barnes 2016a, 29-30; 2016b), then we should be striving for a "feminist future" that would dispose of the social hierarchical conditions that generate and sustain gender and, as a consequence, dispense with these gender concepts themselves as well as the gender kinds they pick out (Haslanger 2012).[26] In an egalitarian social order, gender dies out (even though sexed bodies remain [Mikkola 2016a and 2011; Bach 2012, 235-6]). Others like Jenkins (2015) and Bettcher (2009) argue that we need to differentiate between gender "classes" and roles—or how one is classified as a gender—from gender "identity" or how one responds to one's gender classification (Jenkins 2016a, 410). To use Bettcher's

[24] It's important to note that Wittig was a "materialist" feminist (along with Delphy, Guillaumin and others). Wittig was sympathetic to (but also critical of) Marxism;Wittig's polemic is against differentialist feminists like Irigaray and Cixous who seemed to talk of the "distinctly different" "feminine," presupposing a precultural "sexual difference."

[25] To be fair, Haslanger does not say that "all social relations are hierarchical" or that "all hierarchical relations are relation of domination," but she does claim that *gender* is made up of hierarchically situated social positions (2012, 41n13).

[26] As Barnes (2016) puts it "Our…gender categories are socially constructed insofar as *what those categories are* are dimensions of privilege or subjugation" (29). Haslanger at times seems to hold little hope for the possibility of transforming bigender concepts into non-hierarchical conceits with politically unproblematic consequences, though she is inconsistent on this point (see Haslanger 2012 and *infra*).

example, in some nonmainstream or "resistant" contexts, trans* people have reappropriated and reworked dominant gender terms, demonstrating that while dominant or folk gender concepts can increase the likelihood of leading to psychological, political, and moral harms, gender talks is not in and of itself oppressive (Bettcher 2013; Salamon 2010). In a resistant context, "woman" can be "a matter of self-identification" rather than a matter of genitalia, which can be both affirming and oppositional to mainstream usage (Barnes 2016a; Bettcher 2013; Salamon 2010). We should thus only seek to efface pernicious manifestations of gender talk and behaviors based on context, not any and all mention of gender (as I will contend).

Notice most importantly that the metaphysical and the normative are intermeshed but not isomorphic when it comes to eliminativism: one could endorse a normative vision of neutralizing oppressive gender concepts while remaining agnostic about the metaphysics of gender (whether gender is real, existent, unreal etc.) just in the same way that one could hold a metaphysical vision of gender as being fundamentally unreal or fictional without resolving upon what political strategy would best further gender justice. Or one could be metaphysically realist about gender while also being politically conservationist and reconstructionist (rather than abolitionist), according to which gender categories should be revised and improved, not jettisoned (Overall 2016, 18). The list of potential combinations goes on. It remains for me to specify which combinations I defend, and why.[27]

0.3 Regulative Eliminativism, Pragmatic Abolitionism

This regimentation of eliminativist talk in place, I can now better clarify the view I defend. I endorse modified versions of gender abolitionism, arguing that it's coherent and pragmatically feasible to be abolitionist about a certain portion of "feminism's subject matter" (say, some types of gender categories, roles, norms or concepts we deem to be problematic) while remaining neutral about the metaphysics of gender—indeed, I espouse the contemporary perspective of some feminists that we can be deflationist altogether about the metaphysics of gender insofar as feminist activism does not require, as Mikkola says, a "thick" or "substantive" definitional conceptualization of

[27] So, for example, even if one supported a metaphysically eliminativist theory of gender (there is no such thing as "gender *per se*"), one could advocate for a fictionalist politics of speaking *as if* gender talk were true or *as if* gender were real, since a vast majority believes that gender is real and we need to make effective political headway in policy and law.

gender to effectuate feminist political agendas (2016b, 5; Antony 2016; Bettcher 2009; Dembroff MS).[28] The metaphysical truth or nature of gender does not necessitate political results nor does finding the requirements, preconditions, or essential properties that must be "satisfied" for one to be gendered need to be preconcerted in order to foment political mobilization (Mikkola 2015b; LaBrada 2016a; Heyes 2000; Butler 1999). What this means is that we shouldn't tarry with the question of what gender is metaphysically and should instead focus on what to do about gender justice politically (Mikkola 2016b). As Mikkola asserts, we can "deflate" the "ontological" and "semantic" riddles surrounding what it is to be gendered, by accepting that gender is an essentially "contested" concept and by enhancing pragmatic strategies to enact gender justice in law and policy (ibid, 2010; Antony 2016; Dembroff MS).[29] Hence, while I believe that some gender categories, roles, norms and concepts are oppressive, I don't think it serviceable to try to answer the metaphysical question as to whether they induce oppression (causally) or whether they are in and of themselves oppressive (constitutively).[30] Rather, I follow Mikkola and others in supporting the politically "pragmatic stance" that whencesoever they appear or manifest oppressively (depending on our evaluations for what constitutes the "wrongfulness" of their "injustice") is where and when we should seek to eliminate them (Mikkola 2016b, 1; Cudd 2006).

This is of course easier said than done: Given the circumscribed context of application of eliminativism/abolitionism that I defend, it should be clear that I am not trying to ordain the necessary conditions or objectivist standards under which we could *always* determine where and

[28] Recent feminist work has advanced the idea that rarified and arcane metaphysical debates about *what gender fundamentally or essentially is* are less important and serviceable than developing metaethical, ethical, and political reasons for normative action: what should and can do to extirpate gender injustice (irrespective of the fundamental nature of gender [Dembroff MS; Bettcher 2009; Mikkola 2016b; Antony 2016]).

[29] While some argue that we need to specify *what gender is* to understand the social category and phenomena we're attempting to ameliorate (Haslanger 2012), I agree with those who think that isn't necessary to "get the metaphysics right" about whether or not one meets this or that criterion of gender membership for feminist mobilizations (Antony 2016; Dembroff MS). For example, do we need to know everything there is about the nature of a cold to know that tea (for example) relieves some cold symptoms? We can treat the symptoms of a cold—and even remove a cold—without knowing everything about the full nature of what it is to be a cold. Likewise, I think Mikkola is correct that we don't need a substantially, metaphysically joint-carving concept of gender in order to advance feminist politics (2016b, 5). Instead, we should concern ourselves with normative reasons for how best to engage with and "treat" others (Dembroff MS; Bettcher 2009) by focusing on those to whom "everyday social agents" apply gender terms and proceeding thence (Mikkola 2016b; Saul 2012).

[30] Here I'm following Jenkins (2016b) and forthcoming, who similarly claims that the causal/constitutive distinction is not always useful (her example is pornography). I am also following Mikkola (2016b) in refusing to engage in what she calls the "gender controversy," or debates about the metaphysical nature of gender. On the causal/constitutive distinction see Langton (2009, 95) and Diaz-Leon (2013).

which gender concepts are operating oppressively and why (although I would conjecture, in keeping with neo-humanist feminists like Mikkola, that this would probably have to do with whether they are found to be "dehumanizing" or an "indefensible setback to some of [one's] legitimate human interests, where this setback constitutes a moral injury," according to feminist normative commitments devoted to equalizing inegalitarian gender relations [2015b, 145]). What "gender oppression" signifies depends on context, but I would wager that it will always require a consideration of feminist value commitments as the relevant standard by which to make such judgments (value commitments which, in turn, will be subject to immanent scrutiny, contestation, and redrawing [Heyes 2000; Nobis 2005; see also Haslanger 2012 on "immanent" critique]). What this means is that "eliminating" gender concepts can signify different things and proceed in variable ways: sometimes eliminating a gender concept might mean omitting it (Wittig 1992), creating a modified non-hierarchical gender concept (Haslanger 2012), or de-stigmatizing the "evaluative associations" that we "pair" with certain behaviors and appearances that are "gender-coded" (Mikkola 2016b, 138).

Note that am I not suggesting that we should exterminate any and all gender concepts and the categories they "mark off" (Mikkola 2007). Nor am I trying to determine whether we should maintain a general modified gender discourse or eventually uproot gender from all discourse, since modifying a gender concept—making it something it wasn't before, injecting it with new meaning or purpose—is in a sense to "do away" with it, or to do away with what it was before (Mikkola 2011). While gender concepts and terms might ostensibly remain the same *in name*, what they signify and single out will have been transmuted, which means that they will have become something else partially or even entirely, and hence will have ceased to be what they once were.[31] So modification and elimination are not necessarily conceptually opposed. Hence, I will not attempt to determine whether it is best to enlarge extant binary gender concepts like *man* and *woman*, to forge futural non-binary gender concepts, or to extinguish all gender concepts "as such" since these broad, large-scale questions idealize away from the historically and contextually grounded examples to which I want to call attention.

[31] I believe this is what Butler means when she speaks of "resignifiying" gender concepts and terms (1999; 1993). The point isn't to delete them from our talk but to critically take them up, designifying their former uses and meanings and thus permutating themn. This is her reinterpretation of Derrida's notion of "iterability" (1993).

So where should social eliminativism and gender abolitionism be applied? As I mentioned earlier, the kind of view I have in mind conceives of social eliminativism/gender abolitionism as a *regulative ideal* for context-dependent practical theorizing and acting. More to the point, I contend that the kind of gender talk we should be abrogating in pursuit of social justice is *objectifying* or *hypostasizing* gender talk, which reduces gender to a kind of thing "one is or has" rather than talking of gender as a relation that exists among persons and within institutions—and here I take my cue from Butler's well-known critique of the "metaphysics of substance" (1999, 28 and 2004, 42; Heyes personal communication). Gender categories are plural and intersectional, taking part in larger social systems and structures (Andler 2015; Bach 2012, 236; Haslanger 2016a and 2016b; Heyes 2007), and following Butler's and Heyes' Foucauldian lead, we can think of gender as a label denoting a "strategic" network of relations within a given society, rather than as something that indwells people as an essence or a substance (Heyes 2007; see also Butler 1999; Foucault 1974; Dover personal communication). But in a medical context, gender is often spoken of in reifying, objectified terms—something one is by virtue of specific sex features—which ignores the theoretical, empirical, and political claims made by feminists and trans*activists that gender is social, structural, institutional, and relational. It is this kind of gender talk that social eliminativism and gender abolitionism ought to target: As Matthew Andler (2015) argues, in a medical context we can recognize bodily differences (e.g. "some persons have ovaries, some don't") without needing to *gender* those bodily difference (e.g. "only women have ovaries"), a claim also advanced by Talia Bettcher (2013), who suggest that we can plausibly speak about "*persons*" with body parts in a medical context rather than as "bio-males" and "bio-females" to effectively avoid cissexism and biological reductionism (McKinnon 2015). I further Bettcher's and Katharine Jenkins' argument that we should be less concerned with "metaphysical self-identity" ("What am I?"), which involves defining and determining the kind of gender that one is, and instead focus on "existential self-identity," ("Who am I, really?") or the normative value commitments and desires that interweave one's mesh of beliefs: "What am I about? What moves me? What do I stand for? What do I care about the most?" (2009, 110; see also Jenkins 2016b for extended discussion of Bettcher).[32] My thesis thus situates theoretical discussions over eliminativism in the practical context of social justice and

[32] I am indebted to Jenkins (2016), who also follows Bettcher in advocating for existential rather than metaphysical conceptions of self-identity.

injustice concerning healthcare issues, trans*activism, and bioethical matters.

0.4 Methodology

I've claimed that eliminativist proposals, whether construed as metaphysical or normative propositions, are not easily defensible. I've also submitted that it's unclear what we are arguing when we say that gender is nonexistent and unreal (metaphysically), and what precisely we are aiming to nuke (politically). The eliminativist owes us a justification of both of these aspects, I've suggested, already indicating that any inquiry into gender is bound to be "political-ontological,"[33] insofar as metaphysics and politics are enlaced when it comes to gender. I've also made clear that the everyday binary or bigender concepts such as *woman* and *man*—and the categories they delimit or pick out (Mikkola 2007, 2009)—pose a particular political-ontological problem that will concern me in this thesis. If I'm arguing for a pragmatic, selective, and regulative "cherry picking" from eliminativist theories, but not accepting their metaphysics wholesale, then it becomes incumbent on me to specify what my methodological commitments are such that I can proceed as I do.

In claiming that eliminativism and abolitionism can be construed as regulative ideals, I am adopting Haslanger's "ameliorative" methodology (but not her metaphysics), to explore what particular problems arise when we exert ourselves to politically rally around gender concepts and are obligated to ask (i) why and for which outcomes we are instrumentalizing a given array of gender concepts, (ii) whether we can reinvent these concepts to bring to fruition our (contextual and provisional) political objectives, or (iii) whether we should abjure employing some altogether because they have proven themselves inimical to those aforementioned goals (Mikkola 2007, 2009; Haslanger 2012). This is what Haslanger calls an "ameliorative approach" (2012, 367). In contrast to

[33] I am using the term "political-ontological" to emphasize the ways in which the metaphysical and political questions at issue are mutually enmeshed rather than mutually exclusive, similar to Joe Latham's conception of "ontological politics" (2016). Note, however, that I am not suggesting that these are problems for which political consequences necessarily follow from, are "derivable from" or are necessarily entailed (or presumed) by a given metaphysical theory (I am drawing from Barnes 2016a and Butler 2009, 33, to formulate this claim). I am making the weaker claim, again following Barnes (2016) and Mikkola (2015b), that the potential political consequences that *may* follow from a metaphysical theory—and indeed, which may have implicitly informed and shaped that metaphysical theory despite itself—cannot be sidelined (see again Barnes 2016).

a "conceptual"[34] approach and to a "descriptive"[35] approach, an ameliorative approach considers the "target concepts" of gender that would fructify the most normative and explanatory "work" given a particular context (i.e. the concepts that ought to be employed relative to a particular context and goal-set [*ibid*]). [36] I appropriate such a broadly "ameliorative" approach to *eliminativism* and *abolitionism* about gender concepts and will give serious consideration to the view championed by eliminativists that certain gender concepts, as we apprehend and apply them in contemporary and everyday terms, are constitutively oppressive and hierarchical (see also Jenkins 2016b). What I find problematic about Haslanger's theory, however, is her shift from a claim that her ameliorative methodology seeks to develop revisionary gender concepts (the concepts that one ought to endorse or embrace to meet our feminist objectives) to a claim that her methodology is actually grasping a "real definition" of *what gender is* metaphysically (2014; see Mikkola 2016a, 2009 and Saul 2012).[37] Like other feminists critical of this neo-Aristotelian project of discovering "real definitions," I don't see the utility or necessity of orienting a revisionary methodological project around a definitional, metaphysical one (Saul 2006; Mikkola 2011, 2016a, and 2016b; Antony 2016; Saul 2012).

It may appear too ad hoc for me to be drawing from Haslanger's methodology (ameliorative approach) while remaining neutral about her metaphysics (gender realism). However, there are justified reasons for remaining neutral with respect to Haslanger's metaphysics (as I explain in Chapter 3). I do embrace Haslanger's pragmatic suggestion, however, that *at times* understanding certain gender concepts as constitutively oppressive (e.g., in a medical context) can illuminate something crucial about the injustices of our social world and the way gender organizes

---

[34] Haenel (2014) remarks that conceptual analyses presume that "the (objective) truth or right analysis of a concept in question can be known through introspection" and "there is an intensional definition for the conception in question" (2). This involves, as Haenel (2014) and Mikkola (2009) describe it, an internalist analysis of our *a priori* intuitions about what our ordinary, manifest concept of gender captures (i.e. "the concepts we think are using").

[35] As Dembroff (2016) and Haenel (2014) depict Haslanger's account (2012), a descriptive approach involves a "quasi-empirical" inquiry into what empirical types our operative concepts of gender are successfully tracking (i.e. "the concepts we are actually using," as Haslanger and Haenel put it).

[36] See also Haenel 2014, Dembroff 2016, and Saul 2012 for descriptions of this "social/conceptual engineering project." Barnes (2016a) usefully describes the ameliorative approach thus: "When we are asking what social kinds like race and gender are, we should (at least in part) be asking what we *want them to be*. Why and how are these categories useful? Why should we care about them? How can they help us to accomplish our legitimate political and social goals?" (39).

[37] Barnes (2016a) points out that for Haslanger the method and the metaphysics seem to go hand in hand: "(Re)conceptualizing gender as inherently hierarchical—and thus inherently problematic—helps us, she argues, to work toward equality, in part by transforming the way we think about what gender *is*" (42n60), but this is a contestable point, since there might be other ways to "reconceptualize" gender that do not rely on presumed or intrinsic hierarchy.

our lives (a descriptive claim) at the same time that it proffers grounds for political mobilization (an ameliorative claim). However, let it be clear that I am not saying that Haslanger's theory is metaphysically "true" only or simply by virtue of the fact that it has the potential to encourage and bolster particular feminist interests in a way other theories do not (a point I borrow from Barnes 2016, 39). Likewise, although I do think it could be argued that Haslanger's model effectuates substantial descriptive work while also affording us defeasible ameliorative and transformative pragmatic resources, not much hinges on whether one finds the descriptive or metaphysical component of Haslanger's view convincing or not. This is because, as I specified earlier, my meta-metaphysical approach to the metaphysics of gender here is pretty deflationary. On my view, it is not crucial whether one believes that Haslanger's theory fully or accurately "captures" the social structures and relations that would make being a given gender by definition a matter of subordination or privilege—since I'm more concerned with exploring and defending the practical efficacy of such a view, namely the kind of normative, ameliorative goals this theory allows us to postulate and achieve when we adopt it regulatively *as if* it were descriptively true.

0.5 Structure of the Analysis

In Chapter One, I briefly present the reasons why metaphysical eliminativism ought to be deflated and rejected. I claim that a metaphysical view of eliminativism cannot get off the ground—while folk eliminativism is true and useful, beyond that, we can't get far, namely because the definitions and explanations that this type of metaphysical view can offer will turn out to be question-beggingly circular. Building on the brief comments I've made earlier, I flesh out the difficulties that would be involved in meeting the minimal criteria (as elaborated by drawing from Barnes [2016a] and Mason [2016]) of *gender definition, sociality definition,* and *reality definition* to have a satisfying metaphysical explanation (to say nothing of its possible political implications). My driving point is that metaphysical eliminativism cannot "do justice" to gender, since gender is not just ontological but political (Mikkola 2015b).[38] I distinguish folk from feminist conceptions of

[38] Following Mikkola's use of Anderson's concept and phrase, to "do justice" means both to do explanatory justice to some subject-matter of feminism (attempt to find "significant truths" to explain it) but also to enact normative justice for it (Mikkola 2015b): "we must *do justice* to the subject matter of our investigation in order for our analysis to be (in some sense) accurate, and even truth tracking. This oftentimes requires that we, ethically speaking, do justice to the objects of our study in order to, epistemically speaking, also do our subject matter justice" (15).

gender and end with the suggestion that one of the main political-ontological problems around which feminism rallies concerns not just what gender is metaphysically but what explanatory role gender concepts play in our social goings-on as well as whether our gender concepts can motivate us to redress gender injustices, pragmatic and political questions that a metaphysical theory is ill-calculated to answer.

In Chapter 2 I mount the argument that metaphysical eliminativism is politically and pragmatically ineffectual: if metaphysical questions concerning *what it is to be gendered* invariably dovetail with conceptual, semantic and normative questions concerning what our gender concepts single out, what our gender terms mean, and whether it's normatively valuable that there even be something like gender in our talk and daily dealings, then metaphysical eliminativism becomes moot. Our gender terms—like *man*, *woman* and so on—refer to variable physical, psychological, and social phenomena, such that what gender "is"—and what it means—will vary depending on historical, methodological, philosophical, and linguistic considerations (to name but a few), as well as scope and scale (depending on whether we're referring to types, kinds, groups, or individuals), making the project of showing gender to be unreal or nonexistent—to play no part in our social world—difficult to defend. This renders incoherent the metaphysical eliminativist's aim to prove that gender is unreal and nonexistent.

I then advance to a more detailed analysis of the political failures of metaphysical eliminativism by examining Monique Wittig's account of sex-gender. What's compelling about Wittig's argument is her destabilization of the notion that we need something like gender (the pigeonholing and standardization of persons into roles based on sexually, physically differentiated bodies [see also Antony 2016]). Wittig rightly asks: if gender is contingent, why do we behave as though it were necessary? Shouldn't we contest this "modal rigidity" of gender, as Louise Antony calls it? However, practically speaking, Wittig's account is too simplistic to substantiate the proper explanatory and normative work it seeks to accomplish.

In Chapter 3 I strengthen the case for a kind of regulative eliminativism/pragmatic abolitionism. Most eliminativists, due to their metaphysics, do not sufficiently specify *in which contexts* we should be abolishing gender, nor do they precisify what it is we are in fact abolishing: are we abolishing beliefs about gender, gender terms, gender concepts, gender behaviors and dispositions? There may be contexts—for example, nonmainstream, subcultural, or "resistant"

contexts—where gender concepts and terms are conceived and applied in non-oppressive ways (Bettcher 2009, 2013; Kapusta 2015, 2016); likewise, there may be contexts where employing gender concepts and terms are enlightening for what they track and pick out—for example, in history, empirical psychology, and the social sciences, where what is at issue is not whether or not there is anything like gender, or whether gender is in and of itself constitutively oppressive, but how social groups are formed and treated given a prevailing *belief* that gender is real and substantial (Ney 2014; Haslanger 2016a, 2016b, and forthcoming). Ideally, a defensible form of pragmatic eliminativism would locate and specify the contexts in which gender concepts, terms, goings-on, or beliefs are operative and would be able to explain why and how such gender matters ought to be abolished. It is ultimately toward this view that I will tend, espousing something like a context-dependent, pragmatic abolitionism.

I survey three potential arguments—a conceptual argument (Gilbert), a value-theoretic argument (Overall), and a critical realist argument (Haslanger)—that could be used to bolster a selective, context-dependent pragmatic abolitionism, ultimately concluding that each argument miscarries its intent. I address these views in the order of their persuasiveness. Of the three, I devote the most attention to Haslanger's critical realist model, which, while oriented toward a more politically effective theory than metaphysical eliminativism, ends up taking the social contingency of gender and converting it into a neo-Aristotelian "real definition" of *what gender is* (Haslanger 2009; Haslanger 2014). This move needlessly rigidifies gender and belies Haslanger's normative project. If Wittig's account is metaphysically compelling but politically ineffectual, Haslanger's theory is politically useful but metaphysically problematic. I also note that the critical realist model of gender seems unable to account for the "unconsciousness" of gender ideology—the fact that gendered relations include desire, bodily habits, and non-cognitive attitudes or attachments, making the elimination and eviction of all traces of gender a messy task (Butler 2014; Scott 1986). Gender is not *just* a social position but, conceived of as relational, also an "identity," an embodiment, and an experience of social norms, making it much more difficult to simply dislodge and drive out the material conditions underlying gender concepts insofar as gender norms engender

and mold the very social and material being that we are (on "identity" see Jenkins 2016a and Bettcher 2009).[39]

After critiquing these arguments I explicate and defend Mikkola's "trait/covariance model" (2016b). I claim that, broadly speaking, we can (nearly) uncontroversially concede that gender ontologically depends on our social conventions (in some fashion), and that the question is not whether gender categories are real or void but whether and how to dispense with oppressive manifestations of gender concepts (Mikkola 2016b, 2011). Doing so allows me to present a version of *regulative eliminativism* or *pragmatic abolitionism*, where eliminativism is understood as a regulative ideal, and abolitionism a pragmatic tool. I then present what I take to be the most persuasive argument in favor of regulative eliminativism and pragmatic abolitionism: the trans*feminist-friendly argument forwarded by Andler (2015) and Bettcher (2013), that in the bioethical context of health care for non-cis persons, it is crucial to refer to "persons" or "bodies" with sex characteristics ("uteri," "prostates," etc.) rather than as "bio-males" or "bio-females" in order to not "invalidate" the gender identities of non-cis genders (McKinnon 2015). Regulative eliminativism allows us to imagine being and acting in the world otherwise than we currently do (for example, not construing ourselves by reference to our genitalia or to predominant gender norms), while pragmatic abolitionism allows us to target and neutralize problematic manifestations of objectifying or reifying gender concepts. I then consider and respond to a phenomenological objection to my arguments favoring regulative eliminativism.

I close the thesis with a brief consideration of how one might practically implement pragmatic abolitionism about gender, since many social agents are likely to misapprehend the call to obliterate "women, men, and other genders" finding the idea repugnant, counterintuitive, or even genocidal (Saul 2012,197; Mikkola 2016a and 2016b). I conclude with three broad, practical strategies for gradually implementing gender eliminativism in our daily dealings.

---

[39] In her defense, it should be noted that Haslanger's forthcoming work on "culture and critique" and "ideology" seeks to redress precisely this "cognitivist" approach to ideology which treats it as a matter of belief but the very conceptual and linguistic schemas through which our affective and responsive dispositions are molded (see Haslanger [2013b] for more). Haslanger write that a "social practice"—"ways of organizing ourselves either towards some end or goal, or in response to a coordination or access problem" (2013b, 23)— is composed of "schemas"—"clusters of culturally shared concepts, beliefs, and other attitudes that enable us to interpret and organize information and coordinate action, thought, and affect" (24)— and "resources"—"things of all sorts….that are taken to have some…value" (ibid). Social practices in turn become congealed, making up "social relations" and these combined "practices/relations" constitute "social structures" within which "social groups" occupy or "function at" a "node (or set of nodes)" (25).

1. Against Gender Eliminativism: Metaphysical Problems

1.1 Deflationary Metaphysics

In this chapter I argue that metaphysical eliminativism is unpersuasive on conceptual grounds and I corroborate those feminist accounts claiming that metaphysical concerns regarding gender's nature ought to be "deflated" and overridden by practical considerations (Mikkola 2016b). In particular, I claim that metaphysical view of eliminativism cannot get off the ground conceptually and cannot suit feminist purposes politically—while folk eliminativism might be serviceable, beyond that, we don't get much mileage out of metaphysical eliminativism, namely because the definitions and explanations that this type of metaphysical view forwards will turn out to be stipulative, tautological, and politically ineffectual. I'll show that, as a metaphysical theory, eliminativism cannot get off the ground because gender is also social and political. Drawing from Elizabeth Barnes and Rebecca Mason, I'll suggest that metaphysical eliminativism cannot meet the minimal criteria of *gender definition, sociality definition,* and *reality definition* to have a satisfying metaphysical explanation (to say nothing of its possible political implications). In the next, companion chapter, I'll argue that even if metaphysical eliminativism *were* a good metaphysical explanation—that is, even if we were somehow able to define gender's ontology—it would be politically ineffectual since, to borrow from Barnes, a theory's truth or explanatory fruitfulness in defining a gender kind and its political serviceability or practical implementability are not mutually entailing (2016a, 39; see also Butler 2009, 33). No matter how parsimonious or verisimilitudinous our metaphysical theory might be, we still might be unable to "fix" its normative content: settling on the "metaphysical facts," in other words, is insufficient to settle normative facts (Mikkola 2016b, 101).[40] For it's not enough to point out that gender is metaphysically grounded in social practices or that it's socially constructed—as Barnes points out, feminists agree that gender concepts are grounded in social practices and conventions rather than "carved in nature's joints" (Mikkola 2016c;

[40] See also Mikkola 2010 on "settling the matter." Mikkola rejects the view that "[m]etaphysical facts trump political desiderata; and it is metaphysics that should fix the relevant political categories—our politics cannot fix metaphysics" (2016b, 101). And, as some argue, it may even be that sometimes an "accurate" metaphysical theory of gender, if accepted, would have grave ethical and political consequences if practiced (Dembroff MS; Bettcher 2009).

Barnes 2014, 343; Epstein 2014).[41] What we want to know is *why* and by *which means* gender is being "anchored" in this way so that we might transform these conditions that "put in place" gender practices (given the grave gender injustices of our contemporary moment [Epstein 2014, 4]).

We don't want to just examine how gender concepts are applied and gender kinds identified, we also want to ascertain why and how (oppressive) gender concepts were implanted in the first place in order to better combat and ameliorate them (Barnes 2014, 343, 2016b); we aren't just preoccupied with who is or is not subsumed under a given gender class (according to some set of conditions, rules, or beliefs) but are instead preoccupied with the causal reasons why we've instated and accepted the set of conditions, rules, or beliefs for establishing gender classes that we have (Epstein 2014, 9). Answering metaphysical inquiries regarding what comprises gender can't help us there (Mikkola 2015b, 2016b, 2016c, 2017; see Schaffer 2016 and Griffith forthcoming for an opposite view).[42] My driving point in this and the next chapter, then, is that metaphysical eliminativism cannot "do justice" to gender—either in the "epistemic sense" of affording a decent explanation or in the "ethical sense" of furnishing normative reasons for action—since gender is not just ontological but political (Mikkola 2015b, 15). While this chapter focuses on the "epistemic" and metaphysical reasons why metaphysical eliminativism cannot do justice to gender matters, the next chapter deals with the "ethical" reasons why metaphysical eliminativism falls short.

1.2 The Metaphysics of Eliminativism

In the introduction, I followed several philosophers in defining *metaphysical gender eliminativism* as anti-realism about mind-independence (there is no "fact of the matter" about gender [Haslanger 2012, 90; see also Miller 2016]) and error-theory about existence (there are no objective gender properties that could make our atomic, assertoric statements about gender true [Joyce 2015]). I also suggested, following Barnes (2016a) and Mason (2016), that one of the main conceptual difficulties for getting metaphysical eliminativism off the ground is that it must be able to furnish non-stipulative definitions of the following: (i) *gender:* a non-circular and intersectional

[41] Here I am adopting Brian Epstein's useful distinction between grounding and anchoring conditions. We can say that feminist theories of gender concern not just metaphysical *grounding* conditions but also normative *anchoring* conditions (Epistein 2014, 3). Barnes writes: "The debate over gender…isn't a debate about how/whether genders are grounded. It's a debate about what (if anything) they do, and what (if anything) they explain" (2016b).

[42] For types of feminist metaphysical projects see Ásta (2013a, 730; 732n.18).

definition of gender; (ii) *sociality:* a definition of the sociality of gender such that we could figure out where gender is manifesting (to be eliminated); (iii) *reality:* a definition of reality such that we could specify in virtue of what gender is unreal. I'll unpack here what it is for a metaphysical theory to meet the "criteria for success"[43] in social ontological explanations, as Barnes formulates it (2016a). On Barnes' account, a social ontological account should minimally "delive[r] correct verdicts for paradigm cases," should "[not] prejudge normative issues" by "buil[ding normativity] into the very definition" of what it studies (Barnes 2016a, 10-11), and should be "unifying or explanatory" because it "is not circular" (Barnes 2016a, 12-13). Metaphysical eliminativism falls short of Barnes' criteria, and I'll show why in demonstrating that it cannot satisfy the requisite definitions.

1.2.1 Defining Gender

The first task befalling the eliminativist is to precisify what is meant by "gender" in a "non-circular" fashion, which is not facile (Barnes 2016a, 13). Non-circularity precludes stipulativity, as it would be overly "stipulative" to conclude that *gender needs and can be banished* if we have forejudged a normative definition of gender (predefined as worthy of banishment and in such terms that it *could* be banished [Barnes 2016a, 11, 13]). This, of course, begs the question: if we preconceive gender as a removable thing then, it being presumably possible to remove things, it becomes possible to remove gender.[44] However, if gender is relational, structural, and enacted/embodied rather than some hypostasized thing that could be facilely identified and weeded out, then it becomes unclear whether gender can simply be blotted out (Butler 1999, 2004, 2007). Likewise, while we may plausibly argue that we *ought* to snuff out all forms of gender injustice, whether we practicably *can* in fact target and nix gender when it is "social, systematic, and structural" is less certain (Mikkola 2016b, 188).[45] So the eliminativist will have to find a non-circular definition of gender to prove such a theoretical posit was nonexistent and unreal.

1.2.1.1 Folk Conceptions: Biological Reductionism, Quintessentialism, Bigenderism

[43] As should be clear, these are Barnes' (2016a) criteria.

[44] I thank Cressida Heyes (personal communication) for this insight that eliminativist language is question-begging.

[45] By "social," Mikkola means the way social groups are bound together "in both voluntary and non-voluntary public indicative features that are taken as social significant (e.g., physical traits behavior, social roles, self-ascription)"; by "structural" Mikkola means "hav[ing] their causes in norms, habits, symbolic meanings, and assumptions unquestionably embedded in and underlying our institutional and social arrangements," and by "systematic," (here she cites Clatterbaugh), "exist[ing] 'throughout a society, usually over a substantial period of time,' where 'the institutions of society interlock and reinforce other in ways that create and maintain' injustices" (2016b, 188).

What is gender? As Judith Butler points out, the grammar of the query might already be misleading, if gender isn't simply some*thing* we can point to and categorize under a sortal concept, as one would, say, a tree or a table (2014). While we may point to instances of gender or examples of gendered imagery or behavior, any instance of gender would not "exhaust" everything that gender signifies or could be (Butler 1999). Eliminativists seeking to disprove the theoretical posit of something like gender would do well to begin by rejecting folk theories of gender—namely, biological reductionism, essentialism, and binarism—which are untenable on both scientific and empirical grounds, so a first pass at getting eliminativism off the ground is to distinguish feminist from folk conceptions and to reject the latter.

In feminist discourse past and present, one commonly hears tell of a distinction between gender—or the social roles and values tethered to sexed bodies—and sex—chromosomal, hormonal, and morphological, sex characteristics that make up sexed bodies (Mikkola 2016a; Anderson 2015). Everyday "social agents" often seem to define and explain gender by way of sex: men and women are thought to not simply supervene on but to ground out in maleness and femaleness (Mikkola 2007, 566–67; 2016a; 2016b, 87-88). Folk conceptions reduce gender to heteronormative binarism ("man and woman only") by assuming that gender reduces to cisnormative sexual dimorphism ("male and female only" [Butler 2004; Mikkola 2016a]). As Stephanie Kapusta maintains, the extension of gender terms depends on normative presuppositions guiding the application-condition of gender concepts and terms, namely that, on a folk conception, no human can "be" without bearing a gender, and these genders are biologically predetermined, infixed, mutually exclusive, exhaustive, and binary (2015, 3).[46]

The first element of folk conceptions is biological reductionism whereby "genitalia make the gender" (see Bettcher 2007, 2009). As I phrase it in other work (LaBrada 2016a), even lay conceptions of gender don't simply assume an equivalence or identity relation (gender=sex), but something more like a *grounding,* explanatory relation between gender and sex: we often hear in folk talk in a North American, Western context that one is, say, a woman *because* one is female, since

[46] Kapusta (2015) is regimenting the everyday or ordinary folk "rules of gender" that Bornstein (1994) lists. "Gender rules" are characterized as carrying normative force sanctioning which gender one *ought* to be like ("norms of being") and how one ought to behave ("norms of action") (see Glüer and Wikfross 2015 on this distinction).

woman is thought to be asymmetrically, irreflexively, and transitively grounded in being (natally) *female* (Thompson 2014, 26).[47] Being a woman is "nothing over and above" being female: femaleness asymmetrically explains why one is a woman (womanhood does not in turn explain femaleness); womanhood is irreflexive in not explaining itself (it needs femaleness to be explained); femaleness transitively explains womanhood, such that if femaleness explains womanhood and womanhood explains woman-like behavior, then femaleness explains woman-like behavior.[48] The physical fact of sex is presumed to be ontologically anterior to (as well as presumed to be more explanatorily fundamental than) the social fact of gender and sex is the truth-maker for gender claims (Thompson 2014, 26; Butler 1999; Rosario MS, 19).[49] From this biological-reductionist perspective, the necessary and sufficient conditions that fix membership in the gender category "woman" (for example) are "essentially" and "causally" physical (Bach 2012, 33). Gender categories would thus carve nature at its joints because of the sex categories they track, with sex asymmetrically, irreflexively, and transitively grounding gender (Leslie 2013, 122; Butler 1999; Rosario MS).

Second, another feature of folk conception of gender includes what Sarah-Jane Leslie calls "psychological quintessentialism" or,

> [the belief] in a substance-like entity possessed by some individuals and some forms of stuff, a substance which pervades their insides and causally grounds many of their stable and persisting properties. Membership in a natural kind is taken to be determined by objective features of one's quintessence—namely the features that are shared by other members of the kind. (Leslie 2013, 115)

Quintessentialism about gender would denote the assumption that gender concepts and terms track a natural kind (namely sex), which expresses an essence or set of essential properties. Following Kate Bornstein (1994, 46-50) and Butler (1999, 28-30), we can summarize the folk, psychological quintessentialist view of gender kinds as the belief that gender is a substance which certain individuals bear or express, an intrinsic quintessence that "causally" grounds other types of gender-relevant properties and which constitutes an "objective feature" which fixes or settles gender kind membership (see Leslie 2013 for discussion). This quintessentialist view of gender plays out in

[47] I've modified Thompson's example, which is female fox=vixen.

[48] I am using Thompson's descriptive formula for "regimenting grounding claims" in her dissertation (2014, 10). See Wilson (2014) on "nothing over and above"-ness.

[49] To reformulate Thompson: sex "makes a proposition [about gender] true iff [sex]'s existence grounds the truth of [gender]" (2014, 27). See my LaBrada (2016a) from which this draws.

"ordinary manifesting conditions" (in this context, North America) as a set of folk beliefs about how and why one is a gender (Bornstein 1994, 46-50; Gilbert 2009).[50]

If, as biological reductionism and psychological quintessentialism assume, sex grounds gender, then "trans folk," intersexed individuals, and gender nonconformists "cannot exist" on this model, or if they do it is only as biological defects, moral deviants, and societal misfits (Gilbert 2009, 95). This makes for, thirdly, a thorough *bigenderism*, or "the view that accepts the rules of gender and does not permit or allow for [substantive and explicit] variations, exceptions, and/or deviations from the norm" (ibid; see also Bach 2012, 247-8; Ásta 2011, 2013a). While clearly bigenderism is being refuted all the time (both in biological variations and social conceptions and deportments, whereby there are plenty of deviations from stipulated "norms"), we can take Gilbert's point that bigenderism, along with other intersectional aspects of social identity,[51] prevalently informs the "Background" of beliefs, intentionalities, and inculcated dispositions that structure our social world.[52] According to a presumed natural "entailment" from "sex" to "gender" and "desire," one is naturally and necessarily born a sex that then predisposes one to be a gender that will eventually desire the opposite gender (Butler 1999, Ch.1). This is what infuses the bigenderist, quintessentialist, and biological reductionist folk conception with both heteronormativity and heterosexism (Gilbert 2009, 98).

Thanks to an extensive history of feminist philosophy and feminist-inflected science, the eliminativist could easily show that gender, as construed on the folk conception, is "unreal" and ought to be "abolished": it has long been disproven that how one comports oneself, the social roles one follows, and how one generally expresses gender-stereotypical traits (voice grain, attire, etc.) are not reducible to biological criteria alone. It is also well known that bodies cannot be categorized in solely two sex classes (Fausto-Sterling 2000; Daly 2015; Ayala and Vasilevya 2015; Yap 2016): given the diversity of intersex persons, chromosomal variations in the population, and the availability of sexual-reassignment surgeries, most feminist biologists and philosophers tend to

[50] On "ordinary conditions" see Dembroff 2016.

[51] As Heyes (personal communication) points out, bigenderism only occupies one level of explanation: when white male-identified president Trump claims that Mexicans are "rapists," there is a dense intersection of race, gender, and sexuality.

[52] This is what Searle, in a different context calls "The Background," (Searle 2010, 31). See Jenkins (2016b) for an exposition and critique. I follow Jenkins in expanding the "background" to include "non-intentional" behavioral dispositions and cultivated habits (2016b).

agree that sexual dimorphisms and bigenderisms do not quantify over the diversity of the human species and that alternative models are necessary (Fausto-Sterling 2000; Horvath 1999; Clune-Taylor 2010, 2016; Saul 2012).[53] Lastly, it's well documented that the gender rules are broken all the time: gender concepts and terms are applied differently depending on the social "world" in which one finds itself (for example resistant, trans*friendly contexts [Bettcher 2013; Salamon 2010; Lugones 1987]). Feminists have long invalidated folk conceptions, arguing that the bigender system is itself scientifically inaccurate and politically dangerous (Gilbert 2009; McKinnon 2015, Bettcher 2013). This already bodes ill for the metaphysical eliminativist, however, since non-eliminativist feminists aren't denying that there is something like gender in our social world—and which has "causal" impact and explanatory "power" (Mikkola 2016b). What they deny is that gender resembles what folk conceptions claim to be true. Hence, while non-eliminativist feminists might deny that folk conceptions of gender are "true," they don't deny that gender categories are "real" (see Ney forthcoming).

1.2.1.2 Feminist Conceptions: Neo-Gender Realism, Anti-Essentialism, Nominalism

So, the metaphysical eliminativist would then have to contend with the large literature on what gender is and does, to decide why gender is unreal and worthy of elimination. I am unconvinced that this would be possible: as Butler (2014) pithily remarks, gender is the "name" for a set of debates within feminism and beyond concerning the ways in which gender is limned in terms of experience, embodiment, psychological identity, qualities, norms, symbols, roles, categories, and political classes (amongst others)—meaning that gender is irreducible to an easily identifiable and locatable "object" one could discover and discard (Scott 1986).[54] While Butler is right in a general sense that gender glosses a group of debates, she insufficiently clarifies the motivations that guide investigation into gender's underpinnings in the first place: if gender denominates a series of debates, then the question would seem to be: *why* these debates? *Why* is gender being debated—amongst whom and for which reasons?

In contradistinction to folk views, feminists contend that gender is constitutively and

[53] This draws from LaBrada (2016a).
[54] Haslanger (2012) writes as well that gender can refer to "identity," "norms," "a system of sexual symbolism," or "a social class" (28).

causally concocted by "social forces" rather than predetermined by biological properties, but what this social constructionist claim signifies or culminates in is subject to dispute (Marques 2016; Haslanger 2012, forthcoming; Mikkola 2016a, 2011; Anderson 2015). On the simplest characterization, feminist philosophers like Bettcher appeal to the paradoxical social fact that, although folk understandings of sex (read: "genitals") are supposed to ground gender, we don't usually have public access to other people's genitals, making it the case that we verify someone's gender not by their putative genitalia but by the gender presentation they proffer and which we presume "stands in" for genitals: "Gender presentation is generally taken as a sign of sexed body, taken to mean sexed body, taken to communicate sexed body. And it is precisely for this reason that transpeople who 'misalign' gender presentation and sexed body are construed as either deceivers or pretenders" (Bettcher 2007, 52; Gilbert 2009, 96). Gender presentation is a "nonverbal system of communications" and cues whereby one's gender presentation— embedded in systems of signalization (e.g. "I am this sex, be disposed to have this reaction toward it, etc." [Gilbert 2009, 102])—is supposed to be representative of one's "genital status" (Bettcher 2009). Whenever there's a mismatch between gender presentation and genitalia, say a "man-presenting" figure (according to some relevant standard) whose genitalia are female (according to some relevant standard), then "reality enforcement" can occur, whereby one's gender presentation is denied as either deceitful, fraudulent, or disingenuous (Bettcher 2007).

Feminists further point out that what gender means (and what it does) will differ depending on the theoretical and contextual framework within which it is defined as well as historical and intersectional considerations (Barnes 2016a, 12). Feminist ontologists thus yield differing conceptions of gender depending on where they draw the line between realism and nominalism—or, what allies a category of individuals together—and essentialism and anti-essentialism—or, the "nature" of the individuals so allied (Stoljar 2000, 29n3).[55] In addition to these debates, the eliminativist would have to address a new one: the debate between conservationism and eliminativism, or whether a category of individuals aptly references "real features" of the world and whether it should be preserved in our discourses and doings. The gender eliminativist would also

[55] For these definitions of realism and essentialism see Stoljar (2000, 29n3). There are clearly several kinds of essentialism as Heyes (2000) and Stoljar (1995, 267) point out: amongst which biological, linguistic, metaphysical, and methodological essentialism (Heyes 2000).

have to add questions concerning the scale of gender (how gender applies differently to groups or individuals), its relation to autonomy and free will (whether gender is something one can permutate oneself, or whether it is that which is ascribed to one despite oneself), and its relation to oppression (whether gender identities are distinct from, complicit with, or identical to oppression [Taylor 2016]). Another looming question concerns the relation between *sex* and *gender*. Is the sex-gender distinction biologically significant and meaningful (Butler 1993; Fausto-Sterling 2000; Ludwig 2014)? Which grounds which? Is there even such a distinction, or is sex in fact a gendered kind (Butler 1999; Clune-Taylor 2016; LaBrada 2016a)? How serviceable is such a distinction (Mikkola 2011 and 2016b)? If the eliminativist argues that gender is not real, would they still wish to preserve sex as real, biological, and causal?

To begin their task, the eliminativist would have to disprove (at least) neo-gender realists, anti-essentialists, and nominalists to get their view off the ground. They would have to show why each account of gender is implausible, which means demonstrating how each type of account fails to meet the aforementioned criteria of explanatory success as defined by Barnes (2016a, 10-13), *and* demonstrating that their theory cannot be accommodated within or regimented by extant theories. But it's unclear whether this is possible. Let's consider neo-gender realists, anti-essentialists, and nominalists in turn (I'll be drawing on Mikkola 2016b for my characterizations of these positions).

Firstly, neo-gender realists[56] posit communal conditions that determine membership in gender categories, but do not prejudge what kinds of conditions those are; sometimes neo-gender realists specify gender by means of (social) universals, essences, properties, relations, or facts (Mikkola 2016b; Mikkola 2006; see Stoljar 2011 on "social universals").[57] But the realist is not quite advocating for a universal "gender-defining feature"—be it a property, sort, relation, etc.—that all members of a gender kind personify (though some do), for this universal feature can be both

[56] The term is Mikkola's (2016a) to distinguish these critical "realist" views from older realist views.

[57] As Mikkola puts it: "women as a group are assumed to share some characteristic feature, experience, common condition, or criterion that defines their gender and makes them women" (2016b, 28). This is not to say, as mainstream metaphysical realists do, that "there exists some universal (strictly speaking identical and repeatable) property of *being a woman*…[but] that women as women share some—usually a multiply realizable and complex—feature" (2016b 4n.1). This discussion of gender realism and nominalism draws from my highly abridged account of Mikkola's typology in LaBrada (2016a).

"complex" and "multiply realizable" (Mikkola 2016b, 29; 31).[58] Rather, as Mikkola puts it, for most contemporary neo-gender realists, gender is a one-place predicate or "monadic" property ("F is P"), it is "extrinsic" (it depends on "external social relations"), individually "nonessential" (one can lose that complex monadic gender property P and still exist as a human, person, or organism), and "multiply realizable" (many different individuals can instantiate gender property P [ibid]).[59]

Neo-gender realism, on Mikkola's construal, thus refers to the view that genders "share some…feature," usually a "multiply realizable and complex" one (2016b, 4n1): "there [is] some (normatively) important feature that [genders] qua [genders] share, which unifies their social kind. Such a feature is usually thought to be socially constructed and individually nonessential" (2016b, 46). Some neo-gender realists make the kind-essentialist claim that in some respect all members of a gender kind (man, woman, or neither) bear a common property, feature, substance, essence, or relation that pulls them together as members of that kind or that founds the necessary and sufficient conditions for kind membership (Mikkola 2016a; Mason 2016).[60] On this view, members of gender kinds are thought to be classifiable by virtue of some commonly confederating property or constellation of properties that amalgamates them together as the gendered groups they are and that

[58] Mikkola usefully distinguishes between monadic properties ("one-place predicates like 'is F'") and polyadic properties ('n-place predicates that are expressive of relations like *a,* relation *R*, *B*") (2016b, 71) with gender realists subscribing to the former and nominalists to the latter; between intrinsic ("properties that a particular has eerily by virtue of itself") and extrinsic ("properties that a particular has by virtue of something external to it"), with gender realists thinking that gender is "relation*al*, but not a *relation*," that is, gender is gender is "a monadic extrinsic property" (72); and between essential individual properties ("*I* cannot survive the loss of this property. Were I to lose it, I would cease to exist") and nonessential individual properties (I can lose that property and still exist as myself [72-3]).

[59] As Mikkola (2016b, 63) puts it, there is one concept of woman but many different relativized conceptions of the concept woman. That is, there is one feature that is "multiply realizable" and we can "articulate 'core' [woman-] making features, which are multiple realizable because of social variance" (ibid). Griffith's article on "Social Construction" (forthcoming) also presents gender kinds as "functionally defined multiply realizable kinds" (2). He writes "for a kind K to be realized by a property P is for the instantiation of P to 'bring about' the instantiation of K by P's being a *way* of being a K. A kind K is *multiply* realizable, then, if suitably different properties could bring about the instantiation of a token of K; the different realizers of K are different *ways* in which a thing can be a K. Realization…is a many-one relation that holds between properties…realizers are properties of the individual bearing the realized property…The realization relation is a synchronic, asymmetrical, non-causal determination relation. Realizers…necessitate…what they realize" (4).

[60] For a defense of gender kind essentialism see Mason (2016), for whom essential properties don't have to be "biological," "intrinsic," or "necessary and sufficient conditions": "Rather, kinds can be individuated by clusters of properties that are contingently but reliably coinstantiated because they are held in homeostasis by one or more causal mechanisms. On this account, an individual can be a member of a kind, K, without instantiating all of the properties in the cluster of properties in terms of which K is defined" (844). Mason also writes: "The essential properties of a kind, K, specify what it is to be K. That is, the being or nature of a kind is given by its essential properties" (843).

furnishes the condition(s) allowing them to belong to their gender kind.[61] As Mikkola notes, what distinguishes neo-gender realist accounts like these from older essentialist accounts is that the property of being a gender is like "being a wife" or "being a tenant": while there are characteristic, extrinsic social relations that comprise what it is to hold the social position of a wife or a tenant, that social position is itself possessed by all those who hold it (as the common property or conjoint feature that all those who are wives or tenants possess [2016b, 73]). Being a gender is to instantiate a property that, though universally borne by all other gender kind members, is extrinsic and social rather than "intrinsic, innate, or [individually] essential" (ibid). Hence, realists like Haslanger, McKitrick, and Jenkins maintain that there are "objective" properties that all members of a gender category (here, "woman") embody: for Haslanger, it is to be classed and positioned as a "woman" (because one is believed to be female and subject to subjugation [Haslanger 2012, 230); for McKitrick, gender is an extrinsic dispositional property characterizing not how one actually behaves but "how one is disposed to behave" (2015, 2579);[62] and for Jenkins, it is to be socially constituted to have the "status of 'woman'" as a gender and to "function as a subperson" since one's "deontic powers" are severely undercut (Jenkins 2016b, 91).[63] Realists present a persuasive case for

[61] See Mikkola (2016b, Ch.3 and Ch.4) for an analysis of gender nominalists and realists. Mikkola notes that many realists characterize gender as an "extrinsic" and "polyadic" property: "x, relation R, [social norms and conditions]" (2016b, 76). While one might respond differently to (or satisfy different disjuncts of) the social norms and conditions that must be met to be gendered, what one shares with others of that gender kind is that one maintains a relation to the social norms and conditions either by having the disjuncts (norms, conditions, etc.) imputed to oneself or through self-imputation.

[62] McKitrick's claim is that gender is a "multi-track disposition," a "cluster of dispositions" that has variable manifestations and whose circumstances are "jointly sufficient" but "not individually necessary" (2015, 2580, 2579). Such dispositions are extrinsic—like "weight, visibility, and vulnerability"—which means that they are relational and obtain by virtue of their relation to external factors rather than by virtue of what they are in and of themselves (Weatherson and Marshall 2012). Hence duplicates could differ with respect to these extrinsic dispositions (a duplicate of me could weigh more or less, on this example, depending on extrinsic factors), yet still be my duplicate. McKitrick's formal definition is as follows: "x is gender G iff x has (sufficiently many, sufficiently strong) dispositions D1…Dn to behave in ways B1…Bn in situation S1…Sn, and; The relevant social group considers behaving in ways B1…Bn in situations S1…Sn to be G" (2015, 2581). Mckitrick considers the "relevant behaviors" at issue in to be "modes of dress, posture, and mannerisms, productive and leisure time activities, styles communications…[with] dispositions correspond[ing] to different kinds of psychological characteristics, such as habits, responses to incentives, and experienced desires" (ibid).

[63] Linda Martín Alcoff, as Mikkola lists (2016a and 2016b) as an example [and which Kapusta critiques 2015 and 2016] on transfeminist grounds), makes the realist claim that *all* those gendered as women will have a particular and pressing "relation of possibility to reproduction"—specifically menstruation, impregnation, gestation, birth, and lactation—that is different from *all* those gendered men, regardless of whether or not women want children or are occurrently fertile: "*Women and men are differentiated by virtue of their different relationship of possibility to biological reproduction, with biological reproduction referring to conceiving, giving birth, and breast-feeding, involving one's body*" (2006, 172; also cited in Kapusta 2015).

understanding gender as a kind of "social position" or node within which one finds oneself—this seems to propound the same explanatory claim as the eliminativist: as Mikkola would have it, gender isn't "out there" in the world (mind-independently) but is a product of our beliefs and social actions (2016b, 101). Furthermore, like the eliminativist, the realist isn't declaring there is such a thing as gender "itself" (some sort of independent substance or thing), but conjectures that gender is a *relational* position (Haslanger 2012; Haslanger and Ásta 2011; Alcoff 2006). The eliminativist would have to take the extra step and show that social positions are fictions with no causality or reality, which would be a difficult argument to sustain: in addition to rejecting gender's reality the eliminativist would have to explain why gender roles, categories, concepts, relations, etc. are *also* unreal.

Next, on the anti-realist, anti-essentialist end of the spectrum, some like Ásta Sveinsdóttir claim that gender properties are "conferred" on persons based on context-dependent perceptions and practices (2011, 61). On this "projectivist" account, how we impute gender concepts to persons hinges on what we believe (and desire) and "what we do,"[64] rendering gender a constitutively mind-dependent affair while allowing for social and biological constraints (Ásta 2011; Langton 2009).[65] Ásta culls from Butler's poststructuralist gender performativity theory, appealing to social practices in addition to subjective perceptual activity. Following Butler, Ásta maintains that gender and sex are normative rather than descriptive categories, and that gender does not emanate from an inborn essence but is inaugurated and instated through performative doings or enactments (see Butler 1999).

According to Butler's now canonical theory, gender is not a metaphysical substance or a reified thing but a perpetual "doing" (1999, 28): gender is not commensurate with what a subject "is" or "has" (Butler 2004, 42)—indeed, gender is not a thing at all but a continual and relational acting, insofar as gender is "materialized" "in and as" a series of rule-governed acts over a temporally extended period (2015; Butler 1993, 2004). Gender is performatively enacted through continuous

[64] See Mason 2016 and MS on "what we do."

[65] Barnes (2014) calls Ásta's and Rae Langton's theories "projectivist." Langton, for example, claims that "phenomenological gilding" (the "quasi-perceptual" belief that the world is the way we feel), "wishful thinking" (the creation of beliefs based on the desire for the world to be a certain way), and pseudo-empathy (the tendency to believe that others think and feel as one does) can generate a state of unequal gender relations whereby the desires of the majority that, say, women be a certain way creates the conditions for women to *become* as they are desired to be (2009, 241-266).

performances and practices superintended by a multitude of gender norms mandating and modulating how one ought to comport oneself in order to exemplify a given gender "correctly" or "normally" (i.e. according to certain culturally contingent normative ideals [1999, 112]). These norms are imperious and coercive, and our normative task is not to cast off gender but to figure out how to infirm the sway of those norms already in place and how to "relax" their "hold" on us (2015). As Butler writes in more recent work, we shouldn't want to keep these norms in place but in play, as we can't stamp out gender norms *tout court*, and indeed we shouldn't, since we ostensibly "need" them to "live" and to render life more "livable" for those whose gender identity is crucial to their well-being (Butler and Williams 2014; Butler 2015; Butler 2004).

So Butler is not forwarding the descriptive claim that genders *tout court* do not exist, nor is she advancing the normative claim that they should not exist—still less is she promoting the view that "proliferating" multiple genders for the sake of "proliferation" alone is a viable political end (Butler 2014). What Butler seems to be suggesting, rather, is that gender does not exist *as a thing*, a metaphysical substance, or an interior "gender core"—it is not that which is *had* (a property) or that which *is* (a being-thing) for it is not an ontic thing at all (2004, 41; see also Mikkola 2016b, 36). What we call gender is an effect occasioned in and by our norm-regulated, stylized, and ritualized doings (Butler 1999; see also Mikkola 2016a and 2016b, 33-36). Gendered doings not only follow culturally and contextually contingent gender norms, but such doings "cite" these norms (and cite their ostensive "authority") by virtue of instantiating and "iterating" them (Butler 1993, 1997). The theory of performativity thus seeks to dispute the view that there's first an ontic thing, "gender," which antedates our gender performances thereof (Bettcher 2013; Butler 1992). Butler importantly inverts and confutes that presumptive logical, chronological, and causal relation: it is not as though there were first gender *and then* we came to inhabit or "be" it, but the reverse—gender is retrospectively fancied to have been originating and "animating" our gendered doings all the while, when in fact it is no more than the secondary effect and belated consequence of our various rule-following doings (Butler 1999, 144 and 1993 Ch.1). It is because gender is erroneously thought to be a substantive thing or substance, that we have come to wrongly fantasize that genders can be truth-evaluable (depending on sex assigned and recorded at birth)—as if gender had truth-assessable content depending on one's natal sex—rather than a set of acts laboring under the duress of socially contingent gender norms, codes, and rules (Butler 2004; Mikkola 2016a).

On Ásta's reworked Butlerian, conferralist account, the question is: might a given property be "essential to" someone without this requiring or entailing realism about properties such as "de re necessity" and "real essences" (2008, 136)? Shunning the realist essentialist idea that an object's essential properties "lie in the nature of the object itself" (2013b, 21), Ásta's claims that properties are "conferred" rather than "out there" in the world "if it is in virtue of some attitudes of subjects"—that is, their perceptions and practices—"that the object has the property" (ibid). Those who confer the property can be actual subjects (actual subjects who do in fact confer the property under actual conditions) or idealized subjects (nonfactual subjects who would under the right non-actual circumstances confer the property [2008, 138]). The point of this account is not that the essential properties that establish an object really relies upon us, but that our taking a property to be an essential property of that object ("essentiality") relies upon us or, rather, relies upon our concept-usage and application (ibid; Mason 2016). What is at issue is the "second-order property" (the property of being an essential property) that is mind-dependent (2008, 137). So, for example, the property of gender being essential to us as humans, or the property of gender as being grounded in biology, are the result of our conceptual commitments (how we do employ actually, or would employ counterfactually, concepts, based on the "non-negotiable beliefs" which imbue our concepts, or those implicit beliefs which, if abandoned, would render those concepts unintelligible [2008 139, 141-2]. A non-negotiable belief is one that, if removed or if false, would make it such that "we would not know what talk involving the concepts in question amounted to" [2010, 113]).

The conferralist framework specifies "*who*" is doing the conferring (individual, institution, etc.), "*what*" perception or practice is actuating the conferral (attitude, speech act etc.), "*when*" the conferral occurs (the actual, normal, ideal conditions etc.), and which "*grounding property*" the subjects are consciously or unconsciously essaying to "track" and which grounds the conferral (2013, 722). When it comes to a conferralist account of gender, Ásta attempts to "make good" on Butler's claim that gender and sex categories "are not joints of nature" but regulatory ideals, or "prescriptive norm[s] projected or posited by subjects" (2011, 52). Everyday "language users," to cite Mikkola's phrase, pretheoretically presume that gender terms are tracking the grounding property of sex (male, female) when they identify genders, but in fact gender does not instantiate this grounding property—it is merely a conferred property that is *thought* to express the grounding property of sex. When we say that someone is a man or woman we are not "describing" the world (males and

females) but instead emitting a normative speech act articulating our conceptual commitments that this someone *be* taken to be a man or woman based on the grounding properties we *think* are being instantiated (2011, 53). This reiterative conferral of gender upon others is felicitous in various contexts not because conferrors embody the authority to confer gender in those contexts, but because in multiple contexts conferrors "cite" the authority of preexisting gender conventions and norms to vindicate their conferrals (2013a, 723).[66] Subjects carry "gender maps" or normative schemas about what gender is and what grounds it, and these come into competing play in various contexts when essaying to track gender (2013a, 724).

For Butler and Ásta, then, gender would be a gendered regulatory ideal that we project and which we employ to sex bodies in various contexts: bodies come to "be" insofar as they are rendered intelligible "by virtue of being" categorized as male or female where the latter are in fact gendered categories about what kinds of bodies belong to "men" or "women" (Haslanger 2012, 457). This makes gender a "highly contextual communal property" (2015a). In short, anti-realist, anti-essentialists accounts gainsay the claim that gender is mind-independent—claiming that gender is "real" only relative to our perceptions and practices—such that gender properties would be "conferred" on others based on context-dependent conceptions and conferrals (Ásta Sveinsdóttir 2011, 61). The anti-realist, anti-essentialist advances explanatory claims similar to the eliminativist: they reject the mind-independence of gender (gender depends upon us), but they don't adduce an error-theoretic, negative existential claim (gender doesn't exist). This obviates the problem of explaining how gender could be non-existent *and* harmful *and* capable of being removed/abolished/disbelieved, especially if it supposedly exercises no "causal impact" on our world. The anti-realist has the benefits of contravening mind-independence about gender without

[66] Ásta schematizes this conferralism about gender thus: "Property : being of gender G, e.g., a woman, man, trans; Who : the subjects S in the particular context C; What : the perception of the subjects S that the person have the grounding property P; When : in context C; Tracking : the grounding property P" (2011, 61). On this view, one's gender is subject permutation depending on the context within which one finds oneself. The property of being a given gender G is conferred insofar as a given subject S perceives someone to instantiate a grounding property that makes them that gender G (e.g. physical features, behaviors, social roles, self-attribution, etc.) within a given context C at times T1….T2. But, as mentioned above, grounding properties and conferred properties can come apart: even if we think we are tracking the grounding property of sex when we assign gender to others, we are in fact exposing that gender is itself a conferred social property which we think is tracking sex but might be tracking other things (social role, stereotypes, imaginings, etc.). Thus conferralism accounts for the epistemic fact that the disjunction between the grounding property (what is) and the conferred property (what seems to be) shows that what "matters socially is what you seem to be, not what you are" (2013a, 729).

thereby falling into the conceptual conundra that metaphysical eliminativism engenders.

Finally, and in contrast to gender realists and anti-realists, gender nominalists dispute that there subsist certain traits that all and only gender kind members typify, even if they maintain "that there is *something* that unifies women's social kind, which is normatively significant (e.g., some relations in which women stand)" (Mikkola 2016b, 46). On this view, gender kind members don't need to be endowed with the same qualifying property to be a member of the kind even if something else, say, "external relations" might embed them in similar social positions such that they qualify as members of a kind (Mikkola 2016b, 46). As Mikkola puts it, unlike eliminativists about gender, nominalists do not impugn the existence of gender kinds, nor do they even impugn the idea that there is "something that unifies" a gender kind, but they rebuff the view that this "something" is a trait that all members of a gender kind epitomize—like a gender universal or a self-identical gender property that is realized and reiterated in identical fashion amongst multiple gender tokens (2016b, 46).[67] Nominalist accounts like those of Stoljar (1995; 2011), Hale (1996), and others, have argued that gender concepts amount to "cluster concepts" and gender "terms" are "family-resemblance term[s]" (Mikkola 2016b, 4).[68]

For Stoljar, gender categories gain purchase to the extent that members approximate certain paradigms of that gender, and these paradigms are gender exemplars that "satisfy enough of" a certain cluster of conditions—physical, phenomenological, social, identificatory, etc.—yoked to that gender category (1995, 284). Although these clusters of features are used to track how we apply our gender concepts, they do not precisify sufficient and necessary conditions for

[67] As Mikkola (2016b, 4) points out "nominalists" "seek to unify women's social kind by appealing to a variety of external relations." Nominalists like Marilyn Frye, for example, seek to construct a *positive* category of *woman* based on extrinsic relations in which one stands rather than the intrinsic features that one has: their effort is not to define woman as the conceptual negation to man ("A/not-A") but to construct two distinct categories altogether ("A:B") based on plural, internal relations, "nonoppositional contrasts," and co-constituting *positive* differences amongst women (Frye 1996, 997-998; 1008; also cited in Mikkola 2016b, 47). Other nominalists like Iris Marion Young claim that gender kinds are "social series," that is, in terms of how one is socially positioned and "passively unified" with others in terms of the "practico-inert realities" in which they find themselves (Young 1997, 23-24; also cited in Mikkola 2016b). For a critical review of these three thinkers, see Mikkola (2016b).

[68] These Wittgensteinian accounts argue that there are no necessary and sufficient conditions for membership in a gender category, only family resemblances or "overlapping similarities rather than by a single defining feature or set of features" (Medina 2002, 212, n.192) or "crisscrossing, overlapping characteristics that are clear within social contexts" (Garry 2011, 839; see also Green & Radford Curry 1991; Nicholson 1994; Stoljar 1995; Heyes 2000, 84; Corvino 2000; Medina 2002; Lindemann Nelson 2002; Hale 1996; Frye 2011). Note that resemblance is not equivalent to "sameness" nor is similarity equivalent to "strict identity" (Stoljar 2011, 29; Medina 2002).

predetermining what gender category that concept singles out: "a cluster concept does not pick out a single feature or set of features in all the individuals falling under the concept. In order for an individual to satisfy the concept, it is sufficient to satisfy *enough* of, rather than all and only, the features in the cluster" (Stoljar 2011, 27). The cluster concept instead outlines certain paradigmatic exemplars of women by means of which we begin to get a grasp of what category is being "marked off" (Mikkola 2016a and 2016b). The important point is that there is no one feature, property, or set of necessary and sufficient conditions that all and only members of a gender category bear but, rather, family resemblances and clusters of features that *most* (or "some sufficient number") of those members "share" (Barnes 2016, 45). Hence, Caitlyn Jenner, Hillary Clinton, and Herculine Barbin are all women at some point and time, but what makes them partake of the same gender class is not some context-independent objective property that all and only these three persons emblematize. Nor are these persons all of the same womankind. We can assay the diverse instances where "woman" is applied to such persons and see what similarities—where similarity does not imply strict identity but "relative identity" (Medina 2002)— "run through these and other cases" even if they do not all possess one selfsame feature or set of features (Harbin 2016, 17). This would render gender an "irreducibly disjunctive class" (Haslanger 2012, 57).

Hence, to rephrase Rodriguez-Pereya, on a resemblance-nominalist account of gender it's wrong to conclude that (say) all genderfluid persons "resemble" each other by virtue of being genderfluid—rather, genderfluid persons are genderfluid by virtue of "resembling" each other (Rodriguez-Pereya 2016; see also Stoljar 2011, 28).[69] Gender classes are thus "heterogeneous" but not to the point of being entirely randomized inasmuch as there are "substantive similarities among the members" even though there are no necessary and sufficient conditions of how to apply gender terms that would "correspond[d] to a single set of features of reality" (Stoljar 2011, 29; 33). These family-resemblance and contextualist accounts continue to provide rich discussion and critique, especially from contemporary transfeminist philosophers (Kapusta 2015a, 2015b; Diaz-Leon 2016; Bettcher 2013; Saul 2012; Garry 2011). The eliminativist, however, in tabling gender nominalism, will have to explain why and how we are ascribing gender concepts and terms if every usage of our

[69] Here I'm citing/drawing from Rodriguez-Pereya's account of resemblance nominalism as well as Stoljar's paraphrase thereof. I've adapted Rodriguez-Pereya's formula (2016)—"it is not that scarlet things resemble one another because they are scarlet, but what makes them scarlet is that they resemble one another"—and inserted gender into the formulation to make this example of resemblance nominalism.

gendered language is false and misapplied. What are social agents referencing when they utilize gender concepts (if gender is non-existent)? As Haslanger asks, if our gender terms are only referring to people unwarrantedly mistaken to be or incorrectly believed to instantiate gender (because gender doesn't exist), aren't our gender terms nonetheless referentially picking out something like gender (namely, [falsely] gendered groups or classes [2012, 199])? If our gender terms are solely referencing people thought to be gendered, they're capturing facts about gender—namely groups who are gendered by virtue of our false beliefs in gender—, making our gender terms not only "truth-apt" but also "sometimes true," and thus exposing the fundamental incoherence of eliminativism (2012, 199)?

1.2.1.3 Problems for Defining Gender

Given these wide variety of views about gender, the eliminativist or "gender skeptic" would have to substantiate the stronger assertion that "[gendered] social kind[s] simply [do] not exist" (Mikkola 2016b, 46n1). Metaphysical eliminativism would have to show that the properties that would have to exist in order for gender to make sense do not exist or catch nothing factually worldly, whereas a normative theory of eliminativism would have to show how and why certain elements of gender could be repealed or replaced. For the claim that gender is unreal and nonexistent—with the entire population being fooled into thinking there is such a thing and being unable to trust their perceptions—could still be captured and regimented in realist, anti-realist, and nominalist talk of gender: if gender realism argues that there is something all gender kind members possess to ensure they belong to a gender, then saying, as the eliminativist does, that the only thing hitching together gender kind members together is our misguided belief that they are those genders (and have thus been serried and positioned as those genders), amounts to a kind of realist claim: there is some substantive property—our beliefs—which fasten together gender kinds. If one were to say that the *only* thing fastening gender kind members together were these misconceptions, then this would amount to a nominalist claim: gender kinds exist solely in virtue of our beliefs and terms. Furthermore, to say that gender is not mind-independent is compossible with an anti-realist (but not therefore error-theoretic) claim. Eliminativism (in its error-theoretic variety), can thus easily be regimented within existing theories, forcing its own original theoretical posit—that there is no gender—into ill standing, since its views can be rearticulated within extant feminist theories.

Hence, it also falls on the eliminativist to precisify what gender is *not* metaphysically and what it should *not* be politically in a way that actuates more work than other feminist theories. For while some might be keen on eliminating folk biological reductionist and psychological quintessentialist renditions and formations of "gender," plausibly the problem is not any and all gender conceptions, just inaccurate folk conceptions of gender. If eliminativists want to claim that any and all *gender* conceptions are problematic—be they folk or feminist conceptions—and that any alteration of these conceptions for the better would require not the revision but the abandonment of our gender concepts (in favor of something else), then they will need to specify in what ways they depart from feminist conceptions of gender and why those conceptions are as problematic as folk conceptions. For if the eliminativist holds that even feminist conceptions of gender ineluctably ingrain folk prejudice—because gender is fundamentally unreal or because constitutively prejudicial and oppressive—they will need to specify why it is that any gender conception inevitably entails problematic folk conceptions. The biggest problem with metaphysical eliminativism, to my mind, is that non-eliminativist feminists (neo-realists, nominalists, anti-essentialists, etc.) can easily dismiss eliminativism out of hand by agreeing that, while gender does not capture fundamental "metaphysical structure[s]" like the "ultimate nature of reality"—and is thus metaphysically not "real" in a "fundamental" sense—that's unimportant, since none of our social world is absolutely, metaphysical fundamental (Ney forthcoming). For one can still evidently proffer "true" claims about gender relative to our social world, thus rendering metaphysical eliminativism pointless in endeavor and fruitless in explanation (ibid).

1.2.2 Defining Sociality and Reality

As I have pointed out, the eliminativist would need to precisify in what gender consists, which is fraught with difficulty. Let me touch upon the other two definitions that the eliminativist would have to—but will fail to—satisfy.

1.2.2.1 Conceptions of Sociality

Let's assume we were able to secure what we meant by gender, and concurred with the feminist majority view that gender is "socially constructed" in some meaningful manner. We would

then have to decide what in fact was "social"[70] about gender and furthermore we would be required to specify what kind of social construction was at issue (be it discursive, causal, constitutive, etc. [Haslanger 2012; Diaz-Leon 2013, 5]). For there are differing layers in which gender would be social: this could mean that gender is a *social "property"* (the property of being a gender), a *social kind* (gender as a real or nominal type), a *social fact* (the fact that genders are treated differently), a *social object* (artifacts like toys and clothes are gendered), a *social constituency or group* (bodies are categorized by gender), a *social "event"* (the establishment of laws protecting or discriminating against gender), a *social role* (occupying a social position like "being a wife" or "being a tenant" [Mikkola 2016b; Haslanger 2012]), a *social relation* (relationally defined against other gender and sexual categories), a social *experience* (living as a gender), a social identity (identifying as a gender), a "*social structure*" (patriarchy, capitalism, structural sexism), and so forth (see Mason 2016 for these distinctions).[71] How gender is social will also depend on whether we think that gender is just "socially distinguished" ("drawing a distinction between Fs and non-Fs is motivated by or fulfills a *social purpose*"), "socially constituted" ("the differences between Fs and non-Fs are social, that is, the conditions for being F or non-F are *social features* of things"), or "socially caused" ("things are *caused by social forces* to satisfy the conditions that make them F or non-F" [Haslanger 2012, 190]). For there's quite a difference between proposing that how we think of or define gender is *constitutively social* (its "definition" requiring reference to social relations and conditions, not bio-anatomical ones [Diaz-Leon 2013]) and proposing that gender is *socially caused* (even if, as some argue, there would be no socially constituted facts and objects without them also having been first socially caused [see Marques 2016]). In order to adduce their argument, the eliminativist would have to prove that gender distinctions are not socially "motivated" (our categorizations are false), that gender does not have "social features" (our concepts are inapt), and that gender is not brought into being by human

[70] Mason (2016), drawing on the literature, writes that "a kind is social if the conditions for kind membership involve social properties and relations, or if social phenomena cause instances of the kind to exist [Haslanger's view]…Another possibility is that a kind is social if it depends on collective intension or other attitudes for its existence or nature [Searle's view]. Alternatively, it might be argued that a kind is social if it is the result of cooperative or coordinated behavior among individuals, whether or not the behavior is caused by mental states that are collective in nature. Finally, it might be argued there is no metaphysical distinction between social and nonsocial kinds because social kinds can be understood entirely in individualistic terms" (841-2). Haslanger uses a minimal definition of the "social" as "coordinated activity" to deal with "access problems" for a "resource" (see 2012, 2016a and 2016b).

[71] I am drawing up this list by building on Mason's (2016) distinctions: "There are various categories of social entities other than social kinds and social facts, including social objects…social events…and social properties…social groups…and social structures" (2016, 847 n2).

causal action (gender doesn't "supervene on" human action [Haslanger 2012, 190]). This leads to the implausible outcome that gender is not brought about by human action and "within the natural world," since gender would have no causal part to play at all in our social goings-on (Haslanger 2012). If that's the case, then what's executing all the work that goes by the name of "gender"? Solely our beliefs and fancies? This would fall into an indefensible and implausible idealism.

Assuming that we pinpointed what aspect of gender we were talking about, and gained consensus as to why, the eliminativist would have to explain why we should not talk about gender as a social category structuring our contemporary world (when it clearly does), and how it came to be that the majority of the world has failed to see gender as the fiction that it is. If the eliminativist says that gender is just a social object that doesn't exist (already a contradictory claim insofar as gender would be "something which is not existent"), they would have to explain why we seem to apperceive genders in daily life (what are we perceiving?) and would need to show why gender is reducible to an object rather than an experience, relation, event etc.[72] For example, if gender is a social fact, then it's difficult to see how one could simply remove that fact, since gender not only "supervenes on" but makes up the fact.[73] Indeed, any time the eliminativist can pinpoint why gender is both social and also unreal (say, a socially constructed object), a gender realist or nominalist can simply point to another kind of social aspect of gender (say, a social relation) to refute the unreality claim of eliminativism. If gender is social then it is in fact real (as some feminists claim)—it is socially real in the sense of having causal impact and being existent, thus undermining the eliminativist's claim (Haslanger 2012, 199, 202-3; see Chapter 2 of this thesis for more).

1.2.2.2 Conceptions of Reality

Let's assume the eliminativist was somehow able to specify the grain of analysis sufficiently so that we all agreed on which part of gender was socially instituted yet nonetheless unreal or nonexistent (though I don't think that possible). They would still have to spell out what we mean by "reality" to show why gender is unreal. Rebecca Mason writes compellingly of the polysemous and

[72] Haslanger makes a similar observation with respect to race: "eliminativism may still be a goal for which to aim. But as things stand now, race is something we *see* in the faces and bodies of others; are surrounded by cases that function to us as paradigms and ground our meanings" (2012, 306).

[73] My understanding of social fact, I follow Haslanger: "social facts are 'interpersonal' facts or facts that supervene on such facts… [e.g.] *I am Deb's friend* is a social fact because it supervenes on a certain base set of interpersonal actions and attitudes" (2012, 307n5).

multivalent meanings "real" takes on in the social ontology literature: *reality* can signify what exists, to what is "fundamental," to what is "mind-independent," and to what is "natural" (2016, 844-5). Mason points out how, on each of these considerations of "reality," social kinds like gender are real: gender exists as a social category with real-world impact (how you will be perceived and handled depends on the gender you're assigned) since, as Mikkola claims, there are "relatively" objective or mind-independent features of gender, that is, gender can have objective features "relative to" some "normative practice": whether or not you wear a social artifact like makeup is "epistemologically objective," as Searle (2010) would say, since it can be judged as bivalently true or false relative to some social state of affairs (example from Mikkola 2016b, 137). Indeed, as Mason writes, gender might even be understood as "natural" in the deflated sense of "naturalness" as allowing for "licensed inferences," "generalizations," and "predictions" (say, regarding how you will be treated or what people will assume about you [2016, 844-5]). While clearly gender is not as physically fundamental as protons or quarks, it is obviously *relatively* fundamental, insofar as it explains features of our social world (like structural sexism) whereas protons or quarks cannot explain such social features (Barnes 2014). In many ways gender seems metaphysically *emergent:* the higher-order properties of gender (social behaviors, categories and facts) evince a certain causal and explanatory power irreducible to their "lower-level goings-on" (like the chromosomes, cells, and quarks which make up humans who are gendered)), where the higher-order levels include a "subset of the causal powers" of the lower set [Wilson 2014; Griffith forthcoming]).[74] Even if gender might not be metaphysically "real," in the sense of fundamental, it is nonetheless possible (and actual) that we can formulate true assertions about gender (such as "gender is a social construction"), rendering metaphysical eliminativism on its face incoherent (Ney forthcoming): it would be unable to point to "paradigm cases" of gender, since it would say gender wasn't there, just our beliefs about gender, when clearly there is something there, namely our *gendered/gendering* beliefs (Barnes 2016a, 10)!

[74] I thank Esther Rosario for bringing Wilson's writings on "emergence" and "irreducibility" to my attention as a way of conceptualizing gender. I am also grateful for our discussions about gender and emergence. Griffith ("Social Construction," forthcoming), represents this kind of "emergence" as "realization": "(i) realizers are sufficient for…what they realize, (ii) realizers play a functional role characteristic of what they realize, (iii) the token powers of the realized are a proper subset of the token powers of its realizers" (10). His example: "*being a woman* is realized by properties through which the individual who bears them occupies a social position characteristic of women; the powers bestowed by *being a woman* are a proper subset of the powers bestowed by its realizer properties…*being a woman* is derivative from its realizers" (12).

My deflationary stance toward the reality of gender kinds might seem akin to the view of Mallon (2006) or Haslanger (2012), who assert that gender is in some sense objectively "real"[75] though not in some weighty sense—gender types are "thinly" or weakly objective insofar as they exist, are minimally "unified" together, are significantly "distinct" from non-members of the kind, and participate in the "causal order" of our social world (Haslanger 2012, 202-3; Bach 2012, 236; Jenkins 2016b).[76] However, I don't want to adopt a metaphysical stance that is globally realist or anti-realist about gender kinds, because it simply isn't necessary: feminists don't dispute that gender is, as Mikkola asseverates, "social," "conventional," and "real" (2016b, 118). It doesn't matter whether that "reality" is cashed out as a claim that gender is real independent of what we believe about it (as a realist might argue), or as a claim that gender is only real insofar as it is dependent on our ideological beliefs about gender (as an anti-realist might contend). For, regardless of one's realist or anti-realist take, there is extensive social scientific research showing that people live with and live as genders, sometimes by their own volition and sometimes despite themselves, and it's the case that some people have perished, and continue to, because they did not adhere to, comply with, or fulfill the prevailing gender norms of their society (be they bigenderism, heterosexuality, or sexual dimorphism [2016b, 118 and 187; LaBrada 2016a]). Hence, I wonder (along with and following deflationist feminists) whether both realists and anti-realists can both agree to a minimalist or "thin" notion of existence here: perhaps gender kinds "exist" or are "real" in our social world without us having to endorse the metaphysical realist claim that gender reality includes the possession of common, mind-independent properties all and only gender kind members typify or having to espouse the metaphysical anti-realist claim that reality of gender being no more than the mind-dependent effects of our beliefs and conventions (Mallon 2006). And this is the case if we can

[75] By "real" Haslanger has a very broad, permissive, and "deflationary" notion in mind (2012, 202-5; see also Mason MS). According to Haslanger, a gender kind is real if we can make true claims about it (truth-aptness), a gender kind exists and enjoys "some [minimal] degree of unity" amongst its members (existence and minimal unity [202]), such kinds "can be found in the real world" and participate in the physical-causal order of our world (objectivity [212]), and what distinguishes members of a kind from non-members are real-world differences that we can uncover through exploration and inquiry (reality [203]).

[76] Mikkola puts this nicely: "Feminists are….after a kind that is objective, conventional, *and* real. First, a kind can be objective *relative to* certain strongly normative practices; second, a kind may be conventional in the sense that its existence and persistence *depend* entirely on human agency, our practices, customs, norms, and institutions; third, a kind may be real insofar as it has causal and explanatory *powers*" (2016b, 101-102). The dispute between the realist and the anti-realist is easily settled if both accept that gender "exists" (and they argue about whether or not that existence is mind-independent or not [Miller 2016]). Matters become trickier when an anti-realist eliminativist claims that gender does not *exist,* since this is a stronger claim that gender is not just dependent on us but also an illusion (ibid).

agree that gender (irrespective of its ultimate or underlying metaphysical reality) exercises "causal and explanatory powers" (as Mikkola says) in that the analytical category of gender helps us explain our social world (indeed, it is an "indispensible" part of social scientific inquiry) and our beliefs about gender have causal impact on the way the world is organized (Mikkola 2016b, 118; Haslanger 2016a and 2016b; Ney 2014; Mallon 2006; Scott 1986). This is what makes gender minimally—weakly, "thinly," or at least explanatorily—"real" (Bach 2012, 236). Indeed, perhaps both realist and anti-realist feminists could broadly agree that gender kinds are "conventional" and "social," though how the conventionality and sociality of gender are fleshed out will vary (Mikkola 2016b, 118; Mallon 2006).[77]

1.3 Rejecting the notion of "gender per se"

I have been suggesting that the very formulation of the position of metaphysical eliminativism seems conceptually bewildered and philosophically question-begging. Consider, as a closing example, Nancy Bauer's characterization of (what she designates) "gender-eliminativism," which showcases the incoherence of even a minimal metaphysical definition of eliminativism. Bauer writes: "[eliminativism is] the quasi-nominalist view that women, per se, don't *really* exist" (2011, 119; emphasis in the original). What does it mean to claim that gender "per se" does not really exist? In what sense should we understand this "per se," given that gender itself can be construed in various, often conflicting ways? Bauer seems to have in mind Butler's famous theory of gender performativity as representative of gender eliminativism (2011, 117). But as we saw, gender for Butler certainly exists, only it exists as an enactment (a "doing") not an essence (a "being"). How, then, should we interpret the gender eliminativist's claim that "gender per se does not really exist"?

If this claim is construed as the proposition that gender is not a substantial thing-like or substantive entity that would exist independently from its socially rule-governed enactment, then it would seem that most feminist philosophers would qualify as eliminativists, insofar as there is a large consensus amongst feminist philosophers that gender does not really exist as a thing, Platonic

[77] I like the way Mikkola (2016b) puts this: social practices can be "relatively" objective and factual: "Descriptive traits [like "wearing makeup"] are agent dependent in that their existence depends on factors that require particular human-made background conditions to be in place. Still…[t]he truth or falsity of the statement 'Jane wears makeup' is not up for grabs, *given* our current conventions: either she does or she does not," which makes a social practice both objective and normative (136-7).

form, or metaphysical substance. Indeed, the claim that gender doesn't exist as a thing is much weaker than claiming that gender doesn't exist *tout court* since it only asserts that gender does not exist *as a thing*, leaving open the possibility there might be other ways that gender exists (as a relation, a doing, a becoming, a social fact, an experience, a fantasy, an adaptive preference, and so on). Given Bauer's broad definition of gender eliminativism, even twentieth-century existentialist phenomenologists like Simone de Beauvoir would qualify as an eliminativist.[78] Beauvoir made this point most forcefully in *The Second Sex*: if one is not "born" a gender, but "becomes" and "exists" a gender, then one would not be a gender as one would be an object or a thing since this would entail that one was not a subject at all. For the mark of a subject is the capacity to *become* within a project rather than to statically *be* an object, an argument Heidegger had made decades earlier in positing that "sex" was not a pregiven ontic thing *Dasein* simply "is" but, rather, a factical possibility *Dasein* might become (Beauvoir 2006 [1949] xxiv, cited in Bauer 2011 and Mikkola 2016b; Heidegger 1984 [1928]; Bauer 2011, 126; Morin personal communication; LaBrada MS).

But Bauer clearly does not think all feminist philosophers (especially Beauvoir) are eliminativists, which means that her shorthand definition of eliminativism is not specific enough to pinpoint and single out eliminativism as a philosophically distinctive view. In order to avoid the overgeneralizing effect to which Bauer's loose definition lends, we need to understand gender eliminativism in more fine-grained terms than as just a question of determining whether or not gender exists as a thing or a metaphysical substance, since this the latter is an implausible view that few (if any) contemporary feminist philosophers would countenance or champion. If gender is not construed as being or exemplifying a thing but as, say, becoming within a relation, then arguments about the nonexistence of "gender per se" become decidedly more difficult to maintain short of further qualification. Is gender really a thing at all or a set of relations, an axis of analysis, an experience, a way of talking about social and political relations of power and inequality (and much more [Scott 1986])? The eliminativist will have to prove not only that gender doesn't exist as a thing but that it doesn't exist *in any way*. In this sense, it is unclear (I have claimed) whether or not metaphysical eliminativists can coherently argue that there is no such thing as gender, given that

[78] Arguably, for existentialists, it isn't a question of merely identifying *what things exist*, as an Aristotelian categorialist might. It would seem, perhaps, that Beauvoir's question is *how one "exists" things*, that is, how one relates to, takes up, and lives what one encounters in one's experience as meaningful and workable (or not) and which come to make up the very "one" in their experience of relating and doing (Morin, personal communication).

gender concepts, categories, and terms enjoy wide usage in both academic and everyday discourse. Given the definitional complexity of gender in both feminist and folk conceptions of gender that I have discussed, it is near-impossible that one could plausibly defend metaphysical eliminativism.

In short, I have argued in this chapter (drawing from Barnes and Mason) that metaphysical eliminativism would be unable to provide non-circular and apt definitions of gender, sociality, and reality, which could reliably point out "exemplars" for the "cases" of gendering that engage our interest (Barnes 2016a, 10-13). For such theories preemptively install a negative normativity at the heart of gender's definition (gender is oppressive) which contradicts its error-theoretic presuppositions (gender is unreal and nonexistent), as well as provides an inconsistent explanation for gender's being, causal impact, and phenomenology (what it is, what it does, how it's lived)—all of which means it fails at the "criteria for success" that any social ontological theory must minimally meet, as defined by Barnes (2016a, 10-13), and with which I began. This furnishes us with sufficient conceptual reasons to abandon metaphysical eliminativism. But, as I'll show in the ensuing chapter, there are political ones as well.

2. Against Gender Eliminativism: Political Problems

2.1 Metaphysics and Politics

In the last chapter I conjectured that, even if we take metaphysical eliminativism on metaphysical and conceptual grounds alone it would still be found wanting. Now, in this chapter, I'll propose that metaphysical eliminativism cannot suit feminist political objectives, and this is because (i) gender's ontology is social and political, which impels us to inquire into the kinds of questions we ought to be investigating and "for which purposes" we're "theorizing" (Haslanger 2016b); and because (ii) metaphysics cannot furnish us with the normative reasons we need to enact and further gender justice (Mallon 2006; Mikkola 2016b; Haslanger forthcoming). In the first part of the chapter, I show why metaphysics alone is not sufficient for handling gender, since gender raises not only metaphysical questions but, due to its social nature, political and ethical ones, taking metaphysical eliminativism off the table as a viable option for approaching gender (Mallon 2006). If gender is *political-ontological*, then metaphysics won't automatically provision us with the normative reasons we require, as it's not equipped to (though I allow that in some cases, metaphysical theories can "facilitate" normative consequences, even if they cannot secure or guarantee them—for example, realizing that gender was metaphysically and modally *non-necessary* and *contingent* expedited the normative and evaluative goal of transmogrifying what originally appeared to be inflexible, invariable, or "natural" gender relations).[79] In the second part, I analyze Wittig's account as a specific example and show why the political efficacy of Wittig's project is stymied by its metaphysical commitments.

2.2 Politicizing Ontology

Feminist ontologists have noted that their enterprise might seem self-defeating: if mainstream metaphysics concerns the "fundamental" or ultimate nature and structure of reality, and if gender is decidedly not part of the fundamenta of the world (because socially constructed rather than part of the "brute," physical "goings-on" of atoms and fundamental physics [Wilson 2014]), then the study of gender will obviously not dissect nature at its joints as some metaphysical projects

[79] Haslanger motivates an argument like this: "if we know both that, and how, a phenomenon depends on us, we are in a better position to intervene to change it" (2012, 214).

purport to accomplish (Mikkola 2015b; Witt 2015; Barnes 2014). Furthermore, feminist ontologists do not pursue metaphysical questions about gender in a methodologically abstracted and context-insensitive fashion, which would seem calculated to conflict with mainstream metaphysics (Mikkola 2016c). Mainstream metaphysics, as Mikkola portrays it, would presume to be in the business of "elucidating the *fundamental* structure of reality…[by way of] a unified (non-disjunctive), coherent, non-circular total theory…that purports to tell us truths, where our theory is simple, parsimonious, non-ad hoc and theoretically rigorous—akin to and continuous with science" (2015b, 2, 3).[80] But mainstream metaphysical inquiry will surely not suffice without revision or supplementation, since the very matter of gender is not just ontological but political, indeed, it is ontologically political: the whole point is that gender is not cut in "nature's joints" but that it still matters, and quite importantly, for socio-political reasons (Barnes 2014; Mallon 2006).

As feminist theorists have long observed, when it comes to gender, metaphysics is inextricable from socio-political considerations: gender has social and political grounds, making any theory about gender ineluctably value-laden (Schaffer 2016; Mikkola 2016b, 2016c, 2016d; Barnes 2014). Riffing on the classic feminist slogan, "the personal is political," feminist metaphysicians contend that "the metaphysical is political" when addressing gender: "ontological theory choice," or how we resolve upon and justify which theories of gender we find explanatorily robust, depends upon which theories collect "significant" truths about the social nature of gender, and what makes these truths significant is that they satisfy our "contextual"—that is, moral and political—values for what constitutes a good social-theoretic or critical-theoretic explanation of gender and why (Mikkola 2015b, 3-4; Anderson 2015; Haslanger 2016a, 2016b). Pragmatic, moral, and political values—what Helen Longino denominates "contextual values" (1994; also cited in Mikkola 2015b) and Mikkola "value commitments" (2015b)—ought to inform our decisions about which theory of gender ontology we deem explanatorily robust and metaphysically apt. Feminist metaethical "value commitments" are not contrary to metaphysical inquiry but can crucially help to "regiment" "ontological theory choice" in terms of value-theory (Mikkola 2015b).

What this means is that feminists do not uncritically conflate political claims about how we

[80] I thank Charlotte Witt (personal communication) for sharing unpublished material with me and allowing me to reference it. I cite her talk, "Feminist Metaontology," given at the MIT Feminist Ontology Workshop in October, 2015. Witt (2015), drawing from Mikkola, calls this the "fundamentality argument." I owe my understanding of this argument to Mikkola and Witt.

conceive of gender categories (within nexuses of power) with metaphysical claims about what gender "really" or "fundamentally" is (Ásta 2013). Recall that a metaphysician might argue that how we wish to think about gender politically and normatively has no bearing on what gender "really" is in and of itself.[81] If this were true, as Ásta (2013, 2015) puts it, then saying that the metaphysical is political would risk conflating how things "really are," metaphysically, with how we think they ought to be, politically, making feminist metaphysical inquiry misguided and self-deceiving, if not "confused," about the very nature of its "subject matter" (Mikkola 2007; Mikkola 2015b; 2016b; 2016c; 2016d; Haslanger and Ásta 2011). But feminist metaphysicians have responded that this objection misses its mark in assuming a stark division between metaphysics and politics, for if one goes so far as to say that the metaphysics of gender is constitutionally social rather than indicative of the ultimate joints of metaphysical reality (Mikkola 2016d; Mallon 2006), then one is arguably still forwarding a metaphysical claim: what one is advancing is that gender's ontology (or what it is to be gendered) is political through and through insofar as it is invested in and by structural relations of social power (Wittig 1992; Witt 2011; Mikkola 2015b; Butler 1999). It is precisely because gender is a *social* category—meaning that gender is grounded in "how we think," "what we do," and the "relations in which we stand" (Mason 2015, MS)—that metaphysical inquiries into what gender is (or is not) cannot be divorced from political considerations and questions of social power, relations, structures, and hierarchies (Butler 1990; Wittig 1992; Heyes 2000; Haslanger 2012).

What this means is that metaphysical questions concerning *what it is to be gendered* are indissociable from normative questions concerning how persons are handled (based on perceived or imagined gender membership) and whether it's valuable that there even "be" something like gender in the first place (Dembroff MS; Haslanger 2012; see Overall 2016 on gender's purported value). Descriptive and evaluative features about gender—what makes up gender and what values we think gender ought to exemplify—"covary" with context (as Mikkola claims [2016b, 2011]): what is taken to be a gender marker or gender fact descriptively, and what value judgments are tethered to it, must be relativized to the particular cultural situation and standards at play—we cannot simply look at gender as a metaphysical state of affairs that obtains irrespective of context and uninflected by

[81] As Ásta formulates this: "when arguing that [gender] is socially constructed, the charge goes, social constructionists marshal evidence for the claim that the idea or conception of [gender] is socially constructed but then want to draw the conclusion that [gender] itself, not just the idea of [gender], is so constructed" (2015a, 884; Ásta 2013).

culture, as if gender facts were "out there" awaiting revelation (Mikkola 2016b, 101; 2011). Hence, metaphysics alone will not propel us far (Mallon 2006). This brings us to our second line of argument: even if we somehow came to settle or "fix" the metaphysical facts about gender, this would yield no normative answers to the questions that motivate and compel us (Mikkola 2016b, 101; Mallon 2006).

2.3 Political-Ontological Problems

Second, I would argue that metaphysical eliminativism is vulnerable to major criticisms insofar as metaphysical projects alone cannot settle the normative and ethical considerations that interest feminist political agendas (Mikkola 2016b, 101). If metaphysics is supposedly "value-neutral," then the very project of metaphysical investigation of gender in and of itself cannot necessarily deliver the desired normative consequences feminists might seek to further (such as the annihilation of gender inequality), and indeed such investigation might even be supererogatory to the normative demand to ameliorate contemporary gender injustice (Mikkola 2016b, 101; Mikkola 2015b, 2016c, 2017; Antony 2016; Witt 2015; Dembroff MS).[82]

For when feminist philosophers and activists debate the ontology of gender, they usually do so in the specifically political context of taking action against gender oppression (Mikkola 2016c) and "transforming gender relations," as Butler phrases it, rather than in purely abstract terms (2004). In an effort to resist "idealizing away" (Mills 2005) from the social and empirical contexts within which gender is lived and disputed, feminist philosophers have often approached the metaphysics of gender in an empirically substantiated, intersectionally oriented, and phenomenologically informed fashion by incorporating (and critiquing) research findings from the social sciences and life sciences, by developing pragmatic political strategies of organization and mobilization, and by ensuring that theoretical investigation remains resolutely lodged in and attentive to particular social and historical contexts (Mikkola 2016b, 2016d; Mikkola 2015; Haslanger 2012; Heyes 2000; Butler 1990).[83] Such methodological commitments inform the

[82] Witt (2015), again drawing from Mikkola, calls this the "normativity argument."

[83] Note that to say that feminist philosophers have developed non-idealizing philosophies is not to say that there aren't normative ideals backing their work or that they reject theorizing (this is Mills [2005] point; see also Mikkola 2016c and 2016d). I simply mean, following Mikkola (2015b) and Mills (2005), that they avoid relying on problematically romanticized and context-insensitive thought experiments (see also Mikkola 2016c and 2016d).

contextual values guiding and orienting feminist inquiry and "fix" its program and "subject matter" (Mikkola 2016b, 101; Mikkola 2007, 364). If feminists are to remain on "the rough ground" of everyday gender politics and grassroots organizing, as Cressida Heyes puts it in Wittgensteinian terms (2000), then this requires that we approach the "political-ontological problems" to which gender gives rise from a standpoint nourished by the lived realities and practical concerns of social agents and institutions, rather than from a perspective emanating from armchair abstraction and rarified conceptual analysis (Haslanger 2012, 267; Haenel 2014). The concern isn't to ascertain *what gender is* but to flesh out what theoretical, explanatory office gender concepts can fulfill in accounting for our social goings-on as well as which gender concepts can motivate us to rectify gender injustices (and which ones cannot perform such motivational work [Mikkola 2016b; Haslanger 2012 and forthcoming]). And this metaphysics alone cannot do (Antony 2016).

For, minimally, a feminist project would have to respond with *normative reasons* to the political-ontological problems which have puzzled and plagued feminist theory and activism (Mallon 2006), namely the normative dimensions of ontological questions concerning the nature of gender as a social kind (what it is to be gendered), semantic questions concerning the application of gender terms (what it means to be gendered), methodological questions concerning the scale of analysis (what it means to belong, or not, to a gendered group), and practical considerations (how to circumvent gender injustice [ibid; Mikkola 2016b]). I will briefly limn the political-ontological problems feminist theory has addressed, and end with what deflationist feminists take to be the most practical way to handle them—by bypassing the metaphysical questions of what gender is (Bettcher 2009; Mikkola 2016b; Dembroff MS; Antony 2016). I hope to show at each step of the way, how ontological and semantic questions are politically infused, meaning that orienting feminism around the metaphysical facts of gender is an insufficient project, as many feminists note (ibid). After presenting these political-ontological problems, I will, through a focused analysis, show how Wittig's account fails to respond to them adequately. This will be a specific example of how a metaphysical eliminativist approach (such as Wittig's) cramps its political efficacy.

2.3.1 ***Representation Problems****:* Do gender categories reflect a natural, real, or mind-independent ontological kind, or is it just a "nominal essence" and conventional kind (Bach 2012, 233–34; Stoljar 1995, 275)? If gender is just a nominal essence or a fiction, then on whose behalf is feminism advocating its cause? This is what Bach calls the *representation problem:* "if there is no real

group of 'women,' then it is incoherent to make moral claims and advance political policies on behalf of women" (2012, 234; Mikkola 2009, 561 and 2007, 364; Medina 2003, 657; Heyes 2000, 37; Baehr 2004; Butler 1999; Young 1997, 22; Frye 1996 and 2011, 85-6; Stoljar 1995; Spelman 1988).

2.3.2 ***Property Problems****:* If, in attempting to obviate the representation problem, one avers that a gender category derives from a real ontological kind (not a nominal essence or a fiction), then this elicits the possibility of essentialism and essential gender properties, which is a controversial position to maintain (Heyes 2000; Ásta 2008; Witt 2011). Debates over essentialism raise related (but nonidentical) issues in mainstream metaphysical debates over realism and antirealism (Stoljar 1995, 2000, 2011). Call the following issues *property problems* (see also Mikkola 2012, 9 and 2016b, 3-4 on "ontological puzzles").

Firstly, what kind of essentialism is at stake? Louise Antony and others have exposed that references to "essentialism" in feminist theory express different meanings and carry variable metaphysical and conceptual commitments (2016; Fuss 1989; Heyes 2000; Stoljar 1995; Mikkola 2016b, 28).[84] There is also a difference between what Charlotte Witt (2010, 5-6) calls *kind essentialism*—"if some feature or property is necessary for membership in type F, that feature is essential to *Fs* qua *Fs*" (Mikkola 2016b, 28)—and *individual essentialism*—"some feature or property that makes one a member of the kind F is essential to *F*s qua individuals" (ibid; see also Stoljar 1995, 262).[85] The point isn't to just determine metaphysically which essentialism is "really" at issue, but to ask what political consequences ensue when we unwittingly take for granted a certain kind of essentialism (Fuss 1989).

Second, essentialism remains an open question: the view that gender kind members all harbor a single, essential property rendering them that gender kind qua gender kind universally, naturally, or necessarily, is seemingly controverted by gender's intersectionality: gender is embroiled in other social factors (like ethno-race, geography, class position, and ability [Spelman

[84] As Diana Fuss (1989) pithily puts it, essentialism itself has no essence and, as Heyes (2000) shows, it is important to distinguish amongst biological, metaphysical, and linguistic essentialisms (amongst others) when debating essentialism.

[85] As Antony would have it, most essentialisms in feminist theory are kind essentialisms, according to which: "Being a member of gender *G* is grounded in another, further property *P* and; all *Gs* possess *P* ("universality"); only *Gs* possess *P* ("distinctiveness"); *Gs* possess *P* by metaphysical, logical, or natural necessity ("modal rigidity")." This is Louise Antony's characterization of what she calls "metaphysical reductionism" which I have slightly modified (2016).

1988; Stoljar 1995, 262; Stone 2004; Bach 2012, 235; Witt 2010, 7-8; Mikkola, 2007, 363; Stoljar 1995, 262 and 2000, 22; Hussein MS]). Likewise, kind essentialism begets the problem of "normative exclusion," so that when we precisify what a given gender is by some particular characteristic, those who do not personify it (or do so to a lesser extent) can be invalidated and discounted (Butler, 1999; Bach 2012, 233–35; Haslanger 2012, 228; Witt 2010, 8; Stoljar 2000, 22).[86] Moreover, someone who is dispossessed of that essential characteristic would be ruled out of that gender (Bach 2012, 235). This might be problematic for those who do not possess enough of that characteristic—or who are dispossessed of it—but still wish to remain (of) that gender (235).

2.3.3 "Contestability" Problems:[87] Additionally, as Kapusta argues, there's the question of which kinds of genders are considered "borderline cases" or instances of "indeterminacy" when we are assigning gender concepts, and the potential risk of immorally "misgendering" people (2015, 10 and 2016). Given that there can be instances where it is unclear whether someone satisfies the requirements that are contextually "stipulated" for what count as a given gender—that is, it can be uncertain whether they can be categorized as a given gender and to what "degree" (Kapusta 2015)—questions emerge as to whether and when to impute gender concepts without committing political and moral harm to someone's self-identification or gender self-attribution (Diaz-Leon 2016; Jenkins 2016a; Bettcher 2013; Saul 2012). Consider instances where someone might identify as a given gender but who does not satisfy the relevant, prevalent or predominant standards for the application of that gender concept: do we conjecture that that person is therefore not the gender with which they identify, contravening their explicit promulgations or express self-identifications (Kapusta 2016; Jenkins 2016a; Bettcher 2013; Saul 2012)? Do we make exceptions to the relevant standards, or, if we flout those standards, do we do so on normative or descriptive grounds (Kapusta 2016; Diaz-Leon 2016; Jenkins 2016a; Saul 2012; Mallon 2006; see Mikkola 2016b and 2012, 9 on "semantic puzzles")?

On the one hand, feminists have rightly identified the contextualist nature of applying

[86] My summary of these problems draws from LaBrada (2016a).

[87] "semantic contestability" is Kapusta's term (2015, 2016): "Relative to a paradigmatic conception of WOMAN, a borderline (weakly connected) case ('transgender woman', 'intersexed woman', etc.) exhibits various, positively or negatively weighted gender-pertinent features. From a semantic point of view, it is not obviously wrong to include the borderline case in the category WOMAN, nor is it obviously wrong to exclude the borderline case from the category WOMAN" (Kapusta 2015, 60)

gender concepts and terms; on the other hand, it has proven challenging to justify certain gender-term applications when they don't match up or correlate with a given person's gender self-identification. Jennifer Saul raises this concern when she attempts to formulate a contextualist definition of *woman* that would not trammel transwomen from acquiring inclusion within the category that that concept demarcates:

> X is *a woman* is true in a context C iff X is human and relevantly similar (according to the standards at work in C) to most of those possessing all of the biological markers of female sex. (Saul 2012, 201)

However, as Saul acknowledges and Bettcher underscores, one problem with her contextualist formulations is that there can be (i) individuals who do not evince the biological markers of female sex but who are designated (and designate themselves) as women (2012, 199, 203, 206; see also Bettcher 2013); (ii) sometimes the criterial standards at work in C are "morally and politically" suspect (for example, transmisogynist standards dictating that only ciswomen, those possessing specific sexual features, or those natally assigned the sex of female at birth, are women [2012, 204; see also Bettcher 2013 and Diaz-Leon 2016]). In terms of (i), there are instances where it seems that an individual might answer to some requirements for membership within a gender category (according to some relevant criteria operative in a context) but not others, given that sex categories are neither "exclusive" nor "exhaustive" (Saul 2012, 203-5; Diaz-Leon 2016, 246; Daly 2015; Ayala and Vasilevya 2015; Heyes 2000). Understanding *woman* as a "sex concept" or as a "gender concept" is not enough to avoid misgendering intersexed women and transwomen who are subject to marginalization and pathologization based on the mainstream contextual standards at play defining *woman* (Kapusta 2015, 2016; Saul 2012, 208; Mikkola 2016a). Furthermore, as Kapusta, Bettcher, and Esa Diaz-Leon underscore, if there is no one criterion—be it biological sex or gendered social role—that all ciswomen instantiate, it becomes unclear what the extension of *woman* can be for non-ciswomen (2016; Diaz-Leon 2016; Saul 2012; Bettcher 2009).

Contestability thus occurs when an individual might not fully resemble some paradigm or exemplar of gender relative to a given context and stipulative set of standards (Kapusta 2015, 2016). As Kapusta puts it, this individual might not instance enough of the traits considered "heavily weighted" to belong to a given gender category X or satisfy some of these traits while also satisfying traits that are heavily weighted from a contrasting gender category Y—making it difficult

to apply a strict gender term (2015; Daly 2015, 718). Transfeminist philosophers and activists have brought to the fore how bathroom use and medical visitations can incite incidents of misgendering, according to which a transperson's gender identity is considered irrelevant or insufficient and their "first-person authority" over their gender identification is denied (Kapusta 2015, 78-9, 83; Mckinnon 2014; see Bettcher 2009 on FPA). Even if the application of gender terms and concepts is contextual and contestable, transfeminist philosophers observe that some are more "vulnerable" to "gender-term deployments" than others (Kapusta 2015, 20).

So on the one hand, feminists are right to underscore contextualism and contestability in the application of gender concepts. On the other hand, this very same contextualism and contestability about gender concepts needs to factor in gender-term vulnerability for some trans*people (Kapusta 2015). For, as some feminists argue, when unmodified, contextualism and contestability about gender concepts would seem to imply that there will be certain contexts where a transmisogynist who doesn't believe transwomen are women expresses a correct assessment (according to the relevant standards, for example, a standards which determines that only women have natal vaginas [Bettcher 2013, 239; Barnes 2016]). The issue is how to adjudicate among, and by what meta-standards, the standards at play within a given context: How do we acknowledge semantic contextualism and contestability without conceding too much to the transmisogynist (Barnes 2016; Bettcher 2013; Saul 2012)? At the same time, wouldn't it be problematic for any theory to simply presuppose or pre-establish that anyone is a given gender irrespective of context?

2.3.4 ***Group Problems****:* What occasions the oppression of a gendered group (Taylor 2016; Haslanger 2012)? Are groups just individuals serried together in appropriate "group-like" ways? Do groups reduce to the individuals of which a group consists? Or is there "nothing over and above" social groups (Taylor 2016; Cudd 2006, 25)?[88] Feminists have outlined the metaphysics of social groups by various means—mereology, sets, containers, lumps, or structures consisting in nodes

[88] Taylor usefully distinguishes amongst three positions in oppression theories: explanatory individualism, nonreductive individualism, and strong emergentist nonindividualism (2016). Cudd's four conditions of oppression include the harm condition, the social group condition, the privilege condition, and the coercion condition (2006, 25). Mikkola defines oppression as the "systematic imposition of unjust constraints on social agents and their actions due to various material and psychological forces" (2016,239), distinguish it from discrimination ("unjust differential treatment that results in indefensible inequalities in the distribution of socially relevant goods") and domination ("unjust wielding of social powers that forces the dominated to follow rules set by others and prevents them from determining the conditions of their own actions" [ibid]).

("relations to other nodes") and edges ("relations between nodes" [Ritchie 2015, 316; Frye 2011)—[89] and there is rich discussion in the literature about what gives rise to gendered groups.[90] The reason why it might be important to characterize gender as a social group in a "substantive" way (and in contrast to other groups), is that this might shed light on gendered oppression (Taylor 2016).[91] For, relatedly, the question arises as to how best characterize a given gender group as *oppressed* (and by what means) in order to zero in on and clear away that oppression, once we determine that there is a "systematic," "structural," and "social" injustice exercised against certain social groups (Mikkola 2016b; Taylor 2016). Furthermore, in what ways should we comprehend gender as a group in relation to oppression?[92] In short, there are several questions concerning how to best characterize gender as a group and how to portray the operations of power by which *some* groups are subjugated and others enfranchised. If we accept that there are gendered groups, then we must ask whether we need to clarify what that group is in order to contrive a theory of justice and anti-oppression, or whether these two questions are independent of one another (Taylor 2016). We must also ask what kind of work we would like our theory of oppression to execute, especially if our conceptual concerns in explicating *what gendered oppression is* is to tally with a political program

[89] One could, following Haslanger, distinguish between a "collective" reading—Fs as a gendered group are oppressed qua gendered group; the Fs are brought together as a gendered group in virtue of oppression—and a "distributive" one—the "F-ness" of every individual F in a gendered group is caused by oppression (each F is an F in virtue of oppression [see Haslanger 2012, 211n37]). Haslanger defines "structural oppression of groups" thus: "*Fs* are oppressed (as *Fs*) by an institution *I* in context C iff [by definition]….(being an F nonaccidentally correlates with being disadvantaged by standing in an unjust relation R to others) and I creates, perpetuates, or reinforces R" (335).

[90] As Katharine Ritchie maintains, to be a gender does not require that the group have an explicit "organizational structure" to exist as a group, nor that there be collective intentionality amongst group members, nor are they particularly volitional (Ritchie 2015, 313; Young 1997). Additionally, Ritchie claims that, unlike teams or clubs, membership in a gender category depends on *assumed* resemblances or common features amongst members, whereas in teams or clubs what brings together individuals is a self-assigned role or purpose (Ritchie 2014, 315; Young 1997). It is especially difficult to leave gender- or race-membership, Ritchie adds.

[91] See Mikkola 2016b for a contrary view.

[92] An initial gloss of oppression is offered by Elanor Taylor: oppression refers to instances where "a particular social group is unjustly subordinated, and where that subordination is not necessarily deliberate but instead results from a complex network of social restrictions, ranging from laws and institutions to implicit biases and stereotypes" (2016, 520). This set of unjustified constraints can be understood in terms of psychological feelings of constraint, the unequal distribution of resources, or what Jenkins calls "ontic injustice," that is, the way one is treated unequally based on the social kind to which one belongs because the category is itself "constructed" to "count" as such: "Ontic injustice consists of an individual being constructed as a member of an institutional category where this involves a wrongful deprivation of deontic powers" (Jenkins 2016b, 154; Mikkola 2016b, 204; Jenkins 2016b; Cudd 2006). Haslanger (2012) offers a more precise definition, which Mikkola glosses in the following where "*Fs* are oppressed as *Fs* (as a social kind) by an institution *I* in a context C iff (by definition) there exists some relation *R* where being an *F* nonaccidentally correlates with being disadvantaged by standing in an unjust relation *R* to others, and *I* creates, perpetuates, or reinforces that relation" (Mikkola 2016b, 207n7).

to counterwork such oppression (Mikkola 2016b; Taylor 2016).

2.3.5 ***Practicality Problems****:* Lastly, there is the practical issue that many feminist concepts and distinctions do not always have explicit and concerted uptake in many everyday social contexts. Call this the *practicality problem*. Of course, this is an "empirical question"[93] that no one philosophical theory will be able to fully answer, especially since there has been obvious and effective uptake of many feminist concepts in law, science, policy, academia, and elsewhere. The problem isn't that feminist concepts have *no* uptake—they certainly, and thankfully, do—but that some feminist concepts fail to gain traction when we might hope that they would. How do we practically implement feminist concepts like the sex-gender distinction when many ordinary speakers fail to recognize both the kinds of concepts they are using as well as the specifically feminist ones (we might think) they should be employing (Mikkola 2011, 73)?

In short, an eliminativist theory would not only have to explain gender's metaphysics, but equally be answerable to the political dimensions of those claims, insofar as the nature of gender stems from its social and political grounds (Mallon 2006).

2.4 Wittig

In this section I investigate the views of Wittig, a self-identified "materialist" feminist, in order to weigh the relative strengths and weaknesses of eliminativism.[94] Drawing from David Ludwig's typology of eliminativisms (2014), we could say that Wittig's theory follows the *phlogiston model* of ontological elimination (there never were genders nor were there sexed bodies to which gender terms referred, sex being no more than a gender category and gender itself being a void and irreferential category), whereas Haslanger's theory (reviewed in the next chapter) follows the *redescription model* of ontological elimination (there were always and might always be sexed bodies, sex being distinct from gender, but we need to redescribe the gender terms we use to characterize

[93] Thanks to Cressida Heyes for this insight.

[94] In the next section I address Haslanger, whose work has sometimes been considered to be "eliminativist" in its normative implications. On her typology of theoretical positions Haslanger explicitly rejects "eliminativism," but we will see that on my construal her views might fall under a certain *kind* of eliminativism [see Chapter 3 and Mikkola 2016a]). In contrast to the phlogiston model, for Haslanger, there always were males and females, but we should work toward a day when they are no longer categorized as men or women. The referent exists, we should just "redescribe" it—"it" being the physical phenomenon of sex and our social conceptions thereof—in terms other than gender (as we contemporarily understand and employ those terms [Haslanger 2012; Ludwig 2014]).

and reference those bodies).[95] For Wittig, there never were males or females, men or women, but *persons* (Butler 1999, 28-31). There never was a real referent for sex and gender terms—not that there were no or are no material bodies (there are), only that those bodies were never naturally "gendered" or "sexed" as we presumed them to be (Ludwig 2014). Gender and sex catch no real or worldly gender facts, so we should reject the phenomenon they purportedly describe and deracinate sex and gender talk altogether from our speech.

I will suggest that the eliminativist will encounter great difficulty accounting for the political efficacy of their strategy, that is, developing a metaphysical theory that also can answer to *representation*, *property*, *contestability*, *group*, and *practicality* concerns. For the question about what kind of gender eliminativism could be true in some possible world is less important than the kind gender eliminativism that would be useful in our actual world (and useful, that is, in combatting actual gender injustice [Antony 2016]). I will suggest that what's compelling about Wittig's account is her challenge to the idea that we will always need something like gender (the organization of persons into roles based on sexually differentiated bodies [see also Overall 2016], 10). Wittig rightly asks: if gender is contingent, why do we comport ourselves as though it were modally necessary (Antony 2016)? Shouldn't we contest this "modal rigidity" of gender, as Louise Antony calls it? However, practically speaking, Wittig's account is too simplistic to realize the proper explanatory and normative work it aims to accomplish.

2.4.1 Wittig's Error Theory

Wittig seems to maintain a kind of error theory about gender categories—there is no such thing as gender in and of itself (that is, there is no gender apart from the "conceptual/linguistic schemes" which makes us think gender exists [Mikkola 2010]); gender as such does not exist, only our misconceptions, delusions, or fallacious inferences that gender exists (Stoljar 1995, 275; Miller 2016; Joyce 2015; Barnes 2016, 39-40).[96] As a result, gender categories are void (they don't pick up on any objectively natural gender features) and gender terms are irreferential (they don't "refer"

[95] Ludwig (2014) calls this the "phlogiston model" and "hysteria model" to indicate the difference, but I have opted to call the later the "redescription model" for explanatory ease.
[96] On error theory see Evers 2015; Olson 2014; Joyce 2015; Miller 2016; van Roojen 2013; Eklund 2015; Mackie 1977.

to gender facts or "predicate" gender properties, their being none).[97] What sex-gender terms refer to are politically oppressed and oppressing classes. Sex-gender terms denote social *relations* that produce our false beliefs in the reality of sex: "there is no sex. There is but sex that is oppressed and sex that oppresses. It is oppression that creates sex and not the contrary" (Wittig 1992, 2). Wittig seems to vacillate between an anti-realist claim that gender categories don't capture "natural or objective" gender facts and an error-theoretic claim that they don't capture "any" gender facts "at all" (but perhaps something else, namely oppressed and oppressive groups believed to instantiate gender properties [Barnes 2016a, 40]).[98] If gender is unreal yet oppressive (because it is believed to be real), then those who want to be gendered are laboring under "false consciousness," Wittig asserts (Wittig 1992, 13; Haslanger 2012).[99]

2.4.1.1 Exegesis

Wittig begins by claiming that we can unseat gender talk by instead referencing the materiality of bodies (these bodies would exist before and beyond gender ascription). On this view, there would be harms perpetrated against (groups of) *bodies* according to socially implemented classificatory "regimes" that slice and divide up the population (based on the false premise that there are antecedent, fundamental and natural gender differences amongst those bodies). As Butler's reading underscores (1999), beliefs in gender antecede and are presupposed by the classificatory regime: the regime presumes that it is belatedly happening upon facts that it has in fact sired and instated: "What then is heterosexuality? As a term it was created as a counterpart of homosexuality

[97] As Stoljar formulates the matter, on an error-theoretic view of gender, gender terms attempt to predicate "natural and universal properties" about gender but, since there are no such properties, these terms fail to "correspond to" and exemplify "anything" real or worldly "at all" (Barnes 2016a, 40), making it the case that strictly speaking genders do not exist (Stoljar 1995, 275). Stoljar writes: "insofar as our ascriptions of the term 'woman' purport to attribute universal natural properties, they fail to refer and hence fail to be true of the world…since there is no natural universal named by the general term 'woman,' there are simply *no women*" (1995, 275). I am also drawing on Miller (2016), Joyce (2014), and Barnes (2016a), to characterize error theory here.

[98] Using Barnes' language again, we could say that an anti-realist claim is that gender categories "do[n't] correspond to anything natural or objective," whereas an error-theoretic claim is that gender categories "do[n't] correspond to *anything at all*" (Barnes 2016a, 40).

[99] What Wittig calls "false consciousness" we would now call these "deformed desires" or "adaptive preferences," according to which the oppressed mistakenly believe through "indoctrination, manipulation, and adaptation" that being gendered is beneficial when it in fact only benefits a privileged class and they come to prefer the gender categories available to them, not because they have reflected deeply on these categories, but because they have been lead to believe that those categories are their only choices (Cudd 2006, 183; Superson 2005, 110-111).

at the beginning of this century….they assume a quality of already-there, due to something exterior to a social order, of two groups: men and women" (1992, 41). The classificatory category of heterosexuality, Wittig avers, was back-formed from homosexuality—self-identified heterosexuals, Wittig claims, only came to be because sexology first invented the category of homosexuality in the nineteenth century (Wittig doesn't seem to be speaking of heterosexual copulation, since this would have presumably preexisted the invention of the category. The point is left unclarified).[100] But heterosexuality was then assumed to have always antedated homosexuality as the natural state of affairs from which homosexuality derived and deviated. Worse still, in order for there to be something like heterosexuality, one must presume that there were first bigender classes of individuals—men and women—who would have predated heterosexual relationships: "'we naturalize history, we assume that 'men' and 'women' have always existed and will always exist" (11).

But Wittig dashes this causal and chronological order: As Butler reads Wittig, it was not that there were first sexed individuals (men and women), who then perform heterosexuality, but that a presumption of heterosexuality begot the fiction of primitive, natural sexual difference between men and women in the first place (1999). For Wittig, heterosexuality is a "political regime," a set of regulations and conventions instituted through everyday language use that mark certain individuals as sexed and that presumes that all individuals should be heterosexed (Wittig 1992, xvi). "Sex," on this model, does not reference and pick out sexually dimorphic female and male bodies but causally fabricates them (xiii-xiv): using Langton's speech act-theoretic language, it is not just that an individual comes to "count as" male or female by virtue of being gendered by language (a constitutive claim), but that such an individual "*becomes*" a male or female by virtue of being gendered by language (a causal claim) (Langton 2009, 95; McGowan 2005, 45). For Wittig, we should be fighting for "women as a [political] class," rather than for the "idea of 'woman'" that those called "women" are thought to typify (2). The thought seems to be that we should be fighting for those labeled and targeted as women—a group who, in virtue of being classed as women, are vulnerable to subjugating treatment—so that we can erase the mark of their oppression: their womanhood (grounded as it is in presumptive, compulsory heterosexuality).

[100] See also Blank 2012.

When Wittig asseverates that sex is a "political" rather than biological category, she means that sex is steeped in a widespread and hegemonic social, material, and economic regime of "compulsory heterosexuality," as Adrienne Rich would say (1980; Butler 1999), and what Wittig calls the *straight mind*, a "body of data, of givens, of a prioris, which, all the more for being questionable, form a huge political construct, a tight network that affects everything, our thoughts, our gestures, our acts, our work, our feelings, our relationships" (4). And what the straight mind falsely believes is that heterosexuality is "already-there" and something one must do by assuming or instantiating a given "sex."[101] Wittig seems to hold that the contingent linguistic gendering of words in French and English engenders the misguided belief that this language reflects an antecedent ontological sexual difference. Because many languages are gendered—we have gendered pronouns like "she" or "he"— we have imprudently come to think that the "reality" whereof that language speaks is also so gendered, but this is a confusion and conflation of language and ontology (78).

The straight mind is thus a kind of discourse, understood in the broad sense of a series of "discursive practices" (Butler 1999): the material and the conceptual intermesh for Wittig, insofar as language is material and real, conspiring to enforce gender norms through collective practices according to which we *ought* to "be" heterosexual and thus *ought* to "be" either a man or a woman in order to participate in that heterosexuality (19; see also Butler 1999, Ch.1 and 1993 on "discourse"). In the same way that an abstract posit like "the law" can exert very concrete effects, Wittig surmises that everyday linguistic practices and speech acts are the site and source of the heterosexualization and gendering of bodies—what we say is entrenched in what we do in dense "network[s] of powers" (21, 22). By categorizing persons as genders we are actively being called upon or "interpellated" to become those genders within a heterosexual system (Butler 1993).[102]

Wittig conceives of social relations in the West as deep-structured by the presupposition that heterosexuality is a "given" and that bigender concepts are "essentialist" (Wittig 1992, 21;

[101] Wittig tends to use sex and gender loosely in her writings; in some essays she refers to "gender" as the linguistic mark of the political category of sex (76-7). Some of the articles in the *Straight Mind* were originally written in French and then translated by Wittig into English, others were written in English (and then retranslated back into French). Since gender didn't come to be incorporated into French until recently ("le genre"), before which one only spoke of sex ("le sexe"), the only clue we have to a sex-gender distinction is Wittig's English writings, but here the two are used almost interchangeably.

[102] "The discourses which particularly oppress all of us, lesbians, women, and homosexual men, are those which take for granted that what founds society, any society, is heterosexuality" (24).

Butler 1993). That is, social concepts and constructs about sex and gender are misjudged as natural. The straight mind assumes,

> —that there are before all thinking, all society, 'sexes' (two categories of individuals born) with a constitutive difference, a difference that has ontological consequences (the metaphysical approach),
>
> —that there are before all thinking, all social order, 'sexes' with a 'natural' or 'biological' or 'hormonal' or 'genetic' difference that has sociological consequences (the scientific approach),
>
> —that there is before all thinking, all social order, a 'natural division of labor in the family' a 'division of labor… (the Marxist approach) (1992, 4-5)

Wittig claims that gender concepts are not a reflection of a preexisting natural sexual difference amongst bodies but a socio-cultural product and effect (Butler 1999): sexual difference tries to pass itself off as "the ground of nature" when the oppositions between genders is "economic, political, and ideological" based on the assumption that "'you-will-be-straight-or-you-will-not-be'" (2, 28). The presumption that society must be founded on heterosexual relationships requires that there be women and men in order to reproduce and reinforce those relationships:

> the category of sex is the one that rules as 'natural' the relation that is at the base of (heterosexual) society and through which half of the population, women are 'heterosexualized' (the making of women is like the making of eunuchs, the breeding of slaves, of animals) and submitted to a heterosexual economy. For the category of sex is the product of a heterosexual society which imposes on women the rigid obligation of the reproduction of the 'species,' that is, the reproduction of heterosexual society. The compulsory reproduction of the 'species' by women in the system of exploitation on which heterosexuality is economically based. (1992, 5-6)

On this view, the category of sex enslaves a part of the population by engendering them as "women": the legal and physical property of men that are to be instrumentalized for sexual reproduction (1992, 6). Sex becomes a "category which women cannot be outside of": "Wherever they are, whatever they do….they are seen (and made) sexually available to men, and they, breasts, buttocks, costume, must be visible. They must wear their yellow start, their constant smile, day and night" (1992, 7). Thus, Wittig writes by way of example, newspapers speak of "'three travelers and a women' …seen doing this or that. For the category of sex is the category that sticks to women, for only they cannot be conceived of outside of it. Only *they* are sex, *the* sex, and sex they have been made in their minds, bodies, acts, gestures; even their murders and beating

are sexual. (8)Women are persons who will always be qualified as *women,* whereas other persons (like men) can be qualified as humans or persons without being marked as *a* or *the* sex.[103]

As such, being gendered in language fragments and fractures the "speaking subject": one cannot utilize the "whole" of language in using the deictic "I," since one will always be a divided, fragmented "I," an "I" marked as a *feminine* or *womanly* 'I' (80). Once designated a "woman," one is no longer capable of instrumentalizing the whole of language since one will always be gender-marked as divided from that very language: while deictic shifters like "I"/je should in principle be employed by anyone who speaks French, when a "woman" speaks these shifters will be gendered feminine when linked with adjectives, making the speaker not everyone/anyone (the universal "I") but specifically sexed as woman (the feminine "I"). Hence, gender in language is the political workings of the category of sex:

> For the category of sex is a totalitarian one, which to prove true has its inquisitions, its courts, its tribunals, its body of laws, its terrors, its tortures, its mutilations, its executions, its police. It shapes the mind as well as the body since it controls all mental production. It grips our minds in such a way that we cannot think outside of it. This is why we must destroy it and start thinking beyond it if we want to start thinking at all, as we must destroy the sexes as a sociological reality if we want to start to exist. The category of sex is the category that ordains slavery for women, and it works specifically, as it did for black slaves, through an operation of reduction, by taking the part for the whole, a part (color, sex) through which the whole human group has to pas through…However, because of the abolition of slavery, the 'declaration' of 'color' is now considered discriminatory. But that does not hold true for the 'declaration' of 'sex,' which not even women dream of abolishing. I say: it is about time to do so. (8)

Sex categories operate through gendered discourse by a form of reductionism whereby a universal, distinctive, and modally rigid property is taken to stand in for the whole: color is meant to stand in for race, sex for gender (Antony 2016; see Haslanger 2012 on "color"). That is, neutral physical features are taken to provide evidence of preexisting natural differences when in fact it is our "perceptions" of those physical features as indicating those preexisting differences that is the culprit.

[103] Notably, in French "l'homme" means both "man" and "human," as in the expression *les droits de l'homme/human rights* (see also LaBrada 2016b). In this sense, women are not included within humankind but are marked as other to being human. The same holds in English—mankind is meant to cover both "man" and "human" to the exclusion of "women"). This is also apparent in French when making a self description—if a man can employ the universal "I"/"je" unmarked ("je suis content"), a woman must announce her sex through grammatical gender even when she employs the universal "je" ("je suis contente" [Wittig 1992, 78]).

The straight mind "reinterprets physical features (in themselves as neutral as any others but marked by the social system) through the network of relationship in which they are perceived. (They are seen as *black*, therefore they *are* black; they are seen as *women*, therefore they *are* women. But before being *seen* that way, they first had to be *made* that way)" (11). Sex categories thus "compel" bodies to "correspond, feature by feature, with the *idea* of nature that has been established for us" (1992, 9). Using Langton's (2009) language, the body becomes distorted and "deformed" as it is impelled to propagate gender norms so that one becomes a man or a woman: bodies are constitutively or performatively made to "count as men and women" at the same time that they are causally or perlocutionarily made to "become" (what we call) men and women (Wittig 1992; Butler 1999).[104]

The only "exceptions" to the category of sex are lesbians and nuns, Wittig writes, who manage to unfetter themselves from the category of womanhood by no longer maintaining a binary relationship to men:

> Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is *not* a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically. For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation what we have previously called servitude, a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation…a relation which lesbians escape by refusing to become or to stay heterosexual. We are escapees from our class in the same way as the American runaway slaves were when escaping slavery and becoming free…our survival demands that we contribute all our strength to the destruction of the class of women within which men appropriate women. This can be accomplished only by the destruction of heterosexuality as a social system which is based on the oppression of women by men and which produces the doctrine of the difference between the sexes to justify this oppression. (20)

How does Wittig arrive at such a claim? The reasoning here relies on an understanding of the opposition between men and women in dialectical terms: just as the class struggle between the rich and poor is one of contradiction that can only be resolved through the dissolution of those economic classes (or rather, the dissolution of the economic and social structures which maintain

[104] A related issue I'm not touching upon here is the relation between groups and individuals in Wittig's theory. At times Wittig seems to hold on to a kind of methodological and ontological individualism: "[T]o become a class we do not have to suppress our individual selves, and since no individual can be reduced to her/his oppression we are also confronted with the historical necessity of constituting ourselves as the individual subjects of our history as well" (1992, 16). Here Wittig seems to be saying that gender is reducible to oppression but those of us who are oppressed by gender are not reducible to the oppression wrought by gender (or the oppression which gender is). It's difficult to square this individualism with her account of gender as socialized on a large-scale by discourse. In this, Wittig fails to respond to the *group* political-ontological problem I earlier outlined.

those opposing classes), Wittig thinks that ameliorating the oppression of women means dissolving sex/gender classes. Just as we fight for the poor by trying to cast out poverty (we fight for the poor such that they will no longer be poor and oppressed by indigence) so too should we fight for women by trying to cast out gender (we fight for women such that they will no longer be women and oppressed by gender and sex categories). As Wittig puts the matter, it would be odd to say that we fight for the enslaved in order that the enslaved can be recognized as enslaved or appreciate themselves as enslaved people; likewise, it would (on this view) be odd to say that we fight for women in order that they be recognized and appreciated as women when gender and sex are the grounds of their oppression (13-14). But nuns and lesbians—and gay men, Wittig eventually adds—are capable of fighting against the oppression of gender by belaying participation in heterosexuality (Butler 2007). The lesbian, for example, becomes a "not-woman"—but not a man—by refusing to be complicit in a binary heterosexual relation to men and rejecting the position of power affiliated with heteronormative manhood (12). Hence, Wittig concludes: "it would be incorrect to say that lesbians associate, make love, live with women, for 'woman' has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems. Lesbians are not women" (32).

Wittig asserts that if we finish with the category of "man" the deconstruction of the related category "woman" follows: "Once the class 'men' disappears, 'women' as a class will disappear as well, for there are no slaves without masters" (15). The point is to mobilize on behalf of those *denominated and (mis)treated as* women, such that it becomes the case that they're no longer interpellated or (mis)treated as women. As soon as sexual and gendered difference is conceived of as *socially fashioned and fabricated*—that is, as contingent and not a natural given—and as soon as we apprehend the pernicious mental and physical effects of "sex," we should move to decimate sex and gender categories. She insists that if the heterosexual system is enslaving and damaging, then we ought to abolish its mainstays: color and sex, race and gender (see Haslanger 2012 on "color" and "sex"). We should be actively working to blast gender definitions: "women will have to abstract themselves from the definition 'woman' which is imposed upon them" (11).

Unfortunately, for all this talk of dismantling the straight mind and dispelling sex and gender, Wittig does not specify how we would practically execute and consummate this. The thought seems to be that we should refuse to submit to heterosexuality: if heterosexuality is no

longer the norm, then gender roles (of man and woman) would become nonsensical: "The refusal to become (or to remain) heterosexual always meant to refuse to become a man or a woman, consciously or not" with the result that we should aim for "a sexless society" (13). Wittig appears to assume that a sexless society can be achieved by transforming both our conceptual language (which is highly gendered) *and* by physically refusing to engage in mostly heterosexual relationships:

> [T]here cannot any longer be women and men, and that as classes and categories of thought or language they have to disappear, politically, economically, ideologically. If we, as lesbians and gay men, continue to speak of ourselves and to conceive of ourselves as women and as men, we are instrumental in maintaining heterosexuality. I am sure that all economic and political transformation will not dedramatize these categories of language. Can we redeem *slave*? Can we redeem *nigger, negress*? How is *woman* different? Will we continue to write, *white, master, man*? The transformation of economic relationships will not suffice. We must produce a political transformation of the key concepts, that is of the concepts which are strategic for us. For there is another order of materiality, that of language, and language is worked upon from within by these strategic concepts. It is at the same time tightly connected to the political field, where everything that concerns language, science and thought refers to the person as subjectivity and to her/his relationship to society. (29-30)

On the one hand, Wittig maintains that we must disappear gender and sex from our conceptual language: just as we shouldn't mobilize *as* slaves when we mobilize against slavery, so too should we not mobilize *as* women or men when we mobilize against gender injustice. This part of the project aims to "destroy gender in language" or "at least…modify its use" (81). This means in part resorting to gender neutral language (like "one" or "they") or using preexisting pronouns in nonstandard ways (like calling someone who looks a male on some standard model "she") to sire confusion—one must reappropriate language and repurpose it to new ends (86; Butler 2007). But since discourse for Wittig is both conceptual and material, there is also a physical component to this strategy of destroying gender (or "at least modifying" it). For it is not that there is the real/referent on the one hand, and language on the other: language does not reflect but "transforms" reality (much in the same way that gendered conventions in language are thought to reflect a preexisting ontological condition of sexual difference [77-78]). So in addition to modifying our conceptual and linguistic practices, Wittig seems to hold out for physical action, namely the creation of a "lesbian society," by which she means a society other to the man/woman dichotomy and thus one that would no longer believe in or predominantly practice heterosexuality (9). Wittig appears to believe

that not practicing heterosexuality will quash sex-gender but also believes that the demolition of sex-gender will render heterosexuality outmoded. It's unclear which comes first or if the two strategies are co-extensive—does eliminating gender (upon which heterosexuality depends, insofar as there would be no heterosexuality without binary genders) lead to the elimination of heterosexuality, or is it the desistance from participating in heterosexuality (that is, desisting from understanding oneself as a given gender and relating to an opposite gender in sexual/affectional ways) the means by which gender would be aborted? Wittig does not tell us.

Taking stock, on Wittig's error-theoretic account, conceptual talk of *what it is to be a gender* ontologically commits to gender properties that would have to be instantiated and substantiated at the actual world in order for that talk to be true.[105] Her error theory of gender, more schematically rendered, resembles something like this: some "atomic assertions: and judgments about gender (e.g. "A man is…") depend upon claims that there are certain gender properties, usually conflated with sexual properties (e.g. "maleness"), that are objective, that is, mind-independent facts of the matter that would be as they are regardless of what anyone conceives them to be (Joyce 2015; Evers 2015; Olson 2014; Miller 2016). For, as of now, there are no such properties thus conceived. Gender concepts are thoroughly normative: they are not actually registering objective features about gender (for there are no such features), nor are gender terms descriptive reports of gender facts. Instead, gender concepts and terms are tagging social relations of inequality, social positions, and other power dynamics amongst persons within institutional situations—which themselves are objective—implying that our practical, normative considerations should focus on how humans ought to be rightly "treated" "*qua* humans" rather than using gender as a means to justify normative treatment of humans (Haslanger 2012; Mikkola 2016b). As Mikkola puts it in neo-humanist terms (which mirror Wittig's), the "damage done by patriarchy is not to women qua gendered beings, but to women qua human beings," that is, it is not "*as women*" that those gendered women are "damaged by sexism," but as *humans* gendered as women (2016b, 151, 150). The point of Wittig's discourse is that gender talk captures no *objective* gender facts (there being no such thing) but it does capture *objective* and *normative* social relations and positions of power based on a misguided belief in there being objective gender facts.

[105] Joyce (2015) separates two theses for the error theorist, the conceptual ("[a given] discourse is centrally committed to some thesis *X*") and the ontological ("that thesis *X*…is false").

To claim that gender concepts are not tracking gender (there being no such thing) but something else might make it seem that the view is noncognitivist, as if Wittig were advocating along quasi-realist or norm-expressivist lines that gender concepts and terms are reducible to the desires, projections, or evaluative attitudes of those who use those concepts and terms (Gibbard 1990; 2003). However, Wittig seems to hold a cognitivist view about normative language in general—normative language *is* attempting to report facts, beliefs, and propositions of some sort (Sayre-McCord 2015).[106] What Wittig controverts is the truthfulness of normative language about gender (Sayre-McCord 2015; Miller 2016). Wittig acknowledges that gender discourse, while normative, doesn't just expresses normative attitudes and projective desires—it is "in the business of reporting facts" and beliefs, only it's reporting false ones (Sayre-McCord 2015).[107] Wittig will thus concur with the gender realist that gender discourse is truth-apt, that is, it is "in the business of reporting facts" because it expresses beliefs, and thus gender claims are truth-evaluable (Sayre-McCord 2015). However, what Wittig denies is that gender propositions are literally true—the facts that would need to be in place to serve as truth-makers for those claims do not exist as objective facts of the matter (Mackie 1977).

2.4.1.2 Implications & Objections

Following Overall's (2016) three criticisms of gender (which parallel Wittig's), we can schematize Wittig's conclusions as follows:[108] (i): gender is culturally contingent and socially instituted—so if gender is contingent, why have we come to gender persons in the first place? (Overall 2016, 11; see also Diaz-Leon 2013 on Hacking, 2); (ii) gender is noxious to gender nonconformists as well as to gender conformists, "whose lives are limited and predetermined by gender requirements," even if evidently some do profit from and enjoy their gender status (Overall 2016, 13,14-18; see also Diaz-Leon 2013, 2). If the obligatoriness and compulsoriness of gender is pernicious, why maintain it? (iii) Scientific, social-scientific, and philosophical studies have thrown

[106] In this way, Wittig avoids the problems that plague noncognitivist and quasi-realist views, most notably the Frege-Geach embedding problem (Nolan et al. 2005, 317-18), as well as charges of self-refutation (Boghossian 1989). I thank Howard Nye for pressing me to clarify this point.

[107] For the noncognitivist, gender claims would not express doxastic beliefs but desire, emotion (Ayer 1946 [1936]), attitudes of approval and disapproval (Blackburn 1991), or normative imperatives aimed to regulate and sometimes coerce the comportment of others (Gibbard 1990).

[108] The following three criticisms are adapted from the three criticisms that Overall (2016, 11-18) outlines.

into question the belief that sex features (such as having female or male phenotypes) establish intrinsic gender-specific abilities and psychologies, but many entertain a folk conception of gender as grounded in and explained by sex (2016, 14-15). If gender relies on folk conceptions that are untrue, why keep it?

In the rich literature on gender, many have debated the ways in which we might ameliorate gender relations or combat gender oppression but Wittig asks about the project of "justification" (Overall 2016, 18): are we justified in keeping gender categories (ibid)? If it's the case that we cannot reinvent or rehabilitate a concept to meet and fortify our political objectives—say, of promoting social justice—then we ought to axe that concept and the category it purports to single out. Is gender such a concept? Feminist philosophers and activists have long promoted the political goal of ameliorating and transforming gender concepts in order to further social justice—e.g., tolerance, diversity, equality, non-violence, non-discrimination and so on—but Wittig asks whether gender concepts and categories are actually requisite to realize those goals and what potential pitfalls emerge when we assume that they are.

Now, there are three controversial claims that Wittig makes in order to support *contingency, perniciousness,* and *falsity* all of which are profoundly problematic. The first is Wittig's claim that lesbians and nuns are not women (and homosexual men not men [1992, 24]); the second is that "predominantly" engaging in heterosexuality is morally and politically problematic (Higgins 2005, 91); the third is that gender discourse is false and yet somehow also causally and constitutively determinative of who we are. I will address each of these in turn.

For the first argument: Recall that the concept *woman* only gains sense or signifies within a heterosexual regime. One is not a "real" woman if one does not participate in that system, by which Wittig seems to mean, as Jacob Hale points out, not simply that they are read as defective women but that they are in fact not "women" at all (as this concept is understood within our contemporary heterosexual regime [1996, 98]). Hale reformulates Wittig's argument thus:

> (1) The category of sex presupposes a discourse in which sex is binary, *man* and *woman* are exhaustive, and *man* and *woman* are complementary opposites. So, (2) The category of sex is subsumed under the discourse of heterosexuality. So, (3) To be a woman means to be in a binary relation with a man. (4) No lesbian is in a binary relation with a man. So, (5) No lesbian is a woman. (Hale 1996, 98)

As Hale asseverates, this argument is "invalid," as we can find numerous counterexamples to the

notion that only heterosexual marriage or heterosexual "sexual/affectional" relations with men constitutes as a binary relation (99).[109] Nor does Wittig consider bisexuality, which cannot be accommodated in her dualistic schema (99-100). Likewise, Hale argues, nuns are "symbolically married to Jesus Christ," and belong to patriarchal institutions like the church, and are thus subject to men in some way (ibid). Both nuns and lesbians are in some ways connected to individual men and groups of men—both are vulnerable to sexual assault and unwanted pregnancy (ibid). Having failed to precisify to what degree and what kind of heterosexual relationship is necessary to render one a "woman," Wittig cannot hold that being a woman ontologically depends upon being in a binary relation to men (ibid). In this, Wittig's theory fails to be responsive to the *representation, property,* and *group* political-ontological problems that any theory of gender should address.

Wittig's second argument is that, if gender norms are pernicious, then (as Peter Higgins puts it [2005]) engaging mostly in heterosexual relationships is morally troubling, insofar as it hinges on binary gender relations, and that our desire to be gendered and to desire other genders are manufactured by normative discursive practices such that they are "deformed desires" (because they rest on gender categories that are oppressive and against one's interests).[110] Higgins (2005) proffers a schematic argument (in a different context) that usefully clarifies Wittig's claims. I will apply Higgins' arguments to Wittig, as I think his not only mirror Wittig's theory but also aptly clarify their consequences. Higgins writes: "(1) gender norms are on-balance harmful; (2) conforming to harmful social norms is *prima facie* morally impermissible; and (3) exclusively or predominantly participating in heterosexual relationships is a way of conforming to gender norms" (Higgins 2005, 91)

As seen above, Wittig maintains that gender norms—"the informal, social (and sometimes legal) enforcement of gender" (Higgins 2005, 91)—are pernicious: if gender *just is* a cluster of gender norms, as Wittig believes, and gender norms are pernicious, then gender is itself pernicious (ibid). Gender is noxious insofar as it shores up insalubrious heterosexual norms and enables that

[109] Hale offers up an example: in queer subcultures, trans*men and trans*women have binary relations to men and women that would not plausibly fall under the kind of binary heterosexual relation Wittig has in mind: Hale points out that sexuality can be "gender-nuanced" in various ways (1996, 100).
[110] Wittig often resorts to voluntarist language in talking about desire, which came under fire in well known Butler's critique (1999).

system of norms to continue to damage others (Higgins 2005, 92).[111] Wittig seems to hold, following Higgins, that the benefits of resisting gender norms far counterbalance social "sanctions": where those norms are more entrenched, then lesbian resistance becomes all the more "symbolic and effective" (Higgins 2005, 93), and the alternative (compliance) only buttresses the original harm by disabling people from leading "fulfilling" lives as the genders (or nongenders) they elect—in this way, the sanctions of nonconformity are not preponderated by the "benefits of resistance" (Higgins 2005, 95, 94). Indeed, as Higgins asserts, if conformity only lends credence to and fortifies a harmful system, then it is all the more important not to endorse it by conforming to it.[112]

Higgins claims that, if the foregoing is right, then electing to only sexually engage in heterosexual relationships (women choosing men and vice versa) furthers harmful gender norms and is itself constitutively pernicious and/or morally impermissible. While one might argue that sexual orientation is just a biological, irreducible, or personal preference, Higgins contends that this overlooks the fact that the exclusivist preference for partners of only a certain sex is akin to those who only prefer "sexual partners of a certain race" (97). As Wittig earlier argued—quite controversially—sex and race are *analogous*: both are political classes which are enslaved by norms, and just as we would refuse to ethically accept that one should only date one race (racism), so too must we reject the idea that one must date one opposite sex (heterosexism).[113] One could dilute this overly strong view by surmising that heterosexuals need not forego "all heterosexual activity," but simply "not exclusively or predominantly participate in heterosexual relationships," since the problem is that desire is not something one can easily accept or refuse as one would an argument (Higgins 2005, 98). However, recall that Wittig thinks that all desires for genders are deformed desires (we have been ideologically manipulated into thinking there are only two genders between which we can choose), and thus her focus is not on appealing to people's (deformed) desires and (adaptive) preferences but on altering their language and their actions such that other desires

[111] Higgins defines this premise thus: "*an action that harms others is morally impermissible if other considerations (such as that the action yields benefits that outweigh the harm) justify that harm*" (93).

[112] Indeed, Higgins writes that even one's solitary act of nonconformity can make a small difference by influencing others and encourage the dissemination of dissent (95).

[113] I leave aside this controversial analogization, but this clearly would constitute another objection to Wittig's theory, namely the conflation of gender and race.

(beyond gender/sex) become possible and viable options (Higgins 2005, 98; Superson 2005).[114] If it is morally permissible to not fully engage in heterosexuality, then monogamous heterosexual relationships would have to be dissolved, accomplishing Wittig's plan of undoing binary heterosexual relations such as marriage (101).

Needless to say, it would be difficult to actuate such a strategy in our everyday social contexts (folk conceptions largely reject the idea that sexual orientation is anything but biologically determined). While this analysis might seem convincing in theory, in practice it could be quite harmful to try to insist that individuals participate in sex acts for which they've expressed indifference or resistance because of stipulated moral considerations (indeed, conservative Christians often argue against practicing homosexuality on precisely these grounds: it is morally impermissible to engage in homosexuality, therefore one should not).[115] This seems politically reckless as a strategy: demonizing heterosexual acts falsely presumes that heterosexual acts are somehow fully distinct from homosexual acts, when we should be questioning that very distinction, as Butler and other queer theorists remark (1999). So Wittig's theory fails at achieving *practicality*.

Likewise, Wittig's theory veers into dangerous territory by claiming that identifying as a gender results in "false consciousness" or deformed desires, since such a claim ignores how not all gender identifications and expressions are treated equally. Calling a normative (mainstream, widely accepted) gender like "men" false is different than calling a non-normative (resistant, not widely accepted) gender like "transwomen" false (Bettcher 2013). Given that the former gender expression enjoys mainstream acceptance, while the latter does not, there can be dire moral consequences that follow for non-mainstream genders, namely a "basic denial of authenticity" of their gender self-conceptions (ibid). That is, Wittig implies that any time one identifies as a given gender one is wrong, has an illegitimate sense of self, or labors under false consciousness about the actual identity one is, which can have disastrous effects for non-mainstream genders. But it is all too

[114] Higgins claims that, were one to find that sexual orientation were somehow fully biologically determined this still would not affect the fact that "they can still choose whether or not" to "act on those preferences" (ibid).

[115] One might think that, if we followed through on Wittig's plan, and worked to create a "lesbian society" in her sense, then non-heterosexuality would eventually become the norm (and thus harmful), and would result in the odd consequence that then non-heterosexuality would become morally impermissible insofar as heterosexuals would be marginalized and harmed by such norms. This would be a "straw position," however, since on Wittig's account there would no longer be genders or sexes, and thus hetero- or homo-sexuality would no longer exist (just sex with persons to whom one is attracted).

common to hear, for example, that transwomen are not "real" women but false women or men in skirts (Bettcher 2007, 2009). Thus, if a transwoman identifies as a woman, and it would be morally wrong to say that *ipso facto* her pronouncement she is not or that her claim is untrue, then isn't error theory morally wrong? Shouldn't some identity-claims be treated as "presumptively valid" (Bettcher 2009)? Shouldn't a transwoman's claim to womanhood be as presumptively valid as a ciswoman's claim to womanhood (Bettcher 2013)? How can Wittig avoid a basic denial of authenticity? Wittig's account fails to be responsive to *contestability*.

I'll end with some final problems for Wittig's third argument concerning discourse: Wittig's view verges on incoherence when she speaks about the power of discourse to (con)form our bodies: on the one hand, Wittig ostensibly thinks that gender talk is false. But, on the other hand, in order to even explain how bodies are falsely gendered she has to reference and presuppose (a belief in or conception of) there being something like gender to talk about gender being false and nonexistent (Ney 2014; Joyce 2015; Evers 2015). This threatens to render Wittig's account incoherent. To borrow from Haslanger, if there are no truthful claims about gender and our terms do not reference genders per se but persons thought to exemplify gender, then it turns out that in fact our gender terms *do* have reference (they correctly reference those thought to exemplify gender [2012, 198-99]). Wittig cannot maintain that all gender discourse is false while also arguing that those gendered women are subject of violence and oppression more than those gendered as men, since this would render the latter claim (which she wants to make) impossible. To prefigure Haslanger, if those called women are not really women but "persons gendered as women," then the category of "woman" is not empty—it *is* tracking a real social phenomenon and picking out a social group, namely those interpellated (and treated) as women (regardless of whether they are "women" in some deeper metaphysical sense [Haslanger 2012, 199]).[116] While many of Wittig's philosophical arguments are elegantly formulated, they turn out to be philosophically incoherent and politically ineffectual.

One benefit of Wittig's account, however, is that she seems to corroborate the Butlerian

[116] Relatedly, it's difficult to reconcile Wittig's claim that gender terms are not capturing gender facts while *also* claiming that gendered language (such as pronouns and grammatical gender) causally and constitutively fabricate gender. If gender terms were as false as Wittig presumes them to be, then how can they exercise the causal force on bodies that she claims language exerts? Furthermore, how would Wittig explain the gendering of persons in cultures whose language is distinctly gender-neutral (like Finnish)?

point that gender doesn't simply exist *in* a concourse of social relations but *as* this concourse of social relations,[117] and indeed sometimes it is rooted in hierarchy and grievous social relations, such that we ought to raze these hierarchies and with them the gender concepts they ground (Heyes 2007 and personal communication; Butler 1999; Butler 2004). And a part of mowing down these hierarchies, I will suggest in the next chapter, is by contextually challenging (and indeed attempting to modify/remove) those gender concepts that reinforce these context-particular hierarchies, insofar as gender concepts can, by a "looping effect," reinstall and reinforce the social relations they not only reflect but also reinstantiate (see Haslanger on Hacking [2012, 465-7 and forthcoming]). We must unmake the oppressive hierarchies that underpin some gender concepts, but our activism can only take place *in medias res,* on the "shifting ground" on which we falteringly stand or in the contexts with which we bear, as we resist and counterwork extant gender concepts in an effort to deconstruct the context-particular hierarchies they can sometimes, but fundamentally need not, incarnate and refortify (Scheman 2011; Mikkola 2016b).

[117] Butler (1993; 1999; 2009) often has recourse to such "in and as" formulations, insofar as she writes that gender is relational, not because it exists within relations but is itself those relations. Many thanks to Stephanie Dover as well as the participants of POLS-610 for offering elucidations on Foucault and technologies of power.

3. Regulating Eliminativism

3.1 Defending Abolitionism

In this chapter I defend the notion that we might reframe and redeploy the normative dimension of eliminativism, namely a regulative, restrictive gender abolitionism. I argued in the last two chapters that most metaphysical eliminativists, due to their metaphysics, do not sufficiently precisify *in which contexts* we should be "demolishing" gender, nor do they precisify what it is we are in fact demolishing (see Overall 2016). There may be contexts—for example, nonmainstream, subcultural, or "resistant" contexts—where gender concepts and terms are conceived and assigned in non-oppressive fashion (Bettcher 2009, 2013; Kapusta 2015, 2016); likewise, there may be contexts where employing gender concepts and terms are enlightening for what they allow us to detect and discrepate—for example, in history, empirical psychology, and the social sciences, where what is at issue is not whether or not there is anything like gender, or whether gender is in and of itself constitutively oppressive, but how social groups are assembled and handled given a set of social practices that assumes that gender is real and substantial (Ney 2014; Overall 2016; Haslanger 2016a, 2016b, and forthcoming). Ideally, a defensible form of pragmatic eliminativism would specify the contexts in which gender concepts, terms, goings-on, or beliefs are operative and would be able to explain why and how such gender matters are to be decimated. It is ultimately toward this view that I will tend, espousing something like a context-dependent, pragmatic abolitionism.

In the first section I survey three potential arguments in the order of their persuasiveness—a conceptual argument (Gilbert), a value-theoretic argument (Overall), and a critical realist argument (Haslanger)—that could be used to bolster a selective, context-dependent pragmatic eliminativism, ultimately concluding that each cannot fully bolster the support for the abolitionist projects they propose. Then, in the second, I make a call to take on a deflationary, practical strategy for approaching gender, defending Mikkola's "trait/norm covariance" model (2011). I then address what I take to be the most persuasive argument in favor of pragmatic gender abolitionism: the trans*feminist-friendly argument forwarded by Andler (2015), Bettcher (2013), and McKinnon (2015), that in the bioethical context of health care for non-cis persons, it is crucial that we speak of

"persons" or "bodies" with specific sexual characteristics rather than speak of "bio-males" or "bio-females" in order to not "invalidate" the gender identities of non-cis genders. This requires pointing out the unfoundedness of *objectifying* gender talk, which figures gender as a kind of "thing," or "being" that one simply is by virtue of physical facts. Regulative eliminativism allows us to imagine being in the world otherwise than we currently do (e.g. not defining ourselves by our genitalia or "prevalent" gender norms [Kapusta 2015]), while pragmatic abolitionism allows us to target and neutralize problematic manifestations of objectifying or reifying gender concepts. I then consider and respond to a major objection to my arguments favoring regulative eliminativism.

3.2 Evaluating Extant Arguments

3.2.1 Conceptual Argument (Gilbert)[118]

Miqqi Alicia Gilbert (2009) offers a *conceptual* argument against maintaining gender, which runs like this: nefarious gender politics stem from gender, so if we remove gender then it logically follows that we remove nefarious gender politics. In Gilbert's words:

> If we arrive at such a world [without gender], we would be eliminating the multitudinous hierarchies on which so much of society, ours and others, is built. If there were no categories of woman and man, there would be no transsexuals and cross-dressers, no homosexuality. Preferring sexual partners who have vaginas rather than penises would not mean anything more than preferring someone taller than you or someone with a small nose. In a degenitalized world, sex category no longer exists. (2009, 108)

Gilbert claims that the causal root of transphobia, heterosexism, sexism, and heteronormativity is bigenderism which, she avers, is the hegemonic ideology orienting folk theories: "Strict Bigenderism maintains [a] a binary gender distinction, [b] a higher valuation for male and masculine, and [c] a strict correlation between sex and gender" whereas "Soft Bigenderism maintains [a] a binary gender distinction, and [b] a higher valuation for male and masculine" (2009, 105). Gilbert's preferred solution is "the elimination of gender valuation altogether," that is, the refusal to gender-code properties of the person (such as deportment or dress): "the very terms feminine and masculine do not refer to collectivities of properties, and, consequently, no property is valued

[118] This discussion of the conceptual argument previously appeared in altered, abridged form in LaBrada (2016b). In that article I defended a version of the conceptual argument but have since come to revise my views, insofar as what I took to be a "conceptual" or logical link between gender and oppression failed to fully appreciate the "material" circumstances in which social categories are embedded. See Wyckoff (2014) for an argument against "conceptual links."

more or less than any other" (107). This is *non-genderism*: "Non-genderism entails no binary distinction and no societal valuation making masculine more highly valued than feminine" (ibid).

For Gilbert, metaphysically speaking, oppression is constitutive of gender and it must eventually be nullified (even if, presumably, gender remains serviceable as a metric or heuristic for tracking oppressive relations because many believe and behave as if there were such a thing as gender): "The segregation of the world into two sexes is…a function of gender and its correlate sex category; and it is that fact that brings sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia into existence. Rescue lies in the…degenitalization of gender and the decategorization of personal predicates" (109). Because folk bigenderism defines gender in binary terms, with "ordinary speakers" assuming that gender terms pick out binary female and male bodies, then a diversification of gender beyond this binary division would lead to gender's extermination. Gilbert proposes that the various traits and properties that were before clustered around and cottoned unto specific genders ought to be dispersed and distributed among a wide range of bodies and persons, without a unifying gendered "substance" or "subject" to undergird them to be one's gender proper. The property-clusters (what Gilbert calls "collectivities of properties" and "personal predicates" [109]) that we have hitherto yoked to "genders" would be diffused and co-opted by various bodies such that gender would become incoherent. Indeed, if there are (already) many non-binary "genders" in our world, it is incoherent to denominate them as genders. This is because to label them as a gender (even a non-binary one) is still to reference a binary system of gender insofar as these non-binary genders are being defined against that selfsame binary gender system (they are only defined in opposition to binary gender and thus they are still reliant on and only gain sense because of the binary system of gender against which they are being contrasted [Butler 2004, 42]).[119] The fact that we have non-binary *genders*, defined in relation to the binary gender system they repulse, only confirms the fact that gender concepts are inescapably embedded in a binary frame (because wed to hetero- and cis-normative assumptions about biological sex [ibid]).

But Gilbert omits mention of any practical strategies to actuate this program, which raises the political-ontological problems addressed in the last chapter: precisely what are we extirpating (and in which contexts)? Are we abolishing gender concepts, terms, beliefs, or behaviors? Likewise,

[119] See Bach 2012 on gender binary systems. On this paradox see Butler 2004, 42, from which I'm drawing.

in what sense is gender being theorized here (as an identity, a relation, a category, a concept, an experience, etc.)? Gilbert doesn't seem to wish to expulse comportments that have been gendered, but rather, the "gendered valuations" yoked to that comportment:

> a *person* might be nurturing or aggressive, but *there is no further association of them with a gender category*…Without gender, one is attracted to or likes a person, not a bearer of a certain sort of genitals. One might be attracted to soft vulnerable people, but there would be no necessary connection between those properties and any assumptions about sex. (2009, 108, 109).

Gilbert's formulation still forwards no concrete game-plan that would instruct us on how to pass from our highly gendered world to one where we no longer make any "associations" with gender. Similarly, her analysis neglects to account for the scalar quality of gender—i.e., whether it regards individuals or groups—since Gilbert leaves unclear whether we will be operationalizing non-genderism from the ground-up (at the individual level) or top-down (at the structural level [Madva 2017]). Finally, could the argument not be adduced that, rather than nuke gender, our task is to develop new, non-oppressive gender categories given that implementing gender eliminativism is both counterintuitive and pragmatically infeasible (since a multitude of social agents not only believe in but also *take pleasure in* gender [Mikkola 2016a; Haslanger 2012; Saul 2012])? Is the question, then, not just what we "should" do, but what we "can" and "want" to do?

In the introduction, I hazarded the idea that even if one were to contend that we should only modify our existing gender concepts—say, by proliferating and diversifying non-binary gender identities rather than trying raze gender *tout court*—that this would lead not to multiple genders but to the eventual elimination of gender (as we contemporarily apprehend and live it) itself. However, this conceptual point is useless—yes, clearly, if we alter something it would no longer be as it once was, but the precise question is what we want to alter, what we wish to alter it to, and how we can and should do so. For it's not clear we should just endorse a "proliferation" of genders in order to lead to non-genderism (as Butler warned in a different context long ago [1999]). After all, there are certain gendered expressions (say, of toxic masculinity) that we wouldn't want to allow or endorse since they are deleterious to others (see Heyes 2007). Gilbert gives us no sense of how we might, and without further pragmatic explanation, pass from our highly gendered world to one where gender would cease to operate, leaving her argument unpersuasive. It's evident that, in the present, "gender" and "sex" track relations of social power, inequity, and systematic disenfranchisement.

Gender is not only a serviceable category for political mobilization and for progressive social movements devoted to combatting gender-based injustice, but it also identifies the social identity formed by the qualitative experiences of having lived *as* (or being taken as) a given gender (Scott 1986; Butler 2014; Heyes 2007). Gilbert's call to "end gender" carries no weight unless her account can tell us *how* we go about doing so and why it would be possible for people to give up a social identity and explanatory category that has been so fruitful for feminist inquiry and policy.

3.1.2 Value-Theoretic Argument

Christine Overall offers a more sophisticated account of gender eliminativism by offering a value-theoretic analysis of *gender*, the latter being defined as: "a [compulsory] institutionalized set of beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviors, practices, rules, customs, and laws that are culturally associated with (supposedly biological) sex differences….that facilitate sexual expression and reproduction" (2016, 10). For Overall, it is the "compulsory" or obligatory nature of gender that renders its value questionable. Why do we find gender valuable, given its contingency, perniciousness, and inaccuracy (predicated on false inferences about biology [14-18])? "Why gender at all" (2016, 18)? Overall reviews five arguments that a gender conservationist or reconstructionist could mount in order to justify why one would need some version of gender rather than no gender, concluding that the most plausible could be the last one (18). I have modified, reformulated, and titled these arguments for convenience's sake:

(i) **The *survivalist* argument** (we need gender to survive in our current social order [2016, 20]);

(ii) **The *facilitator* argument** (we need gender to facilitate social organization and respect sexual "difference" [22]);

(iii) **The *mobilization* argument** (we need gender in order to advance political claims against gender oppression; without gender we cannot "identify" the subject of gender injustice and were we to lose gender then "man" would occupy the place of the human universal: "to be a person [would be] to be a man" [25]),

(iv) **The *social identity* argument** (we need gender for acquiring a social identity; furthermore [29]; to not recognize gender would be to perform a moral wrong against gender minorities like trans*persons who would be denied their gender identity [Bettcher 2014])

(v) **The *historic-aesthetic* argument** (gender is valuable for the role its played in the past organization of human societies, which were historically arranged by gender categories, and as an aesthetic performance that can be viewed as just that: a performance [2016, 32]).

Overall exposes the weaknesses of arguments (i)-(iv). Against *survivalist*, she points out that this already "concedes the harmful nature of gender as an institution," and furnishes no justification (save preventing *more* harm from gender non-conformity) for why gender ought to be valued (21). Against *facilitator*, she claims that this argument relies on "fear"—that the world would implode without gender—and the false premise that not being gendered would induce the "unisexualization" of the population and the imposition of uniformity: "we do not have a choice between 'two' [genders] and 'one.' We have a choice between two and thousands of ways of being and living" (23). It is question-begging, Overall writes, to presuppose that the only way to differentiate among persons is by gender, since this implies that people are only recognizable by their gender (which also reinforces the idea that one's gender-presentation "literally signifies" one's genitalia, as Bettcher claims [cited in Overall 2016, 24]). Against *mobilization,* Overall argues that organizing around gender alone is not sufficient for securing justice (her example: "'men's rights' groups" do the same, exposing that "mobilization on the basis of gender can be destructive" [27]). But once again, the "value" of gender is only to be found with the elimination of "gender oppression," which still does not impart the value that gender might have in and of itself [ibid]. Likewise, if gender were to "end," it wouldn't be that all persons became "men," but that we would recognize the plurality of individual persons (28). This contributes to her argument against *social identity*, which gainsays the presumption that one could not maintain a social life or identity without gender being an integral part (when gender is not, as Butler puts it, "exhaustive" of who one is [Butler 1999 Ch.1; Overall 2016, 30]). The only reason we injudiciously presuppose that gender is a prerequisite for "self-development" is because it is "compulsorily" imposed upon persons to begin with (Overall 2016, 31).

Overall contends that the most plausible contention one could forward if one wanted to prove that gender were in any sense valuable—and, notably, Overall does not say gender is in fact valuable only that, *if gender were to have any value*—would be a contention founded on "historical, cultural, and aesthetic reasons" (32). Gender as a category limns the prior "cultural activities and social interactions" which have governed nearly every documented society (32; Haslanger 2012). Likewise, gender, if divested of its obligatory character, might become a "living style" or "a form of play," dissevered or divorced from "genitalia" (2016, 32). As Stephanie Dover describes it, being a

gender would be like "being a hipster" or "being mod," it would designate an aesthetic, provisional mode of being and self-fashioning rather than a deep-seated identity (personal communication). However, Overall adds, even if we were to accept *historic-aesthetic* we would still have to recognize the historically and constitutively oppressive nature of gender, since the only way for gender to be aesthetically pleasurable would be to render it non-compulsory (i.e. optional and volitional [37]), which arguably would leave us with something other than gender as hitherto conceived. She writes:

> To eliminate gender's oppressive character, gender identities and roles should be *chosen* (over and over again), not imposed; *optional*, not compulsory…it would become entirely detached from any socially required connection to sex (maleness or femaleness). As a result, we might gradually no longer have genders in the traditional sense, but simply different characters, personalities, or ways of being. And that would be a good thing. (20016 37, 42; see also LaBrada 2016b)

Overall is aware of potential objections to her account, insofar as it seems to interpret gender as "superficial…a matter of the style of the moment" rather than an embodied experience, seems to "underestimate[e] the power of gender and its all-encompassing nature," and it might even seem to consent to "the oppressive nature of gender" (36). Overall astutely observes that gender should be seen as "aspirational"—that toward which one works rather than what one "is"—and that we should contravene its "obligatory" character (2016, 41). However, this arguably hangs on a somewhat question-begging definition of gender (as that which is founded on misinformed views about sex). There is also a vacillation here between gender conceived as an imposition of obligatory norms and gender conceived in terms of voluntarism (an "ethic" or style that one might "choose" [2016, 38]). It is particularly unclear whether the account is arguing against particular gender norms and the political relations in which they're immersed or against some other conception of gender (i.e. comportment). The "definitional" aspect of gender raises concerns for this project (see Bettcher 2009): if gender is intersectional, how can it be conceptually or "analytically" isolated from other features of social identity in order to be removed (Butler 1999, Ch.1)? And would this removal be a self-conscious, voluntaristic act, or would it be imposed from without by political policy?

One pressing objection is that the value-theoretic account seeks to ask after the *value* of gender rather than to explore its causal-explanatory importance. Gender is an important analytical tool, as Joan Scott argues, for capturing robust causal explanations of our social world (1986; see also Ney 2014). We arguably are needful of gender as an analytical (and not just historical) category

to track social facts organized by gender presently (not just historically), where what seems to be at stake are "structural" relations of power wherein social actors enfranchise or subjugate others based on a *taking there to be something like gender in the real world* (Haslanger 2012). This doesn't commit us to the view that there in fact is such a thing as gender per se nor commit us to the value-theoretic view that all gender categories are worth safeguarding. It's senseless to argue that *gender per se* has no "causal powers," because it does not exist, since gender relations clearly do (and here it becomes a senseless metaphysical quibble whether gender "itself" plays a causal role or people's "beliefs about" gender existing and being real [see Ney 2014 for this argument; Mikkola 2016b; Mallon 2006]). When developing social explanations to apprehend what our gendered language is actually tracking, we don't need to "incur" any hefty "ontological commitments," as the saying goes. Gender concepts/terms are tracking social relations of power whereby some bodies are enfranchised and others disenfranchised based on whether those bodies are perceived to exhibit and instantiate gender properties, as Haslanger will put it (2012; Scott 1986). And, furthermore, these bodies are causally induced or provoked to exhibit gender, much in the same way we make infants and children exhibit gender characteristics through clothing, hair styling, and projective attribution of gender personality traits, much before gender would be or could be perceptible or instantiated (Diaz-Leon 2013; Haslanger 2012; Fausto-Sterling 2000; Butler 1999s). Overall's account acknowledges, of course, that gender is a serviceable analytical category for apprehending the history of past populations who believed in or endorsed gender as well as our contemporary social world (Scott 1986; Overall 2016). However, this arguably underestimates the analytical power of gender for contemporary purposes: gender explains "structural" and "systematic" features of our social world as it currently stands, and to ask "why gender at all" arguably diverts from the present obligation to apprehend gender as it is being conceived and lived in (Mikkola 2016b, 118), as Haslanger points out (2012). As I will contend later on, following Mikkola's argument to this effect, we must commence in so-called "ordinary" and everyday talk about gender rather than parachute in a particular gender vocabulary completely alien or esoteric to "ordinary" language (Mikkola 2016b).

3.2.3 Critical Realist Argument (Haslanger)

3.2.3.1 Exegesis

A third argument for abolitionism comes from Haslanger's critical realism about gender kinds and her ameliorative approach, both of which have magnetized widespread popularity and controversy. Haslanger proposes that we can reinvent or reconstruct gender concepts to meet our political objectives—say, of furthering social justice—by conceiving it in such a way that we progress towards identifying, targeting, explaining, and eventually eradicating it (2012, 374). For Haslanger, we are obligated to persist in talking about gender provided that we define our gender concepts as constitutively oppressive: the gender concepts we ought to be employing are those that would educe our desire to raze the social hierarchies upon which those concepts are based—and with them gender concepts themselves. As I'll point out, there is a notable inconsistency in Haslanger's account between postulating a metaphysical, real definition of *what gender is* (independently of our political investments), and postulating a normative, revisionary project of reconceiving gender concepts to befit our provisional political goals (Saul 2006; Mikkola 2016b). I will heed the suggestion made by others that we should abandon Haslanger's metaphysical, neo-Aristotelian effort to define gender and instead focus on the revisionary aspect of her proposition (ibid). Haslanger's model adopts a needlessly bulky metaphysical realism, and it would provide a more politically effective theory were its metaphysical commitments rendered nugatory. Haslanger's account of why gender is thought to be necessary (but isn't), ends up converting her ameliorative approach to gender into a neo-Aristotelian "real definition" of *what gender is* (Haslanger 2009; Haslanger 2014), a move that needlessly rigidifies gender and contravenes Haslanger's normative objectives.

Haslanger holds that gender categories are "defined in terms of social relations," that is, they are constitutively relational positions, associated with norms, and lodged in a oppressive social hierarchy (2012, 185): "Construed simply, genders are those social positions, within a particular culture, constituted by how sexed beings are viewed and treated" (2012, 195). Though socially constructed, genders are real, "weakly" objective ontological types: claims about gender are "truth apt" and "sometimes true" (199n24); if gender has "causes" then it "exists and is real, even if we are the cause" (203n28); gender types enjoy "some degree of unity" (202); "boundaries" between gender types "correspond to real differences" (203); and they are "part of the causal order…[having] causes

and effects" (210). By "type," Haslanger intends something less robust or weighty than "kind"—which, she writes, might imply "necessary and sufficient conditions for being a member" "universal[s] (an abstract entity) that all members of the type share" or modal claims about "necessarily [being] members of that [kind]" (210)—although she still maintains that gender types are real, objective, and partake of the "natural world" (they are not spookily "caused" by "non-natural" "processes," since humans and their minds are also biological as well as social beings [211]; or "the social is….a part of the natural" such that there is "a spectrum from the non-social to the social within the natural [world]," for "the natural world is all there is" [213]). Hence, if a social category like gender or race "pick[s] out a set with some loose connection among the members," then they "are real" (302).

Haslanger thus rejects Wittig's error-theoretic eliminativism in favor of realism even as she promotes, as most feminists do, the political liquidation of the hierarchical social structures that have made gender into a constitutively oppressive category (see also Bach 2012, 236, who calls Haslanger's view "social objectivism").[120] For Haslanger, there are objective "conditions" (as she calls them) that all gender kind members "satisfy," but such conditions are socially manufactured rather than biologically endowed (2012; see also Mikkola 2009; 2016a). On this view, gender categories are outlined and "marked off" by one's positioning in hierarchical social structures that disenfranchise or enfranchise one in "systematic" fashion depending on whether and how one's body is apperceived or imagined to typify certain sexual and reproductive properties (Barnes 2016, 29). Genders are thus grounded in socially instituted requirements and properties, they are instated and sustained by socio-cultural practices, and they are not inborn, "intrinsic," or immutable but "relational," contextual, and variable (Bach 2012, 236; Mikkola 2009). What it is to be gendered is to be either enfranchised or disenfranchised and this property (of being enfranchised or disenfranchised) is objectively real, making gender a "thinly" objective ontological type (Bach 2012, 236-7).

[120] In fact, Haslanger explicitly rejects the attribution of error-theoretic eliminativism about gender to her views even though she simultaneously holds that gender concepts, "as we currently know them," should be eliminated (2012, 235). For Haslanger, gender categories are not void and our terms aptly refer to objective gender kinds. Haslanger claims that error-theoretic accounts are incoherent: to grant that gender terms refer to gendered groups rather than to gender per se is still to concede that our gender terms *refer* to something about gender, thus rendering the error theorist's view incoherent (2012, 199). Haslanger uses "type" as a less strongly "unified" collection than a "kind" (202).

In this sense, gender categories, while constructed by hierarchizing social practices, are notwithstanding real and establish the objectivity of social kinds. But while objective and real, Haslanger argues that we ought to overthrow the social conditions that make for these gender concepts and the categories of *man* and *woman* which they pick out: "women are those who occupy a particular *kind* of social position, namely, one of sexually marked subordinate" (Haslanger 2012, 239 and 268-9; Barnes 2016a, 30). We ought to obliterate the social, hierarchical conditions that underpin our gender concepts such that the gender concepts *man* and *woman* would cease to arrange coordinate, codify, and control our social world and would cease to single out the gender categories of *man* and *woman*: "we should work to undermine those forces that make being a man, a woman, or a member of a racialized group possible; we should refuse to be gendered man or woman, refuse to be raced" (2012, 242). But what remains to be explained in Haslanger's account is how concepts and material conditions interact: it's not sufficient to redefine concepts to alter material conditions, as Haslanger herself recognizes (2014 and forthcoming).[121] Likewise, Haslanger will have to account for the voluntarist language involved in "refusing to be" gendered or raced, given that processes of gendering and racialization are not necessarily that which one elects or that to which one agrees consciously or voluntarily (which Haslanger has come to acknowledge more explicitly, see forthcoming) and especially since, in accepting the sex-gender distinction, Haslanger assumes that "[o]ur bodies often outdo us, and undo us, in spite of the meanings we give them," which seems to put a limit on voluntarism (2012, 246).[122] Furthermore, if gender is intersectional, then how one would "refuse to be gendered" seems difficult, insofar as there are other intersectional factors (ethno-race, geography, religion, class, etc.) which contribute to gendering and which would also need to be refused *ad infinitum* (Madva and Gasdaglis MS).

Here are Haslanger's definitions of *woman* (the converse holds for *man*) and of *gender:*

S functions as woman in context C iff$_{df}$

(i) S is regularly and for the most part observed or imagined to have certain bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction;

(ii) that S has these features marks S within the background ideology of C as someone who ought to occupy certain kinds of social position that are in fact subordinate

[121] I thank Cressida Heyes for this insight.

[122] Haslanger seems to acknowledge this "to say that someone is oppressed as an *F* is not to imply that they *identify* as an F. Rather…one is oppressed by virtue of being a member of the *Fs*; that is, being an *F* is a condition that subjects them to an unjust policy or practice (regardless of whether being an *F* is meaningful to them or not)" (2012, 324).

(and so motivates and justifies S's occupying such a position); and

(iii) the fact that S satisfies (i) and (ii) plays a role in S's systematic subordination in C, that is, *along some dimension*, S's social position in C is oppressive, and S's satisfying (i) and (ii) plays a role in that dimension of subordination. (Haslanger 2012, 235)

A group G is *a gender* in context C iff$_{df}$ members of G are (all and only) those:

(i) Who are regularly observed or imagined to have certain bodily features presumed in C to be evidence of their reproductive capacities; and

(ii) Whose having (or being imagined to have) these features marks them within the context of the ideology in C as motivating and justifying some aspect(s) of their social position; and

(iii) Whose satisfying (i) and (ii) plays (or would play) a role in C in their social position's having one or another of these designated aspects. (Haslanger 2012, 244).

On Haslanger's view, the gender concepts we ought to be employing are those that portray *woman* and *man* as constitutively hierarchical and oppressive such that our political objective would be the eventual liquidation of the social conditions and conventions nourishing these gender concepts (liquidating these gender concepts in the same sweep [Barnes 2016a, 30; Mikkola 2016c]). In nullifying the social hierarchies upon which these gender concepts are predicated, so too would the gender concepts of *man* and *woman,* as they are contemporaneously or standardly apprehended, cease to single out gender kinds and categories—indeed, the existence of these gender categories would effectively be terminated: "'after the revolution' we should anticipate that there will be no men and women, but there will be males and females (and herms, merms, ferms, etc.), and these sexual differences will have distinct but egalitarian implications" (Haslanger 2012, 269; Barnes 2016a, 30-31; Mikkola 2016a).[123]

For, on Haslanger's account, to be a woman just means holding a disenfranchised social role and position by virtue of being taken to typify the biological role of "bio-female" in human reproduction; to be a man just means holding an enfranchised social role and position by virtue of being taken to personify the biological role of "bio-male" in human reproduction (Haslanger 2012,

[123] As Barnes puts it: "Our gender categories—men and women—are hierarchical categories. They are ways we divide people based on perceived bodily characteristics that privilege some and disenfranchise others. And so the goal of feminism is to get rid of these entrenched hierarchies. This means…that the goal of feminism is to get rid of women (and men). To be clear, the goal is not, of course, to get rid of the people who are in fact categorized as women and men, but rather to get rid of the categorizations (that is, to eliminate the social hierarchy that constitutes the gender divide). The goal of feminism on the Haslangerian model is to make it such that, in the future, there aren't any women or men, and the categories 'man' and woman' are of purely historical use" (31).

235; Barnes 2016a, 29-31).[124] It is because *woman* and *man* are thus defined that Haslanger can assert that one the political desiderata of feminism includes the eventual extermination of the hierarchical social conditions that buttress these gender concepts—a standard claim with which most feminists would concur.[125] The extra, controversial metaphysical step Haslanger takes is to presume that, were we to axe the hierarchical social structures and relations—which generate what gender is—then gender concepts would cease to pinpoint and distinguish persons since hierarchical social positions within a social structure are all that gender is (Mikkola 2016a; Mikkola 2011). "After the revolution," sexed bodies would abide (male, female, intersex, etc.), but we would desist from labeling them as "men," "women," etc. (ibid; Haslanger 2012, 269). Sexed bodies would remain insofar as sexual difference is an "ontological difference" (a real-world difference), since our "classificatory" "distinctions" do not always properly "map" or fully capture those real-world differences (2012, 87).[126] In this sense, Haslanger accepts the sex-gender distinction as reflecting a real-world difference that can evade or resist our classificatory schemes (249).

3.2.3.2 Implications and Objections[127]

Haslanger may be on track when she claims that the way gender is imputed to bodies, and how bodies are classified as having or being genders, is inherently oppressive in the sense that those categories organize individuals based on hierarchical and heterosexist social relations (or as she would put it, bad "norms are *constitutively grounded* in a social role [here gender]" (2012, 53). If

[124] In this "conventionalist" sense, gender ontologically depends on social conventions which, if disannulled would lead to their disappearance as well (see Mikkola 2011 on "conventionalism," especially 67-8). Griffith ("Social Construction," *forthcoming*) redescribes these roles as "functional roles": "All women…are women by virtue of having properties that together allow their bearer to occupy certain kind of social role, i.e., the one characteristic of women….If the social position or role definitional of a kind is characterized broadly enough, then there are no particular set of properties required to belong to the kind. The properties that realize a social kind may exhibit significant diversity. Hence, different people can be women, for instance in virtue of importantly different factors" (8).

[125] As Barnes underscores, this does not mean that those identified as men and women actually or occurrently instantiate these biological roles, only that they are believed, perceived, imagined, or thought to incarnate such roles and are subsequently handled as such (2016a, 29-30). Nor is this to say, as Barnes further remarks, that "any and all" women will be disenfranchised in the same way with regard to "any and all" men, only that *some*—a portion or a subset of those gender-marked in virtue of the sex ascribed to them—will be vulnerable to particular forms of social disenfranchisement ("along some dimension" as Haslanger puts it) by virtue of being classed as women and some will be susceptible to particular forms of social privilege by virtue of being tagged as men (Barnes 2016a, 30-31; Haslanger 2012).

[126] Haslanger's example is fruit: "Granny Smith apples are different in Fuji apples in color and taste"—this is a real-world difference (ibid). Calling one set "Granny Smith" and another "Fuji" reflects our "linguistic/conceptual" practice of drawing a distinction between them (ibid).

[127] This and the following section (3.4.2 below) previously appeared in abridged form in LaBrada (2016a).

gender is actually just the organization of individuals into subordinated groups and privileged groups, then we ought to quash it (see also Overall 2016). Note that these are claims about the oppressive effects and uses of gender categories and classes, not claims about gender identity, or how gender is lived and negotiated, or felt "in the flesh" (Jenkins 2016a). Consider again the argument, forwarded by Katharine Jenkins, that there is a difference between gender categories (classes, roles) and gender identity. Gender identity is not just a question of assigning gender (or no gender) to oneself but the map or guide crafted in response to being assigned a given gender (even if one considers oneself agender or rejects gender, this does not prevent others from ascribing gender to one despite oneself): "S has a gender identify of X iff S's internal 'map' is formed to guide someone classed as a member of X gender through the social and/or material realities that are, in that context, characteristic of Xs as a class" (2016a, 410). Keeping this definition in mind, one could say that it is not always the case that gender identity is oppressive, even if being classed as a member of a gender may be. This identity, or "the internal sense of who you are," as Rachel McKinnon puts it, need not offer proof of a deformed desire (2015). While gender as a classificatory and normative apparatus might be innately oppressive, how we negotiate terms like *man* and *woman* is not, since gender norms can be diverted from their "regulatory" aims as they are laid claim to (Butler 1999; Bettcher 2009). Questions linger, however: Why and when does gender give rise to pleasure, rejoicing, or "positive" valuation (Mikkola 2016a; Haslanger 2012, 243)? How can we determine when undertaking a gender preserves oppressive norms or disorders them? Need one identify oneself as a member of a gender to counteract and mobilize against gender oppression and (hetero)sexism?

Although Haslanger's model is persuasive, it has been reprehended for a number of reasons by multiple feminist scholars: it pegs subordination as the "defining feature" of womanhood (as Mikkola puts it) when many "ordinary" social agents are unlikely to entertain that particular definition in mind (or to agree with it); it positions trans*women and intersex people in an ambiguous or tenuous relation to gender categories (Jenkins 2016a, Mckinnon 2015; Saul 2012); it does not consider gender identity (can one just be a gender by virtue of identifying as one? [Barnes 2016]); and its normative goal to obliterate gender concepts is susceptible to being misapprehended by "everyday" or "ordinary" social agents (Mikkola 2011, 2016b; McKinnon 2015; Saul 2006). In adopting a "social universal" according to which all women are those who are subjugated (i.e.

subjugation is the necessary and sufficient condition for membership in the kind "woman"), Haslanger seems to neglect other gendered possibilities or "positive" transvaluations of these gender concepts, as Stoljar puts it (1995, 279). In this, Haslanger's account, while claiming to respond to *property* and *representation problems* ultimately does not, since it presupposes a normative content to gender definition.[128] And it especially suffers when it comes to addressing *contestability* and *practicality* problems (most especially the case of non-cis-genders [see Jenkins 2016a; McKinnon 2015]).

I have, for my part, elsewhere questioned Haslanger's neo-gender realist construal of the sex-gender distinction (LaBrada 2016a). As multiple feminist philosophers have demonstrated, the sex-gender distinction is fraught on metaphysical, empirical, and methodological grounds (Mikkola 2016a; Butler 1999; Clune-Taylor 2016). Mikkola questions whether the sex-gender distinction is serviceable for realizing feminist purposes insofar as folk conceptions and intuitions about gender claim that gender grounds out in sex: gender is usually reduced to sex and not vice versa (2009 566–67). So how do we practically implement the sex-gender distinction when many speakers are unaware of it (Mikkola 2007, 73)? Haslanger is also inconsistent on whether it is possible to maintain gender concepts and categories (making them non-hierarchical). At times, she seems to hold that we can retain gender but render it a "thin" or nonsubstantive "part" of social identity: "we should try to envision new non-oppressive ways of being gendered *without* being a man or a woman" (2012, 254); at other times, she is agnostic about whether there could be "non-hierarchically grounded" genders (2012, 254, 245); and at still other times, seems committed to the abolitionist notion that, "after the revolution," "there will be no men and women" (2012, 269).

As I have previously argued (2016a), my worry is that the sex-gender distinction founders if, as Butler and others theorize, sex is exposed to be a "conventional kind" rife and riddled with gender norms (Butler 1990; Fausto-Sterling 2000; Daly 2015; Ayala and Vasilevya 2015; Rosario MS). If it's the case that sex is itself thoroughly gendered, then there's no guarantee that removing "gender" (by virtue of eradicating hierarchy) would lead to just sexed bodies (LaBrada 2016a). After all, by virtue of what would we be sexing them? By physical criteria alone? This would just

[128] As we saw earlier, it is question-begging and circularly stipulative—as Barnes warns (2016a, 11)— to install or "bake in" a negative or oppressive normativity into our metaphysical conceptualization of gender (precisely to rid ourselves of it), and this is what makes Haslanger's metaphysics controversial (Saul 2006).

reintroduce the folk conceptions of gender that we had originally sought to displace. In Chapter One, I pointed out how folk conception of "sex" assume a biological binary difference in body type and comportment between male and female bodies, as if bodies solely instantiated dimorphic sex-types, each with a coherent bundle of genes, gonads, and genitalia (Ayala and Vasilyeva 2015, 727-728; Haslanger 2012, 187). However, as Talia Bettcher observes: "Even experts do not agree how to define sex," and her example is the "definitional account" of sex offered by biologist Joan Roughgarden (Bettcher 2009, 103). For, as Roughgarden writes, biologists tend to agree that "sex [solely or only] means mixing genes when reproducing," with the biological categories *female* and *male* being indexed to "gamete size" (large and small gametes, respectively) rather than "binary body type[s]" (Roughgarden 2004, 22–23, 26; see also Rosario MS, 9). Or as Bettcher puts it when paraphrasing Roughgarden, "binarism" solely signifies "gamete size, reducing sex to the sheer production of one or the other gamete" (2009, 105).[129] As Bettcher and Esther Rosario emphasize, according to Roughgarden's definition sex terms *just* indicate particular biological indicators and all other references beyond that circumscribed scope are gendered in their signification: if sex *just* signifies gene-admixing then, Roughgarden and Rosario insist, all talk of sex beyond or above this restrictive definition is the product of pre-reflective, normative presumptions about gender (MS, 8-10; for a critique of Roughgarden's "deflationary" definition see Bettcher 2009, 103).

Hence, the biological categories "male" and "female" (denoting gamete size alone rather than more wide-ranging gendered features) do not license the conclusion that there are exclusively binary "body type[s], behavior[s], and life histor[ies]," especially amongst nonhuman animals (Roughgarden 2004, 26; Bettcher 2009, 103; Rosario MS, 9). Assertions regarding dimorphic sex(ed) kinds, especially their bodily categorizations by binary type, fail to mimetically mirror a preexisting natural condition or state of affairs. Indeed, such assertions spawn controversial questions and concerns about how and why one can or should instate nontrivial criteria and conditions for prearranging human bodies around those sexually dimorphic kinds (Haslanger

[129] As Franklin (2007) notes, sex refers in evolutionary biology to "genetic exchange that is an adaptation resulting from *selection for the benefits of such exchange*" or "any process that involves the transfer of genetic materials" (75). I am grateful to Esther Rosario for discussing Roughgarden's "simple" or deflationary definition of sex and female/male categories with me. Rosario (MS, 8-10) develops Roughgarden's definition—"sex [only or solely] means mixing genes when reproducing" (Roughgarden 2004, 22; see Rosario's summary MS, 9 for how this "merely," only, or "simply" denotes gamete-size])—in the context of sex difference studies in neuroscience.

2016b). As Haslanger herself points out, science alone cannot decide the matter because sex is biological, since the issue is that the biological and the social are co-constituting when it comes to claims about sex—this would seem to imply that the sex-gender distinction is bound to founder (139).

Haslanger offers an illustrative example of this (which seems to contravene her espousal of the sex-gender distinction) when she points to the difficulties involved in circumscribing or delineating what it is to be a male kind, which is generally associated with the following features: *S* is a male if S has XY chromosomes and produces "fertile relatively small motile gametes and no large gametes"; displays an appropriate gamut "of primary and secondary sex characteristics associated with men and none associated with women"; displays the appropriate hormonal levels associated with men (and not with women) and takes himself to be male, is taken by others to be male, and serves the social roles associated with males (139-140; see also Rosario MS for a discussion of brain studies and the Y chromosome). We can already see that the ways in which we define a candidate for inclusion in a male kind ineluctably involve reference to social features (gender traits), as well as to a range of biological features that must be weighted with relative importance (is it more important to have XY chromosomes or to be thought to be male by other human beings? [140]). While some might argue here that we can simply excise all reference to social roles in these instantiation conditions (to make sex a purely "biological" phenomenon), this would miss the point that the biological characteristics at issue here are constitutively social: when scientists claim to single out "sex" as a natural kind, they are not unveiling a preexisting state of affairs but modeling and welding sexual categories accordant with the epistemic and normative commitments backing the concepts they utilize to track and register that kind (see Brigandt 2009; Ludwig 2014).[130] As feminist philosophers of science often aver, how we resolve the questions of which features matter for determining "sex" will depend on the contextual values informing our inquiry—namely, which features we choose to weigh and why—since "for every sex characteristic, there are some people for whom it does not clearly indicate either maleness or femaleness" (Daly 2015, 710; Anderson 2015; Fausto-Sterling 2000; Rosario MS).

[130] I thank Ingo Brigandt for pressing me on this point in conversation about sexed kinds.

What this implies is that gender isn't grounded in sex, as folk intuitions would have it, but that the sex-gender distinction is itself grounded in social practices and perceptions rather than independent of them (Mikkola, 2011, 67; Schaffer 2016; Barnes 2014; Griffith forthcoming). Sex-gender consists in social relations, themselves part and parcel of a larger nexus of social structures; sex-gender would be "generated by, dependent upon, and explicable on the basis of social patterns" (Schaffer 2016, 3; Griffith forthcoming). What this means is that sex-gender is less fundamental than the social patterns (our attitudes, actions, practices etc.) that ground it—gender is engendered by, is ontologically dependent on, and can be explained by its social grounds (Schaffer 2016, 4; Griffith forthcoming). As Griffith puts it in "Social Construction and Grounding," for gender to be "non-causally socially constructed" is for it to be "partly grounded" in "repeated patterns of human interaction," which are "relatively stable, systematic, structured, and network-like" and which are predicated on "individual or collective responses to the subject's body (or the perception thereof), e.g., genitalia, function in reproduction," rather than "inevitable, natural, or fixed" traits (forthcoming, 3). In emphasizing the social grounds of sex, my purpose is not to repudiate the fact that there are bodies that menstruate, bodies that have prostates and so on, but to question how we define and "prove" sex. For if we identify sex exclusively with particular organs or if we conflate gender and genitalia—as if certain organs exhausted the type of sexual being one is or could be—then we succumb to cissexist, biological determinism. As Butler asserts, we don't have to discredit or disbelieve biological sex(es) and sex facts when we suggest that sex is not a "given" (1993). What we are claiming, rather, is that our scientific and everyday conceptions of sex are substantially molded and impacted by social norms about what we think men's, women's, and others' bodies "are" or ought to be (Ayala and Vasilyeva 2015, 727; Butler 1993, 1999).[131]

In recent work, Haslanger continues to remain "neutral" on whether or not gender is "socially constituted" all the way down (2016b; see also 2012, 192), though she acknowledges that the "conditions"—"purported features of the things that differentiate them and provide a basis for applying the distinction"—that one thinks must be satisfied for one to be sexed (and the "epistemic criteria" by which one judges and adjudicates how those conditions have indeed been satisfied) are socially inflected, since they require that one reflects on the "purposes for drawing the distinction

[131] Butler argues a similar point (1999; 1993). I am drawing heavily from LaBrada 2016a for my discussion here.

or noting the differences" in the first place (Haslanger 2012, 189). For, arguably, one's "purposes" in maintaining a sex-gender distinction can fail to be "legitimate," "apt," or "reliable" (ibid). Suffice to say that Haslanger doesn't specify what it would look like, and how it would be possible, to exterminate gender while still recognizing physical and bodily differences in a non-gendered way, though others have (see Andler 2015; Wittig 1992). Hence, it remains difficult to reconcile Haslanger's claim that sex would abide "after the revolution" since, at the same time, she wishes to argue that "we should refuse to use anatomy as a primary basis for classifying individuals and that any distinctions between kinds of sexual and reproductive bodies are importantly political and open to contest," indicating a profound tension in her theory (Haslanger 2012, 243). This worry I raise also adds to those feminist accounts concerned by the cissexist implications of Haslanger's model, which seems to discount those transwomen whose gender self-identifications are not always "perceived or imagined" to satisfy the conditions to belong to the social class of "woman," or who are at least not accorded proper "recognition respect" for their identities (Jenkins 2016a, 2016b; Mikkola 2016b; Saul 2012; Bettcher 2009).

Still, these criticisms notwithstanding, I would suggest that Haslanger's normative abolitionist model is more plausible than many of the others I have reviewed, provided that we (i) conceive of it as an ameliorative revision rather than a descriptive or neo-Aristotelian "real definition" and (ii) we turn away from Haslanger's metaphysics, adopting what Mikkola calls "effective feminist politics": we must analyze how we can operationalize gender concepts given our contemporary context (Mikkola 2016b).[132] For the critical realist argument, like the conceptual and value-theoretic argument, is wrong to speak of gender in such sweeping, context-insensitive fashion: while we should be aiming to overturn *folk* conceptions of gender, we might not want to overturn certain feminist conceptions of gender (as Haslanger herself recognizes), which can be not only descriptively accurate of our social world but also politically serviceable for mobilization. But in which contexts should we be trying to eliminate gender concepts and in which should we not? It's a petty verbal dispute whether Haslanger successfully accounts for gender's metaphysical reality, since the fact of the matter is that a vast majority historically and presently believes it does and mistreats people as a result, and that's where our philosophical and practical investments ought

[132] I thank Cressida Heyes for pressing me on the difference between what we ought to do and what we can do, given contextual constraints and resources.

to lie (Jenkins 2016b; Heyes 2000). On my Mikkolan view, we can be "deflationist" about the debates regarding whether gender bears an intrinsic oppressive nature, fundamental value, or metaphysical realism, and instead focus on whether or not we can justify the pragmatic elimination of certain gender concepts (as Mikkola recommends). In the next section of this chapter, I will discuss the kind of deflationary way we might approach and reference gender (in order to get a plausible regulative eliminativism and *pragmatic* form of abolitionism up and running).

3.3. Defending Mikkola's "Trait/Norm" Model

I would now like to reframe eliminativism as a regulative ideal orienting a context-dependent pragmatic abolitionism. Akin to most feminist philosophers, I agree with the "conventionalist" or social constructionist theory that gender categories are the "products" of contingent social practices and conventions (Mikkola 2011; LaBrada 2016a). Some of these conventions, furthermore, are oppressive in their effects (Overall 2016; Ásta 2015a; Mikkola 2011). I think that we can grant this broad conventionalism about gender (gender "ontologically depends" on social conventions and "relative to" certain "normative practices" [Mikkola 2011, 2016b]) and selective normative abolitionism (we ought to eliminate those *oppressive* conventions upon which gender hinges [ibid]). What really matters, to my mind, is devising and defending normative reasons about whether or not we can justify normative abolitionism and, if we can, figuring how to install the best practical strategies to gradually effectuate it (and in which contexts [Dembroff MS; Bettcher 2009; Antony 2016; Mikkola 2016b]). I will defend Mikkola's deflationary metaphysics and pragmatic approach, here, in order to set the stage for my version of regulative eliminativism and pragmatic abolitionism.

3.3.1 Gender Concepts and Terms

Mikkola claims that in order to obviate counterintuitive philosophical definitions of gender terms it is best to predicate their strategies on what "ordinary" or everyday "speakers" think are the referents of gender terms rather than essaying to force ordinary English speakers in a (presumably) North American context to espouse feminist definitions of gender (Mikkola 2007, 364; 2009; 2011). If a practical concern of feminism is arresting gender oppression and discontinuing gender injustice then, Mikkola argues, it is unnecessary to proffer definitions of *woman*—we should seek to

aid those to whom "ordinary" agents normally impute the term *woman* (2016b; Antony 2016).

Obviously, "ordinary" social agents hold objectionable and morally exceptionable views about gender, but Mikkola's isn't claiming that we depend upon what such agents *think* gender is, instead, we should look at (and advocate for) those to whom minority gender terms are applied and who are mistreated. We "look and see," as Wittgenstein would say, at how gender terms are being applied to "fix the reference" of the group around which our projects will be oriented. Mikkola distinguishes between "extensional intuitions" one may have about applying gender terms and "semantic intuitions" about the "intensional content" of gender terms (2016b, 106). Although semantic intuitions are likely flawed and "encode" faulty conditions for the applicability of gender terms (insofar as "ordinary speakers" tend to conflate or confuse gender and sex when imputing gender terms), Mikkola maintains that extensional intuitions are serviceable for establishing the "reference-fixing conditions" of gender terms insofar as speakers "find it easy to apply gender terms, and there is a high degree of uniformity in everyday gender ascriptions" (2016b, 107). As Mikkola (and other feminists like Heyes, Frye, and Young) contend, even though everyday social agents might not have a clear definition of "woman" (any more than we do what makes someone "bald" or a "child" [Mikkola's examples]) this does not prevent them from successfully or aptly referring to "women" tokens through gender-type terms (ibid). Mikkola summarizes her point: "we need not precisely specify what it takes for someone to count as a woman (or satisfy the intension of *woman*) in order to make good our reference-fixing….we can merely rely on the reference-fixing extensional intuitions" (2016b, 106).[133]

Mikkola's claim, then, is that when everyday speakers employ gender terms they are not judging or being prepossessed to judge that person *S* is gender G based on their "conceptual competence" to properly apply or accredit gender concepts (2016b, 108). Rather, speakers are under the sway of "predoxastic" perceptions, "co-located" with other mental states, which serve as "a presumptive justification for [one's] (possible) subsequent judgment" that person *S* is gender G (ibid). On this view, extensional intuitions only show "which individuals we think the term applies

[133] These intuitions are thought to be useful because they are predoxastic and *perceptualist*—representing the "gut feelings" of how one takes matters to be—rather than doxastic—attitudinally or dispositionally judgment-based (2016b, 107). Perceptualist intuitions lay the foundations for doxastic judgment and even furnish a kind of "presumptive justification" for those later judgments, and they are either *sui generis* or coextensive with "other mental entities" like "thoughts, imaginings, and so on" (2016b, 108).

to" but shed no light on the intensions of gender concepts (be they manifest or operative) or the semantic content of gender terms (2016b, 109). While our predoxastic perceptualist extensional intuitions furnish the starting-point for further analysis of the content of gender concepts and our doxastic judgments thereof, Mikkola maintains that we are not obligated to flesh out a "thick conception" of gender—we only need to practically speak about gender and focus on those to whom gender terms (like woman) are consistently contextually imputed (ibid). In this sense, we will mobilize around those who are typically interpellated as women, orienting "feminism's subject matter" around a "very thin conception" of gender (Mikkola 2016b, 110, 113).

While I think this practical strategy a good one (and indeed, it is perhaps one of the only places whence we can inaugurate action), the problem with such an "extensional approach"—which looks at what "referents" gender terms single out rather than what "definitions" gender terms supply—is that, as Kapusta and others point out, oftentimes ordinary social agents have exceptionable or ideologically troublesome conceptions of gender (2015, 2016; Haslanger 2012). Hence, as transfeminist philosophers like Kapusta and Bettcher argue, if we only take our cues from the way a hegemonic majority of ordinary agents apply gender concepts and terms, rather than trying to transform how they conceive of gender, then we risk unwittingly engendering and reinstituting heterosexist, transphobic, racist, and other problematic extensional intuitions (e.g. if we only ground our gender concepts of *woman* in what ordinary agents do, then this might signify that some trans*people won't be considered as their self-identified genders, since gender concepts have "multiple meanings" based on the relevant contextual standards for who "counts as" a gender and how gender-labels are assigned [Bettcher 2009; Kapusta 2015; Diaz-Leon 2016; Jenkins 2016a]).

Furthermore, as Bettcher and others contend, it's uncertain whether we can rely upon the extensional intuitions of ordinary social agents who might not know when and whether to impute gender terms to those who disidentify with gender ("agenders," "neutrois," etc.) or to those who identify precisely with the indeterminacy of gender categories ("genderqueer" etc.). In these cases, we can't always bank on ordinary intuitions about those to whom such terms apply, since the very definition of such identities, if there be one, would be that which defies or resists the application of sortal gender concepts. Mikkola has replied to this objection that she is preoccupied with how gender concepts are "deployed" and not with "some underlying *concept* that our language use

supposedly expresses"; what matters is those features taken to be "*indicative* of category membership" in a given gender (2016b; 110, 109).[134] For Mikkola, if it's the case that some extensional deployments of gender terms exclude trans* and intersex persons, this is not a matter of analyzing our semantic intuitions but moving toward normative political discussion—no theory, she rightly claims (2016b, 138-9), should presumptively include or exclude trans* and intersex persons within a predetermined gender category (e.g. "all trans*men are always and only men") since this itself would violate the self-identifications of those trans* and intersex persons who don't wish to be included in that gender category (e.g. some trans men self-identify as *trans* men and not as men [Mikkola 2016b, 113]).[135] Despite the potential problems I've delineated, I think Mikkola's account both anticipates and ably responds to them. Her model, as I understand it, is a good place to commence grappling with gender—indeed, perhaps it's our only place to commence, the place in which we come to find ourselves "thrown," as Heideggerian idiom would have it.

3.3.2 Gender "Traits" and "Norms"

Do we have to resolve upon *what gender is* to approach gender justice? Not quite, Mikkola says. Although Mikkola claims that her view is not metaphysical, she understands that it might seem like a predicate nominalist theory according to which "the tokens of women's type have in common that they are all picked out by the term 'woman'" (2016b, 110n1). But she explicitly repudiates the metaphysical implications "that individuals are women by *virtue of* being picked out by 'woman'" since the matter that concerns her is the application of concepts and terms (ibid). While Mikkola deflates ontological questions about gender, she nonetheless does propose an alternative model for conceptualizing sex and gender as a way to deflate ontological puzzles about gender's being and semantic puzzles about gender's meaning: namely a "trait/norm covariance" model (2011; 2016b). On this account, traits are features about which we can establish "facts of the matter" (namely, "physical/anatomical traits," "appearance," "roles," "self-conceptions" [here Mikkola is referencing

[134] That is, extensional intuitions report nothing about what a man *really is* when we follow those to whom "man" is imputed, but instead shows us what indicative features about those called men are thought to augment "the likelihood that one is a member of [that gender] category" (Mallon 2004, 652-653; cited in Mikkola 2016b, 109).

[135] Mikkola writes: "[a] theory of gender that point-blank excludes trans*women from women's social kind is simply unacceptable. But just as I find it politically problematic to propose such an exclusionary theory, I find it problematic to propose a view that unquestionably includes trans*women. After all, not all trans*women want to be part of women's social kind because this implicitly denotes cis women's kind. Some want to be identified specifically as trans* women rather than women" (2016b, 113).

Stoljar's typology in 1995]) whereas norms are the "value judgments" which we associate with these descriptive traits (2016b, 129). Mikkola likens these evaluative norms to Tamar Gendler's concept of "aliefs" or "associative, automatic, arational, [mental states] antecedent to other cognitive attitudes….affect laden, and action generating" (ibid). Norms[136] are both belief- and alief- based mental states that compel us to take descriptive traits and make them "count as" with feminine, masculine, queer, trans*, intersex, or neutral (2016b, 130 and138).

This "counting-as relation," Mikkola writes, is "quasi-essentialist" in linking traits and norms: the counts-as relations "are like the essentialist relations, except that they merely *purport* to capture some facts about the world, it is *as if* they pertain to some essential/definitional facts of the matter, when they do not" (132).[137] What this means is that "we…have congealed particular accidental relations between traits and norms to make them appear essentialist" such that "wearing make-up," for example, is a descriptive trait that is paired with the evaluative norms of being feminine in the West, and femininity is associated with being a woman (133).[138] What genders traits is not that we just "associat[e them] with men or women" but that they *prescriptively* impart "ideals that are appropriate to the roles constituting gender" (Haslanger 2012, 48). To what extent is this "counting-as relation" descriptive or prescriptive? Mikkola seems to oscillate between the view that "our language use does not fix what exists" and the view that "our language use is [only] part of what constructs the ontology" of gender and thus "can helpfully tell us something about that ontology" (2016b, 123). The extent to which our language constructs that ontology is left undecided in Mikkola's account, since she wants to claim that the existence of some social facts is "agent-dependent"/mind-dependent, but that the verity or spuriousness of our assertions about those

[136] I am following Haslanger's definition of norms as "clusters of characteristics and abilities that function as a standard by which individuals are judged to be 'good' instances of their gender; they are the 'virtues' appropriated to the gender" (2012, 42). Norms can be either "prescriptive" ("the basis for judgments about how people ought to be (act, and so on)" and "descriptive "some individuals have the properties in question and others do not" (2012, 44 and 45). Haslanger further distinguishes norms that are "appropriate to a social role" ("satisfying that norm would make for or significantly contribute to successful functioning in that role" and norms that are "grounded in a social role" ("satisfying the norm is sufficient for functioning in the role, perhaps successfully, perhaps not" [2012, 55]).

[137] An essentialist account would look like this: "one institutional fact seems to provide (at least partly) the definition of another institutional fact…we can define an object—this tells us *what* the object is, what is its *nature*. Putting together the essence-as-definitional and counts-as-definitional views yields the following: if one institutional piece of reality provides (partly) the definition of another, then the one tells us something about the other's *nature*—what the other essentially is" (Mikkola 2016b, 132).

[138] What ossifies these trait/norm pairings to make them covary together in a quasi-essentialist manner is, Mikkola proposes, a kind of acceptance-dependence on the part of social agents (ibid).

agent-dependent facts are themselves not "agent dependent"—so, for example, the perceived femininity of wearing make-up is a mind-dependent social convention (it "depends on us" [Haslanger 2012, 214]), but whether or not one is in fact wearing make-up does not hinge on our attitudes or beliefs, it is not "up for grabs" (either one is wearing make-up or one is not as a matter of fact [Mikkola 2016b, 137]). In Searlean terms (1995, 2010), make-up as a social practice with gendered norms is *ontologically* subjective—we evaluate and make-value judgments about whether make-up is feminine or not, good or not, etc.—but *epistemically* objective. It can be objectively true or false that someone is or is not wearing make-up within the context of a given social practice.

For Mikkola (and for me), the feminist strategy should be to make out those who are called and considered as a given gender and to critically assess the norm/trait pairings associated with their gender, in order to pin down whether they are normative or morally impermissible associations and, if so, how one ought to deconstruct or dissociate those pairings. I would simply add, following Jenkins (2016a), that in order to be more inclusive of gender variance and diversity, we should accord an important place to gender identity and self-identification—it's not sufficient to just look at *who* is normally called this or that gender, but also those who call themselves and identify as a given gender (especially when someone identifies as a given gender but is then accused of being a "deceiver" or a "pretender," that is, not a "real" "woman" or "man,"—something which often happens to some trans* people [Bettcher 2009]).

What's serviceable about how extensional intuition and trait/norm covariance model deflate metaphysical matters, as Mikkola and others contend, is that this allows us to attend to more pressing normative questions, such as those social conventions we find oppressive and those social relations it would behoove us to reform (Mikkola 2016b; Antony 2016). So which conventions do we find oppressive and apt for elimination? For my purposes, I take *gender* to refer to trait/norm pairings whereby certain descriptive traits—which on Mikkola's typology include "physical/anatomical traits" (i.e. having ovaries or not; having certain voice pitch), "appearance" (one's comportment and gender-presentation), "roles" (the social roles like "care-taker" or head of household), and "self-conceptions" (identifying as a given gender)—are paired with certain evaluative norms ("having ovaries is something only *women* have"; "women *look* a certain way"; "women are *predisposed to* be caretakers"). Notice that this avoids incurring ontological commitments about *what gender is*; all that this model says, incorporating eliminativism as a

regulative ideal, is that this pairing is contingent and not founded on the way things *essentially* are. While trait-norm pairings are "quasi-essentialist"—as if those taken to be this or that gender instantiated gender properties *as if it "flowed from their natures"*—we know this to be empirically and philosophically specious (but we need not make a further claim about the reality or unreality of gender). What we practically target are the "acceptance-dependence" relations that ossify these pairings in a quasi-essentialist way (Mikkola 2016b, 134): "x is [y] in some context C, if and only if some group C in that context has the attitude of accepting something as [y] (or believing it to be [y]) toward x" (134), where this acceptance is both explicit and involving "*implicit* non-belief-like automatic states" like aliefs (ibid). So our pragmatic concern should focalize on the cognitive beliefs and non-cognitive aliefs that orient social subjects to accept that these trait/norm pairings hold "naturally" or "essentially." How do we disengage traits from norms to challenge and change them?

Regulative eliminativism should target the pairing as being contingent, mind-dependent, and subject to decoupling or unyoking (an attack on quasi-essentialism). Holding eliminativism as a regulative ideal for certain petrified or "congealed" trait/norm pairings can actuate us to see that the pairing is not essential or natural to gender. Pragmatic abolitionism can focus on how to dissolve that pairing (an attack on acceptance-dependence). I'll give a focused example in the next section, concentrating on objectifying gender talk.

3.4. Regulative Eliminativism and Pragmatic Abolitionism in Action

3.4.1. Trans*feminism and Objectifying Gender Talk

In this final section, I'd like to flesh out an example of regulative eliminativism and pragmatic abolitionism in action. I am particularly motivated by a desire to address *contestability* problems. For certain trans people's gendered self-identifications are "invalidated" because they do not have the "descriptive traits" that have been problematically paired with certain norms (Bettcher 2007, 2013).[139] Notably, if one doesn't have certain physical features and gender-presentation, one is thought to not be a given gender (associated with those features and presentations). This problematic trait-norm pairing is an *objectification* or *hypostatization* of gender. "Objectification" is a

[139] Jenkins (2016b) defines the ontic injustice of transpersons (the way the category is constructed wrongfully by hegemonic norms) thus: "For any person x, if x meets the condition 'x's gender presentation is not normative for the gender they were assigned at birth,' then x counts as having the status 'trans/transgender/transsexual/freak' and functions as a subperson around here" (149).

heavily theorized concept in feminist theory, with extensive work done by Papadaki (2010), Haslanger (2012, Ch.1), Nussbaum (1995), and Langton (2009), and has usually referred to "instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership, denial of subjectivity, reduction to body, reduction to appearance, [and] silencing," as Papadaki summarizes in combining Nussbaum and Langton's work together (2015).[140] But while these conceptions are certainly resonant here, the particular kind of objectifying talk I have in mind draws from Haslanger's understanding of naturalizing objectification and its relation to normative generics.

Haslanger remarks that objectification refers to the way in which a given gender is thought to instantiate particular properties solely in virtue of kind membership, i.e. one is thought to "non-accidentally, by virtue of what one is, by nature" be in the state that one is (2012, 472, 66). On this view, "(1) all objects have a nature or essence; to be an object is…to have a nature; it is by virtue of their nature that objects are members of kinds or species… (2) Natures determine what is normal or appropriate—what is natural—for members of the kind…(3) An object's nature is essential to it" (2012, 66). We can see this kind of objectifying gender talk at play in normative generics like, "boys don't cry"[141] or "women are submissive" which have a kind of naturalizing or essentializing effect ("one is saying *of a kind of thing (Fs),* that its members are, or are disposed to be G (or to G) *by virtue of being of the F-Kind*…G-ing is what Fs do (or are disposed to do) by virtue of the nature/essence of F-ness; the source of the G-ness is in being (an) F"), a "normalizing" consequence ("[there exists] a robust regularity between F and G"), and a "normative" one (" it is right and good for Fs to be G, and Fs that are not G are defective" [2014, 380]). Objectifying talk thus makes the "projective error" of assuming that gender talk provides faithful representations or literal reportages on what and how one is by the nature of their gender (when it in fact reflects the objectifier's presumptions), the normalizing error of assuming that there are "statistical regularities" in gender behavior and expression by virtue of one's gender (when one is a woman one tends to be passive; boys tend not to cry), and the normative error that a given gender *ought* to behave or be as they are by nature (a bad woman is not passive; bad boys do cry [Haslanger 2014]).

It is this kind of gender talk that we can target on both regulative eliminativist and pragmatic abolitionist grounds. It's difficult to determine where ideology critique for this kind of

[140] In forthcoming work Haslanger focuses on "epistemic," "ideological," "projective, and Kantian "objectification."
[141] The examples come from Leslie (cited in Haslanger 2014, 372) and Haslanger (2012, 469).

talk ought to commence, since one cannot simply cease to use "generics" (Wodak et al. 2015, 630), and indeed being able to generalize about a minority social kind can be politically effective, for example being able to say that "gender variant people are subject to discrimination" (see Antony 2016 on productive generalizations). It's furthermore difficult to challenge the background or "common ground" which constitutes a complicated web of schemas, presuppositions, and implicatures (Haslanger 2012, 374). However, I think one place to start is by besieging the folk conceptions of sex and gender that still inform medical practice. Troubling how sex and gender is talked about in *medical* and healthcare contexts would be a place to implement our strategies.

Now, as I mentioned in Chapter One, *folk* eliminativism has been a part of feminist theorizing for centuries: disproving "naturalized" or pre-theoretic presumptions about gender, and eliminating them from academic and popular discourse has been one objective of feminism. As we saw with folk conceptions of gender—that set of prejudices, beliefs, biases, rules, and stereotypes regarding the grounding of gender in psychological quintessentialism and biological reductionism—*gender* might be one such theoretical posit used to name and explain the variety of mental states (desires, beliefs, moods, qualia) associated with being a gender. As we also saw, folk theories hold the objectifying view that there is some kind of gender essence or substantival gender property rooted in biology that explains why any and all members of a given gender kind display similar psychological and physical features (e.g. all females are supposed to be less aggressive, smaller-bodied and with poor spatial reasoning; e.g. all males are supposed to be more aggressive, larger-bodied, and good at spatial reasoning [Butler 1999; Leslie 2013; Overall 2016]). Folk conceptions of gender are meant to predict and explain why those of a given gender will display the psychologies and anatomies that they do: anatomy and biology (physical sex facts) are meant to causally ground the kind of psychologies that persons exhibit (gender facts [Leslie 2013]). Should it turn out that there is not only a correlation but a causal relation between sex and gender, then folk conceptions would demonstrate predictive, explanatory power—and might even be true (ibid). So folk conceptions presuppose something like an objectifying gender nature or gender substance, rooted in biological, physical facts: what makes the theory true is an ontological commitment to something like a gender essence (where that essence is biological or quintessential).

However, as we also saw in Chapter One, feminists have developed a range of sophisticated theories to explain what gender is and what it might be—they have proposed theories

of gender as conferred, enacted, and socially constructed rather than as anchored in biology. Feminist theories of gender as social, relational, and performative rather than an intrinsic, substantival, and biological essence makes for an ontological incompossibility between feminist and folk theories.[142] The question is not about furthering feminist conceptions by trying to make everyday social agents endorse feminist conceptions by merely explaining their logical or inferential mistakes (Mikkola 2016a; Yap 2016). This is a "cognitivist" model of ideology-critique that has shortcomings and drawbacks (Haslanger forthcoming). Rather, the question is how to uncouple problematic trait/norm pairings through changing habits and altering perceptions. Unlike the "phlogiston-model of ontological elimination," we should "redescribe" the referents (i.e. the "trait/norm pairings") to which gender concepts are applied (Ludwig 2014). On this view, it's not that gender terms and concepts miscarry when attempting to reference real entities in the world (as phlogiston did) but that the referred-to phenomena themselves should be "redescribed" by means of feminist-inflected theories of social groups and structures such that folk conceptions of gender essences can no longer have any explanatory purchase (ibid).[143]

But if we wish to dispense with folk conceptions of gender, then how do we go about displacing and replacing entrenched folk conceptions with something else? And what exactly are we abating? We have to answer at least these sets of questions:

(i) *What* is being eliminated? (the target of elimination)
(ii) *How* is it to be eliminated? (the means and methods of elimination)
(iii) *Can* it be eliminated? (the practicality and temporality of elimination)
(iv) *Where* is it being eliminated? (the context and situation of elimination)
(v) *Why* is it being eliminated? (the justification for elimination)

[142] Feminist theories (notwithstanding Witt's uniessentialism [2011]) for the most part do not include or quantify over something like gender essences, are more explanatorily robust, and have proven consistent with social scientific and empirical work on stereotype, prejudice, and identity formation through self-fulfilling prophecies and behavioral feedback loops (Bluhm 2012; Haslanger 2014; Yap 2016; Fausto-Sterling 2000). Folk theories positing gender essences have failed to explain the social nature of gender and have been ill supported by rigorous scientific research (Kourany 2010). In this sense, adopting feminist theories of gender requires leaving behind folk theories that are ontologically committed to there being gender essences insofar as feminist theories are "better justified" (Ludwig 2014). Furthermore, folk theories of gender posit gender essences, when no such thing exists (making it the case that gender essentialist terms are nonreferring and gender essentialist categories are void). It is not that there used to be gender essences that have since fallen into extinction, but that they never existed in the first place (Johnson MS). Gender essences do not reference something real, much in the same way that phlogiston terms did not (Ludwig 2014).

[143] I myself am tempted by Richard Rorty's claim that we should stop understanding eliminativism as an ontological claim ("someone has made a philosophical or scientific discovery that there are no X's") and instead formulate it as a pragmatic claim: "nobody any longer has use for this sort of talk" (1991, 115).

I submit that, in a medical context, we can eliminate the gendering of bodily organs in generic talk. *What* we are eliminating is not any and all mentions of gender, but omitting the mention of gender roles or classes, which we can certainly do without loss of scientific "accuracy" or information (Jenkins 2016a, 2016b; Andler 2015). Jenkins, when describing the category of gender, schematizes three aspects (assigned role, functioning role, and identity): "Assigned role: how an entity should be categorized; Functioning: how an entity actually gets categorized by most people's application of the rules of the institution; Identity: how people feel themselves to fit within the institution" (2016b, 109). Akin to Haslanger's distinction between "manifest" concepts—the "publicly" defined concept we take ourselves to be employing—and "operative" concepts—the "implicit, hidden" concepts we're "actually" employing—, "assigned role" comprises the explicit application-conditions of "rules" for counting as belonging to a gender role, whereas "functioning" denotes the tacit application-conditions that are in fact at play or actually *in practice* for counting as belonging to that gender role (2012, 370, 378; Jenkins 2016b, 109). The point of these distinctions is to elucidate the fact that there exist persons who "feel" themselves "to be a" given gender category (identity) even though they may not be taken to be that gender, but are not taken to be that gender in either assigned role or functioning (Jenkins 2016b, 109).[144] Jenkins wants to make room for transwomen whose identity or "a person's felt sense of which institutional [gender] category they belong in" might be invalidated because they are not recognized as their stated gender either in how they are classified in theory or in practice (ibid). I believe that discussion of gender in a medical context—specifically in health-care management—is "overripe" for elimination, to borrow Dembroff's term (2016). Instead of saying, "women have ovaries" or "men have penises" we can use the gender-neutral, empirically accurate, and trans*friendly alternatives: "persons with ovaries" or "persons with penises." I am following a proposal made by Bettcher, who doesn't want us to eliminate any and all talk of gender, but to allow for the "multiple meanings" of gender, including those trans*meanings which do not define gender in terms of genitalia, to be recognized and respected (2013, 236).

[144] Jenkins' account of "feeling like a gender" is as follows: "feeling oneself to be a woman is best understood as a matter of taking the norms associated with women to be relevant to oneself…One way of taking a set of norms to be relevant to oneself is to endorse the content of those norms as part of one's practical identity… It is also perfectly possible, however, to take a set of norms to be relevant to oneself whilst holding a critical attitude towards those norms" (2016b, 110).

Bettcher expresses frustration that transwomen are always portrayed as borderline, marginal, or indeterminate instances of women in feminist theory because, even there, the relevant standards at play are usually mainstream or "dominant" cis-conceptions (2013; 2009, 106; see also Kapusta 2016). For Bettcher, a descriptively accurate and politically advantageous understanding of *woman* is one that treats that concept as having multiple meanings—some dominant, some resistant—rather than just situating transwomen as "hard cases" or borderline cases relative to dominant meanings of womanhood (ibid). It is not just that there is a definitive definition of *woman* that will change relative to context—where some transwomen satisfying that definition in some contexts and not others—but that there are many different definitions of *woman* at play—such that a transwomen could be satisfying a different definition of womanhood in many contexts and thus not relinquish her claim to womanhood (Diaz-Leon 2016). So, for example, a transwomen might correctly apply a resistant concept of woman to herself—that is, one that does not encode dominant criteria for what counts as womanhood—and thus would meet the relevant standards of womanhood *metaphysically* (according to how the world really is in her resistant context) rather than by political fiat (according to how she thinks the world ought to be like in a dominant context [see Diaz-Leon 2016, 253]).[145] In order to acknowledge the multiple meanings of gender, and without visiting violence upon transwomen's identifications, Bettcher offers an example of reframing the generic "men/males have prostates" with the following:

> I know many trans women…who are content with their 'male genitalia.' However, many do not consider them *male* genitalia in the first place, but the sort of genitalia congruent with transgender femaleness… Often, what happens is that the social meaning commonly associated with a body part is, in a subcultural context, completely changed. In light of this, a trans woman might reasonably complain that testing for prostate cancer cannot be viewed in terms of testing only men (or males). Such a claim… is transphobic in that it erases the existence of trans women by treating them as nothing but (non-trans) men. Instead, once trans women are taken seriously, the testing ought to be framed in terms of testing both

[145] Bettcher writes: "On the multiple-meaning view, a trans woman can say that she is a woman in *all* legitimate contexts because those contexts in which she is a not a woman occur in a dominant culture that has been rejected for the reasons mentioned above…. There are actually two concepts and two meanings of "womanhood". The two concepts (and the two meanings) are related in that the latter is a result of changes performed on the former…. A preoperative trans woman might be a woman-R ("woman" in the resistant sense) but not as a woman-D ("woman" in the dominant sense). She would be a woman-R and fail to be a woman-D not as a matter of political decision but metaphysically speaking. The political question, instead, concerns which concept we should take seriously, and this is connected to the larger question regarding which gendered vision of the world (if any) we commit to" (2013, 243-4; also cited in Diaz-Leon 2016)

> non-trans men and trans women of a certain age. More simply, the testing could be done on *people* with prostates. That testicles, penises, XY karyotype, and prostates count as *male* in the first place is precisely what trans subcultures are *contesting.* (2013, 236)

Bettcher is noticeably responding here to the aforementioned *contestability* problem, but her argument is not simply normative, it is also "does justice" (in the "epistemic" and "ethical" senses of the phrase) to bodily diversity (Mikkola 2015b). Her strategy also resists the tendency to make trans*patients "special cases" of medical treatment or as a completely separate category of clinical patient (Latham 2016). As Matthew Andler argues, there are "other terms that can be used in equally or more effectively ensuring the just treatment of sexually differentiated bodies" (2015, 11). Andler suggests that "sex differences," "roles to be played in reproduction, such as pregnancy and childbirth," and "sex relative roles in child care" can all be replaced with gender-neutral language (12). In response to the first matter, Andler recommends adopting sex terms ("male" and "female" [13]). In response to the second, Andler claims that, since that not all females "have reproductive capacities," neither gender nor sex "effectively picks out which bodies have the capacity to bear children" (14); in response to the third, Andler points out (along with others), that caregiver roles need no particular gender (15; see also Ayala and Vasilevya 2015). However, while Andler admits that in some contexts using sex terms is better and more "accurate" than using gender terms, I would question whether this presupposition of the sex-gender distinction doesn't offend against some trans* identities. After all, as Rachel McKinnon claims, we have good reason to refuse a binary gender system like the sex-gender distinction for the potentially cissexist implications that it carries (2014). For example, McKinnon suggests, if trans men are men by gender, then one might ask whether they are male. But this has problematic implications, like the notion that only those who have undergone certain surgical procedures or taken hormones count as male or men. Likewise, the sex-gender distinction elides intersex individuals (ibid).[146]

Hence, I think that in order for doctors to avoid reference to "males" and "females" in a health care context, while still acknowledging differences in bodily organs and capacities, we can adopt a suggestion by Haslanger to speak about "pregnant persons," "lactating persons," "menstruating persons," in a way that would not presuppose fixed understandings of sex, ignore bodily differences, nor give into folk theories which conflate sex and gender (2012, 244). Once

[146] Here I'm drawing from LaBrada (2016a).

again, my argument is that we can omit mention of gender roles or classes in a medical context, not that we should eliminate all mention of gender, since I'm trying to make room to respect and acknowledge gender identity (Bettcher 2013; Jenkins 2016a). While gender as a classificatory and normative apparatus might be oppressive, how we negotiate terms like *man* and *woman* is not, since gender norms can be uncoupled from heteronormative aims as they are practiced (Butler 1999; Bettcher, 2013). What we are trying to do is unyoke the trait/norm pairing that takes descriptive traits (being able to lactate, having a penis etc.) and pairs them with a particular norm to make up gender: we want to undo the "quasi-essentialism" which makes having this or that trait a matter of being gendered and we want to lessen the "acceptance-dependence" (or alief-belief web) that forms the "background" by means of which gender is conceived (Mikkola 2016b). Ultimately, when thinking about the many aspects of gender identity, the goal of is to move, as Bettcher would have it, from the metaphysical question of *what gender is* to the "existential question" of "What do I stand for?" (2009, 110). As Bettcher puts it, existential "self-conceptions" are better than metaphysical ones concerns questions regarding the ethical value commitments for which we stand—the kind of people we have come to be and why—rather than whether or not we satisfy the requirements necessary for belonging to a gender class (either in its assigned or functioning roles, to use Jenkins' terminology).[147] Regulative eliminativism (pointing out the falsity of gender talk in a medical context) and pragmatic abolitionism (focusing on repealing gender talk and replacing it with gender-neutral talk) usefully contests the rigidity of trait/norm pairings, as Mikkola claims we should, and spurns metaphysical considerations of what makes up a gendered being, centralizing instead existential questions concerning the kinds of people we have come to be and, of course, the kinds of people we would like to become (see Heyes 2007 on "self-transformation"). In Mikkola's words, "overcoming" the "dehumanizing" aspects of gender injustice "is not primarily about people being happy and flourishing; it is about guaranteeing the *possibility* for personal happiness and flourishing…what lies at the heart of social justice is that we all have the same or equal chances. The point is not that we treat everyone equally, but that we treat everyone as *equals*" (2016b, 253).

3.4.2 Objections and Responses: Phenomenology of gender

I would now like to briefly touch on one potential objection to my account and reply

[147] Jenkins (2016b) develops an extensive account of "trans respect" based on Bettcher's notion of "existential identity."

accordingly. It might be objected that this account neglects the experiential dimension of gender and that my claim (following Jenkins) to assail gender "roles" but not gender "identity" is easier said (theoretically) than done (practically). After all, some strains of feminist phenomenology (rightly) reject talking about gender as an object or a thing, so isn't it wrong to carve up "gender" into roles, categories, identities, etc. as feminist ontologists tend to do? In deflating the metaphysics of gender by reducing it to Mikkola's trait/norm model, haven't I neglected to speak more explicitly of gender as a lived *experience*?

While I explicitly aim to target gender roles and classes (and not gender identity), it is clear that these are not easily analytically separable (one's gender identity is after all fashioned by and made up of the responses one develops in reaction to gender classification). And it's true that lived experience might seem to obstruct gender eliminativism, even a regulative version, insofar as gendered/gendering norms, symbols, and practices "subjectivate" who we are, as Butler's Foucault would say: we are not only "subjected to" gender but "subjectivated by it," that is, transmogrified into the subjects which we come to "be" (Butler 1993, 1999).

It's certain that phenomenology has usually been pitted against gender eliminativism (Bauer 2011; Heinämaa 2011; Stoller 2005). Feminist phenomenologists have claimed that while one might eliminate problematic notions of gender from some discourses, one cannot and should not do so from phenomenological accounts of bodily and personal experience (ibid). However, I submit that existentialist phenomenologists like Beauvoir were actually quite uncertain and perhaps even "agnostic"—as Bauer puts it—about whether or not there would or should always be something like gender (given the myths and fallacies about biology upon which it is founded [2011, 120; Deutscher 2002]). While phenomenology in the existentialist tradition ostensibly attempts to subvert the subject/object dichotomy—as Sartre declares in *Transcendence of the Ego*—this philosophical methodology nonetheless allows us to speak of and describe experiential states of feeling objectified by gender categories (and states of "self-objectification" [Bauer 2011]) without reifying gender into some sort of object or thing (Bauer 2011; Langton 2009). When Beauvoir discusses the "facts" of biology, for example, she claims that the facticity of the body only acquires meaningfulness in the context of signification and "sense-making," indicating how questions of *what* we are converge with

questions of how we live *that* we are.[148]

Elsewhere, I have argued that Heideggerian, existentialist-inflected phenomenology allows us to talk about "being treated as" (a gender) as chiasmatically enlaced, inseverable from but not therefore isomorphic to experiential states of "feeling like" (a gender) (LaBrada MS).[149] Heidegger is often accused of being eliminativist and charged with having neutralized the question of sexual difference[150] by "neutering" Dasein (Irigaray 1983; Derrida 1991; van Leeuwen 2012). But careful reconsideration reveals a much more complicated story, for what Heidegger intends by "Dasein's neutrality" is far more nuanced and complex than his detractors generally presume. In particular, I think that we find in Heidegger an early nod in a *regulative* eliminativist direction. As Heidegger remarks in §10 of *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, the purpose of the existential analytic is to study Dasein's existence, namely the meaning and temporality of its Being as well as how Dasein understands that Being, which requires that we sets aside questions concerning what Dasein's bodily and sexual features would have to be like, as this would reduce Dasein to ontic considerations (1984 [1928], 136). Heidegger emphasizes that fundamental ontology is not primarily interested in how Dasein's Being might be factically concretized in particular bodies or sexes. Rather, fundamental ontology is interested in the ontological "mode of being" of Dasein's Being as such and the "intrinsic possibilities" for Dasein to understand or grasp what it means to be: "The term 'man" was not used… Instead, the neutral term *Dasein* was chosen. By this we designate the being for which its own proper mode of being in a definite sense is not indifferent" (1984 [1928], 136). He specifies that the "peculiar *neutrality* [*Neutralität*] of the term 'Dasein' is essential," insofar as the existential analytic of Dasein must be undertaken before any talk about Dasein's "factual concretion," that is, its manifestation or concretization in a factic, sexed body (1984 [1928], 137). Dasein's neutrality is thus "neither of the two sexes [*keines von beiden Geschlechtern ist*]," Heidegger asserts, but this is not a

148 See Deutscher 2002 for discussion.

149 See Butler 1993 on indissociable but non-identical bodily states.

150 A note on terminology: while "sexual difference" talk often appears in a French and European context (especially in twentieth-century French philosophy), in an Anglo-American one, critics have adopted a sex/gender distinction instead (the former indexing biophysical properties and the latter indexing social and psychological ones [Butler 2014, 2004]). *Sexual difference* is something of an amalgam of sex and gender symbols and traits—in a French context, those like Irigaray (1983) and Derrida (1991) slip among physical and mental properties, as they are enmeshed in cultural norms, when they describe sexual difference—at times it ostensibly refers to ontological conditions of speech and subjectivity, at others to societal norms and symbols, and at still other times to bodily traits—as the means by which we distinguish *men* and *women* (in this literature, there is an unfortunate lack of attention to trans* and intersex bodies and issues).

negative claim that Dasein's neutrality is therefore "sexless [*Geschlechtslosigkeit*]" (1984 [1928], 137; German cited in Derrida 1991, 385). Instead, this is a positive claim to the effect that Dasein is the origin and source of an "intrinsic possibility" of becoming a sex (or not) rather than inherently being a sex (or not) (1984 [1928], 136). Hence, we can surmise that it would be a category mistake to think of Dasein in terms of sex or sexlessness since the very structure, meaning, and openness of Dasein's Being is what makes sex a possibility—the possibility of being sexed (or not)—in the first place. "Dasein" is a term for what is prior and other to factical sexual embodiment, as that which makes it possible (or not), and thus, strictly speaking, Dasein cannot be said to be either sexed or sexless in itself.[151]

Heidegger's phenomenological claim that Dasein is neutral usefully shows, I would submit, that contingent, factical features about the body (in this case sexual differences) do not predetermine ontological possibilities of Being. Strictly speaking, Dasein cannot have a "sex" in a *fundamentally* ontological way, insofar as sex is only a factical possibility that Dasein can become rather than what it inherently, ontologically, "is" in and of itself. And, second, trying to understand what sexual difference "is" in ontic terms is also the wrong question, since sexual difference is not a "thing," ontic object, or a substance that one could simply embody but only a variable possibility one might become (Beauvoir most famously undertook precisely this project in existentialist terms, pithily remarking in the *Le Deuxième Sexe* [1989 (1949)] that "on ne naît pas femme, on le devient"). Rather, the point is that Dasein is the "site" of possibility, the "clearing" where various possibilities (like being a sex) are staked out and taken up (or not), so it would be nonsensical to say that sex (one possibility among many) is inherent to Dasein.[152] In an important sense, it is crucial that Heidegger *not* permit sexual difference to be anything other than a possibility of Dasein (rather than a fundamental condition of possibility for any and all Being as such), insofar as it can lead us to petrify and eternalize contingent factical ways of being and to forget that Dasein's Being is one of

[151] As Marie-Eve Morin puts this, "Dasein is a neutral term that names the entity that I am only with regard to its understanding [of Being] and prior to its factual concretion [in a body]" (Personal communication). In other words, even though Dasein is prior to sex it is also that which makes sex possible (or a possibility that can be taken up) by virtue of its structure, openness, and meaning (care).

[152] I apologize for this catachrestic spatial language of "site" since Dasein is not some kind of container within which possibilities would be housed or cloistered. The openness-to-the-world of Dasein's Being provides a "clearing," as Heidegger puts it, or an opening up for possibilities, which is why I speak in this pseudo-spatial way. Nonetheless, it should be clear that this is a constraint of my language rather than a claim on Heidegger's part that Dasein is "spatial" in a conventional sense.

becoming and finitude.

Heidegger's *Existential Analytik*, especially as it was adopted by Beauvoir, rejects the naturalization and essentialization of sexual difference by leaving sexual difference open as a possibility that might be taken up (or not). Sexual difference, on this reading, is a possibility among others that one *might* become (or not) rather than a natural necessity, essential substance, or ontological condition that one *must* be in order to understand Being as such. Just as one *might be* or *could have been* a painter (or not),[153] so too one might be or could have been a sex (or not). The only difference, perhaps, is that how one goes about realizing the possibility of becoming a painter versus actualizing the possibility of becoming sexed depend on different social factors.

It has been, and continues to be, important for some feminists to repudiate the claim that one *must be sexed* and to advance the claim that one *can be* (as one possibility amongst others). Consider that, historically speaking, it was crucial for some feminist philosophers to impugn the biological determinist premise that women's bodies hindered their rational capacities. Thus early modern humanist philosophers like Marie de Gournay would argue that "taken rightly, the human animal is neither man nor woman," or that "the mind has no sex," as the Cartesian François Poulain de La Barre famously put it, in order to render salient the socially fabricated nature of gender (LaBrada 2016b). For these philosophers, it was indispensable to their arguments for "equality" to be able to claim that *being sexed* was an "accidental" property, not an "essential" one, to being human, precisely because sexists believed that if one were a particular sex then one could not exercise certain capacities (like rationality [ibid]). But if being sexed were a contingent possibility rather than essential feature of what it was to be human, then sex was not a determinant but a possibility.

Hence, while one might think (as Bauer warns) that regulative eliminativism reintroduces a Cartesian split or dualism in experience that phenomenologists would reject, my proposal actually follows the phenomenological suggestion of Bauer and others that these types of socially enforced dualisms are played out in experience as an "*experience* of dualism…of a tension between our drive to transcend ourselves and our drive to cement identities" (2011, 125).[154] Taking my cue from

[153] The painting example owes to Marie-Eve Morin (personal communication).

[154] Here, I differ from phenomenologists like Sara Heinämaa (2011) who uses Husserlian phenomenology (understood as "[an] investigation into the correlation between subjectivity and objectivity, or consciousness and being, characteristic of all experience… disclosing the essential features of the intentional acts that take part in the constitution of the different senses of objectivity and being… illuminat[ing] the passive aesthetic synthesis which

Heidegger and Beauvoir, I would propose that a certain interpretation of existentialist phenomenology could support regulative eliminativism, insofar as phenomenological methodology in this tradition might give us a way of talking about experiences of being gendered without needing to suppose that one is necessarily or inherently a gender (for example, we can talk about seeing colors without having to qualify "seeing colors *as* a man").[155] It is often forgotten that Beauvoir emphasizes a certain skepticism over "whether there is such a thing as a woman and, if so, what a woman is" (Bauer 2011, 199), writing: "One wonders if women still exist, if they will always exist, whether or not it is desirable that they should, what place they occupy in this world, what their place should be (1989 [1949], xix; also cited in Bauer 2011, 119). But Beauvoir also complicates these claims in observing that in "everyday experience" we often encounter the fact that "humanity is divided into two classes of individuals whose clothes, faces, bodies, smiles, gaits, interest, and occupations are manifestly different. Perhaps these differences are superficial, perhaps they are destined to disappear. *What is certain is that for the moment they exist with a blinding obviousness*" (1989 [1949], xx-xi, emphasis added; also cited in Bauer 2011, 120).

One might even suggest that phenomenological-existential accounts of racism and sexism like those of Franz Fanon, Beauvoir, or Iris Marion Young, are not just telling us what it "feels like" to be a gender (or a race) in a first-order way but also telling us what it feels like to be "*viewed" and* "*treated" as* a gender or race when one is thought to be a given gender or race (these experiential

---

establishes the most rudimentary, primordial objectivities on which acts can operate…demonstrat[ing] how the different senses of being result from the constitutive activities and passivities of conscious subjects" [135]). For Heinämaa, we pre-conceptually perceive the types of *man* and *woman* in passive synthesis and "independently of our active interventions" (145; 144). But while Heinämaa is interested in "transcendental forms of experiencing" and perception in order to establish a phenomenology and typology of sexual difference on a pre-conceptual level, I am interested in Heidegger's and Beauvoir's renditions of phenomenology, since the latter discuss the conditions under which one might *become* certain possibilities (such as the possibility of becoming sexed) within concrete social contexts rather than assuming that sexual difference is pre-conceptual to all experience (Beauvoir 1949, 66, cited in Bauer). I don't think one can easily parse the difference between "concepts" of gender and pre-conceptual "perceptions" of gender, as Heinämma would like us to do (145).

[155] Of course, it might be interesting to show the ways that one might 'see color as a man," insofar as it would show something about the way we construct men or the stereotype of manly perception. Stephanie Dover (personal communication) points out that it would be interesting to see how typically, heterosexual men not working in art or fashion are taught to learn less about the differences among colors and hues—say, the difference between periwinkle and azur—since this is considered a "feminine" or "gay" kind of knowledge. Seeing no difference amongst shades of blue would be one way that we are socialized/gendered in our phenomenological experiences of the world. But this doesn't prove that one *must* be gendered to experience color, only that how one is socialized based on how what gender they are thought to exemplify can influence one's experience

states being inseparable but not therefore identical [Butler 1993]).[156] Phenomenology could supplement regulative eliminativist proposals by furnishing a fine-grained account of the social experience of being gendered (or raced) without relying on a belief that gender categories are metaphysically real—indeed, it would eschew that metaphysical question altogether.

In other words, existentialist phenomenological methodology, by bracketing away our presuppositions and "natural attitudes" about what we think gender is, might permit us to talk about embodiment and bodily differences without preconcerting that we need binary gender categories to divide up those bodily and experiential states (e.g. we can acknowledge that some bodies can give birth, some not, and so on; we can recognize that bodies will have differing qualitative states depending on the kinds of bodies they are; and we can do all this without assuming that these bodily differences and experiential states will facilely divide along binary gendered lines). I want to allow that genitalia and physical sex don't necessitate a particular gendered mental state *and* acknowledge that one will undergo particular gendered experiences, or experience being treated in particular gendered ways, depending on whether one is *taken to* have or be of a particular physical sex (Haslanger 2012). Gender is relational, subsisting not in but among people—but gender talk can also be *objectifying*, making you feel like a thing (namely the thing you're called or treated as).[157] When someone says "you're a queer" this might make the person so interpellated very much feel like a queer, socially "count as" queer, or even "become" a queer (Langton 2009).

With some existentialist-inflected phenomenological methodologies, I would conjecture, we could contrive nuanced personal and bodily accounts of lived experience—especially accounts of how social categories like gender are incarnated and interrogated—without committing ourselves to metaphysical views about whether or not gender categories subsist independently of our personal and social experiences of them, nor to views about whether or not we will always need to describe our experiences through gender (there might one day be a world where gender won't be paramount for framing our experiences, infusing our embodiment, or constructing our social identity, but that isn't our contemporary world). In focusing on the tensile experience of both embodying and disputing gender categories and norms, we can complicate the potentially cissexist

[156] On "viewing" and "treating" see Haslanger 2012.
[157] I thank Cressida Heyes (personal communication) for the phrase "gender doesn't inhere in people but between people."

claims about what it "really" or "naturally" feels like to be a given gender.

Hence, I don't see phenomenology (as I'm rendering it here) as opposed to my account. To be clear, I'm not saying that we should reject first-person accounts about gendered phenomenology out of hand or rule them out of court. I'm claiming that we can develop complex considerations of how social agents live and negotiate gender categories—that is, the experience of *becoming* gendered, identifying with or repulsing gender attributions—in relation to larger social contexts, conventions, and relations. There's a feedback loop (or as Hacking calls it, a "looping effect") between the experience of negotiating with one's gendering and the experiences that are subsequently colored or shaped by one's negotiation with that gendering, and I'm not denying that social location and identity influence our standpoints and epistemologies (see Haslanger 2012). All I'm saying is that phenomenology doesn't *prima facie* contravene the Mikkolan trait/norm model, but could supplement it, giving us insight into (i) how we negotiate, live in, receive, and/or impugn gender categories without granting some sort of mystical primacy to what it "really" or "genuinely" feels like to be a gender (Jenkins 2016a, 2016b); and furnishing us with (ii) ways of theorizing bodily differences and experiential states in nuanced fashion without presupposing binary gender categories. What phenomenological accounts can indicate, in tandem with regulative eliminativism, is how experiences of gender qualia (what it "feels like" to be a gender) are inextricably, and perhaps indistinguishably, interlaced with experiences of gender conventions (what it "feels like" to be *gendered*, that is, what it is like to be *taken to be* or *treated as* a gender according to a context-relative set of norms). This doesn't contradict a trait/norm model so much as nuance it: "feeling like a gender" could be a part of a descriptive matter of "self-conception" and being treated in particular way a normative matter. And this, to my mind, befits the pragmatic eliminativist's agenda in dismissing the metaphysical view that there is something like "gender as such" that we feel (or that we are) independent of social conventions, behaviors, and practices.

Indeed, as a speculative hypothesis (one I cannot fully defend or embroider upon here), it might well be that when we asseverate that a person is gendered or perceived to be a gender, this might signify that said person is not instantiating gender or representing gender in a first-order way, as this would imply (weightily) that there is or that there exists "something like" gender that one could in fact exemplify (harking back to the substance metaphysics that Butler and other feminists condemn or at least providing fodder for extended metaphysical inquiry). Rather, I would suggest,

we might ask whether one's embodiment of gender and one's being-taken-to-be-a-gender are more plausibly a "second-order instantiation" of the *property of personifying the property of gender* (see Mason 2015, MS and Ásta 2008).[158] It might well be that bodies don't reflect, represent, or impersonate gender in a first-order way; rather, they might reflect or represent (in second-order fashion) the representation of what we think gender is (and which influences our interpretation of how we "feel" or "exist" that gender). Bodies wouldn't represent gender but would represent the representing of gender, that is, they would represent what we take to be the representation of gender.[159] This might allow us to continue to employ gender talk as needed without unwittingly subscribing to any particularly metaphysically weighty view about what gender ultimately "is."

[158] In another context, Mason refers to "second-order [social] properties" which are properties whose property is instantiating other properties (MS, 2015). I am applying Mason's account (about social properties in general) to gender. I am also drawing from Ásta's discussion of second-order properties (2008).
[159] I thank Stephanie Dover for the phrase "represent the representing of gender."

Conclusions and Consequences

In this thesis, I have shown that the metaphysical component of gender eliminativism is defective on both metaphysical (Chapter One) and political grounds (Chapter Two). However, I argued that we could construe eliminativism "amelioratively" as a regulative ideal rather than a metaphysical truth—*as if* some gender concepts and categories were unreal and deserving of elimination—for pragmatic abolitionist purposes, with a particular focus on medical and health-care contexts friendly to some trans*people's gender identities and capable of answering to *contestability* problems (Chapter Three). All the while, I suggested that we ought to continue the "deflation" of feminist metaphysical "puzzles" already initiated by Mikkola and others, adopting Mikkola's "trait/norm covariance" model in order to practice our theorizing. I also responded to the objection that such a deflationary model neglected the lived experience of gender, by proposing that feminist existentialist phenomenology, far from subverting my proposal, might enrich it.

Although my aim in the project was to defend a plausible and practical form of eliminativism, I think other context-dependent strategies will be in order: these will include (i) altering our language (particularly gendered generics), (ii) altering our basic street fashion (to introduce more variety across gender presentations), and (iii) altering certain habits (trying to unyoke trait/norm pairings). I'm especially inclined to endorse the trans* and intersex policy claim that we needn't assign gender or sex at birth or on passports (Clune-Taylor 2010; Jenkins 2016b). Passing a "moratorium" on assigning gender-sex at birth (and in passports), as Clune-Taylor puts it (2016), would make gender-sex categories non-compulsory and would reveal, perhaps, their fundamental non-necessity (Overall 2016; Dover personal communication). Space considerations prevent me from embroidering upon these strategies further. My intent in this project was to provision further "tools" for our gender justice arsenal and armature by showing how a regulative, ameliorative, and pragmatic rendition of eliminativism and abolitionism can serve some of our objectives to undo gender inequality. My project, if persuasively presented, will have exposed that regulative gender eliminativism and pragmatic abolitionism, when understood in practical terms and as an ameliorative approach, are viable options, defensible on both philosophical and political grounds, provided that their scope of justification and application is contextually focused and pragmatically circumscribed rather than metaphysically general and philosophically far-reaching.

Works Cited

Anderson, Elizabeth. 1995. "Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and a Defense." *Hypatia* 10 (3): 50-84.

_____. 2015. "Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/feminism-epistemology/>.

Andler, Matthew. 2015. "Is Gender Needed for Justice?" M.A. Thesis, Georgia State University.

_____. 2016. "The Concept of Sexual Orientation." Unpublished Manuscript.

Antony, Louise. 2016. "Abstract: Feminism Without Metaphysics." Unpublished Abstract for presentation at Society for Analytic Feminism, September 2016.

_____. 2009. "The mental and the physical." In *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics*, 555-567 ed. Robin Le Poidevin. New York: Routledge.

Alcoff, Linda Martín. 1991-1992. "The Problem of Speaking for Others." *Cultural Critique* 20: 5-32.

_____. 2011. "Experience and Knowledge: The Case of Sexual Abuse Memories." In *Feminist Metaphysics,* ed. Charlotte Witt, 209-223.

Ásta Sveinsdóttir. 2008. "Essentiality conferred." *Philosophical Studies* 140: 135-148.

_____. 2010. "Siding with Euthyphro: Response-Dependence and Conferred Properties." *European Journal of Philosophy* 18 (1): 108-125.

_____. 2011. "The Metaphysics of Sex and Gender." In *Feminist Metaphysics,* ed. Charlotte Witt, 47–65.

_____. 2012. "Comments on Charlotte Witt." *Symposia on Gender Race and Philosophy* 8 (2): 1-5.

_____. 2013a. "The Social Construction of Human Kinds." *Hypatia* 28 (4): 716–32.

_____. 2013b. "Knowledge of Essence: The conferralist story." *Philosophical Studies* 166: 21-32.

_____. 2015a. "Social Construction." *Philosophy Compass* 10 (12): 884-892.

_____. 2015b. "Social Construction as Social Significance." Unpublished Manuscript.

Ayala Saray and Nadya Vasilyeva. 2015. "Extended Sex: An Account of Sex for a More Just Society." *Hypatia* 3 (4): 725-742.

Babbit, Susan E. 2005. "Stories from the South: A Question of Logic." *Hypatia* 20 (3): 1-21.s

Bach, Theodore. 2012. "Gender Is a Natural Kind with a Historical Essence." *Ethics* 122 (2): 231–72.

Baehr, Amy. 2004. "Feminist Politics and Feminist Pluralism: Can we do Feminist Political Theory without Theories of Gender?" *Journal of Political Philosophy* 12 (4): 411-436.

Barnes, Elizabeth. 2009. "Disability and Adaptive Preference." *Philosophical Perspectives* 23 (1): 1-22.

_____. 2009b. "Disability, Minority, and Difference." *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 26 (4): 337-355.

_____. 2014. "Going Beyond the Fundamental: Feminism in Contemporary Metaphysics." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 114 (3): 335-351.

_____. 2014b. " Valuing Disability, Causing Disability." *Ethics* 125 (1): 88-113.

_____. 2016a. *The Minority Body: A Theory of Disability*. Oxford: Oxford UP.

_____. 2016b. "Realism and Social Structure." *Philosophical Studies* doi:10.1007/s11098-016-0743-y

Bauer, Nancy. 2011. "Beauvoir on the Allure of Self-Objectification." In *Feminist Metaphysics*, ed. Witt. 117-129.

Beauvoir, Simone de. 1989. *The Second Sex,* ed. and trans. H.M. Parshley. New York, NY: Vintage.

Bennett, Karen. 2007. "Mental Causation." *Philosophy Compass* 2 (2):316-337.

Behrensen, Maren. 2013. "Born That Way? The Metaphysics of Queer Liberation." *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgeder Issues* 12 (2): 2-7.

Bettcher, Talia. 2007. "Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers: On Transphobic Violence and the Politics of Illusion." *Hypatia* 22 (3): 43-65.

_____. 2009. "Trans identities and first-person authority." In *You've Changed: Sex reassignment and personal identity*, ed. Laurie Shrage. Oxford: Oxford UP.

_____. 2012. "Full-Frontal Morality: The Naked Truth about Gender." *Hypatia* 27 (2): 319-37.

_____. 2013a. "Trans women and the meaning of 'woman.'" In *The philosophy of sex*, ed. Nicholas Power, Raja Halwani, and Alan Soble. Lanham (MD): Rowman & Littlefield.

_____. 2013b. "Feminist Perspectives on Trans Issues." *SEP*

_____. 2014. "Trapped in the Wrong Theory: Rethinking Trans Oppression and Resistance." *Signs* 39 (2): 383–406.

Blank, Hanne. 2012. *Straight: The Surprisingly Short History of Heterosexuality*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Boghossian, Paul. 1989. "The Rule-Following Considerations." *Mind* 98 (392): 507-549.

Bornstein, Kate. 1994. *Gender outlaw: On men, women, and the rest of us*. New York Vintage Books.

Bluhm, Robyn. 2012. "Self-fulfilling Prophecies: The Influence of Gender Stereotypes on Functional Neuroimaging Research on Emotion." *Hypatia* 28 (4): 870-886.

Brigandt, Ingo. 2009. "Natural Kinds in Evolution and Systematics: Metaphysical and Epistemological Considerations." *Acta Biotheor* 57: 77–97.

Butler, Judith. 1999 [1990]. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge.

_____. 1993. *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex."* New York: Routledge.

_____. 2004. *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.

_____. 2007. "Wittig's Material Practice: Universalizing a Minority Point of View." *GLQ* 13 (4): 519-533.

_____. 2009. *Frames of War: when is life grievable?* New York: Verso.

_____. 2014. "Gender" in *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A philosophical Lexicon*, ed. Barbara Cassin, trans. Emily Apert et al. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP.

_____. 2015. *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Cambridge: Harvard UP.

Butler, Judith and Cristan Williams. 2014. "Gender Performance: The TransAdvocate interviews Judith Butler." *The TransAdvocate. http://transadvocate.com/gender-performance-the-transadvocate-interviews-judith-butler_n_13652.htm*

Carlson, Asa. 2010. "Gender and Sex: What Are They? Sally Haslanger's Debunking Social Constructivism." *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory* 11 (1): 61–72

Chakravartty, Anjan. 2016. "Scientific Realism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/scientific-realism/>.

Clune-Taylor, Catherine. 2010. "From Intersex to DSD: The Disciplining of Sex Development." *PhaenEx: Journal of Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture,* 5 (2): 152-178.

_____. 2016. *From Intersex to Disorders of Sex Development: A Foucauldian Analysis of the Science, Ethics, and Politics of the Medical Production of Cisgendered Lives.* Ph.D. diss. University of Alberta.

Corvino, John. 2000. "Analyzing Gender." *Southwest Philosophy Review* 17 (1): 173-180.

Cudd, Ann. 2006. *Analyzing Oppression*. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Currah, Paisley and Lisa Jean Moore. 2009. " 'We Won't Know Who You Are': Contesting Sex Designations in New York City Birth Certificates." *Hypatia* 24 (3): 113-135

Daly, Helen. 2015. "Sex, Vagueness, and the Olympics." *Hypatia* 30 (4): 708–24.

Dembroff, Robin A. 2016. "What Is Sexual Orientation?" *Philosopher's Imprint* 16 (3): 1-27.

_____. "Dissertation Summary." Unpublished Manuscript.

Derrida, Jacques. 1991. "Geschlecht: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference." In *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds,* ed. Peggy Kamuf, 380-402. New York: Columbia University Press.

Deutscher, Penelope. 2002. *A Politics of Impossible Difference: The Later Work of Luce Irigaray*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Diaz-Leon, E. 2013. "What Is Social Construction?" *European Journal of Philosophy* DOI: 10.111/ejop.12033.

_____. 2016. "*Woman* as a Politically Significant Term: A Solution to the Puzzle."

Dupré, John 1981. "Natural Kinds and biological taxa. *Philosophy of Science* 75: 344-82.

_____. 1993. *The disorder of things: Metaphysical foundations of the disunity of science*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Drayson, Zoe. 2015. "The philosophy of phenomenal consciousness." *The Constitution of Phenomenal Consciousness,* ed. S. Miller, 273-292. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Einheuser, Iris. 2006. "Coutnerconventional Conditionals." *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 127 (3): 459-482.

_____. 2009. "Some Remarks on 'Language-Created Entities.'" *Acta Anal* 24: 185-192.

_____. 2011. "Toward a Conceptualist Solution of the Grounding Problem." *Noûs* 45.2: 300-314.

Eklund, Matti 2015. "Ficitonalism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/fictionalism/>.

Epstein, Brian. 2014. "How Many Kinds of Glue Hold the Social World Together?" in *Perspectives on Social Ontology and Social Cognition*, eds. Mattia Galloti and John Michael. Dordrecht: Springer.

Evers, Daan. 2015. "Is there enough evidence for moral error theory?" Unpublished manuscript.

Fausto-Sterling, Anne. 2000. *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. New York: Basic Books.

Fine, Cordelia. 2010. *Delusions of Gender. How Our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Flanke, April. 2005. “Through Thick and Thin: Validity and Reflective Judgment.” *Hypatia* 20 (3): 115-126.

Franklin, L.R. 2007. “Bacteria, Sex, and Systematics.” *Philosophy of Science* 74: 69-95.

Friedman, Michael. 1991. “Regulative and Constitutive.” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 30 (S1): 73-102.

Frye, Marilyn. 1996. “The Necessity of Differences: Constructing a Positive Category of Women.” *Signs* 21 (4): 991-1010.

_____. 2005. “Category Skepticism and its Cure.” *Symposia on Gender, Race and Philosophy* 1 (1): 1-5.

_____. 2011. “Metaphors of Being a Phi.” In *Feminist Metaphysics*, ed. Charlotte Witt, 85-95. Dordrecht: Springer.

Fuss, Diana. 1989. *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference.* New York: Routledge.

Garry, Ann. 2011. “Intersectionality, Metaphors and the Multiplicity of Gender.” *Hypatia* 26 (4): 826-850.

Gibbard, Alan. 1990. *Wise, Choices, Apt Feelings.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

_____. 2003. *Thinking How to Live.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Gilbert, Miqqi Alicia. 2009. “Defeating Bigenderism: Changing Gender Assumptions in the Twenty-First Century.” *Hypatia* 24 (3): 95–111.

Glüer, Kathrin and Wikforss, Åsa, "The Normativity of Meaning and Content", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/meaning-normativity/>.

Gowans, Chris. 2015. “Moral Relativism.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/moral-relativism/>.

Green, Leslie. 2015. “Germaine Greer is right about trans-women.” https://ljmgreen.com/2015/11/01/germaine-greer-is-right-about-trans-women/

Griffith, Aaron. Forthcoming. “Social Construction: Big-G Grounding, Small-g Realization,” *Philosophical Studies.*

_____. Forthcoming. “Social Construction and Grounding,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.

Groneberg, Micahel. 2005. “Myth and Science around Gender and Seuxality: Eros and the Three Sexes in Plato’s *Symposium*.” *Diogenes* 208: 39-49.

Haenel, Hilke. 2014. "The 'Woman Problem' in Philosophy: Ameliorative Projects as Political Projects." Unpublished MS.

_____. 2014. "The Concept *Rape* as an Ameliorative Project." Unpublished MS.

Hale, Jacob. 1996. "Are Lesbians Women?" *Hypatia* 11 (2): 94-131.

_____. 1997. "Leatherdyke Boys and Their Daddies: How to Have Sex without Women or Men." *Social Texts* 52/53: 223-236.

Harbin, Ami. 2016. *Disorientation and Moral Life*. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Haslanger, Sally. 2008. "Changing the Ideology and Culture of Philosophy: Not by Reason (Alone). *Hypatia* 23 (2): 210-223.

_____. 2012. *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*. Oxford: Oxford UP.

_____. 2013a. "Race, intersectionality, and method: a reply to critics." *Philosophical Studies* 171 (1): 109-119.

_____. 2013b. "Social Meaning and Philosophical Method." *APA Proceedings and Addresses* 88: 16-37.

_____. 2014. "The normal, the natural and the good: Generics and ideology." *Politica & Società* (3): 365-392

_____. 2015a. "Critical Theory and Practice: Ideology and Materiality." Unpublished Manuscript.

_____.2015b. "Social Structure, narrative and explanation." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*. 1-14. DOI: 10.1080/00455091.2015.1019176.

_____. 2016a. "What is a (Social) Structural Explanation?" *Philosophical Studies* 173 (1): 113-130.

_____. 2016b. "Theorizing with a Purpose: The Many Kinds of Sex." *Natural Kinds and Classification in Scientific Practice. Ed.* Catherine Kendig. New York: Routledge, 2016. 129-144.

_____. Forthcoming. "Objectivity, Epistemic Objectification, and Oppression." In Ian Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus, eds. *Routledge Handbook to Epistemic Injustice*. New York: Routledge.

_____. Forthcoming. "Social Construction: Gender and other Social Categories." In Ann Garry, Serene Khader, and Alison Stone, eds. *Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy*. New York Routledge.

_____. Forthcoming. "Culture and Critique. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*.

_____. Forthcoming. "Racism, Ideology, and Social Movements." *Res Philosophica*.

Heidegger, Marin. 1984 [1928]. *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic,* trans. Michael Heim. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Heinämaa, Sara. 2011. "A Phenomenology of Sexual Difference: Types, Styles and Persons." In *Metaphysics of Gender*, 131-155.

Higgins, Peter. 2005. "Sexual Disorientation: Moral Implications of Gender Norms." In Lisa Gurley, Claudia Leeb, & Anna Aloisia Moser, eds. *Feminists Contest Politics and Philosophy*, 91-103. Pie: Peter Lang.

Hussein, Reima. "Intersectionality as a regulative ideal." Unpublished manuscript.

Heyes, Cressida. 2000. *Line Drawings.* Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP.

_____. 2007. *Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

Holroyd, J. 2012. "Responsibility for implicit bias." *Journal of Social Philosophy* 43: 274-306.

Horvath, Christopher. 1999. "Measuring Gender." *Biology and Philosophy* 14: 505–19.

Irigaray, Luce. 1983. *L'Oubli de l'air chez Martin Heidegger.* Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.

Johnson, Michael. "Eliminativism and Fictionalism." Unpublished powerpoint.

Jordan-Young, Rebecca. 2010. *Brain Storm: The Flaws in the Science of Sex Differences*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP>

Jenkins, Katharine. 2016a. "Amelioration and Inclusion: Gender Identity and the Concept of Woman." Ethics 126 (2): 394–421.

_____. 2016b. *Ontic Injustice*. PhD Dissertation, University of Sheffield.

Joyce, Richard. 2015. "Moral Anti-realism." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Archive: Fall 2015 Edition*. Metaphysics Research Lab, Center for the Study of Lang. and Information, Stanford U, 2015. Web. 22 Mar. 2016.

Kapusta, Stephanie Julia. 2015. *Contesting Gender Concepts, Language and Norms: Three Critical Articles on Ethical and Political Aspects of Gender Non-conformity*. Diss. University of Western Ontario.

_____. 2016. "Misgendering and Its Moral Contestability." *Hypatia* 31 (3): 502-519.

Khlentzos, Drew. 2016. "Challenges to Metaphysical Realism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/realism-sem-challenge/>.

Kournay, Janet A. 2010. *Philosophy of Science After Feminism*. Oxford: Oxford UP.

LaBrada, Eloy. 2016a. "Categories We Die For: Ameliorating Gender in Analytic Feminist Philosophy." *PMLA.* 131 (2): 449-459

_____. 2016b. "Unsexing Subjects: Marie de Gournay's Philosophy of Sex Eliminativism." In Claudia Brodsky and Eloy LaBrada, eds. *Inventing Agency: Essays on the literary and philosophical production of the modern subject*. New York: Bloomsbury. 51-79.

_____. "Unsexing Ontology: A defense of Dasein's neutrality." Unpublished Manuscript.

Lane, Riki. 2009. "Trans as Bodily Becoming: Rethinking the Biological as Diversity, Not Dichotomy." *Hypatia* 24 (3): 136-157.

Langton, Rae. 2009. *Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

Latham, Joe. 2016. "Making and treating trans problems: The ontological politics of clinical practices." *Studies in Gender & Sexuality* 19 (3): 347-368.

Leslie, Sarah-Jane. 2013. "Essence and natural kinds: When science meets preschooler intuition." *Oxford Sutdies in Epistemology* 4: 108-66.

_____. 2015. "'Hilary Clinton is the only man in the Obama administration': Dual Character Concepts, Generics, and Gender. *Analytic Philosophy* 56 (2): 111-141.

Levey, Ann. 2005. "Liberalism, Adaptive Preferences, and Gender Equality." *Hypatia* 20 (4): 127-143.

Lennon, Kathleen. 2012. "Biology and the Metaphysics of Sex Difference," *Embodied Selves*, ed. in Arnal Gonzalez, et al, 29-46. London: Palgrave.

Leslie, Sarah-Jane. 2013. "Essence and natural kinds: When science meets preschooler intuition." *Oxford Studies in Epistemology* 4: 108-66.

_____. 2015. "'Hilary Clinton is the only man in the Obama administration': Dual Character Concepts, Generics, and Gender. *Analytic Philosophy* 56 (2): 111-141.

Lindemann Nelson, Hilde. 2002. "Wittgenstein Meeets 'Woman' in the Language Game of Theorizing Feminism.' In *Feminist Interpretations of Ludwig Wittgenstein*, eds. Naomi Scheman and Peg O'Connor, 213-34. University Park: Pensslyvania State UP.

Longino, Helen. 1994. "In Search of Feminist Epistemology." *Monist* 77 (4): 472-85.

Little, Margaret Olivia. 1995. "Seeing and Caring: The Role of Affect in Feminist Moral Epistemology." *Hypatia* 10 (3): 117-137.

Lugones, María. 2003. *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theroizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions.* New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Ludwig, David. 2014. "Hysteria, Race, and Phlogiston. A Model of Ontological Elimination in the Human Sciences." *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science.* 45: 68-77.

_____. 2016. "Ontological Choices and the Value-Free Ideal." *Erkenntis* 81: 1253-1272.

Madva, Alex. 2016. "A Plea for Anti-Anti-Individualism: How Oversimple Psychology Misleads Social Policy." *Ergo.* 3 (27): DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/ergo.12405314.0003.027

Madva, Alex and Katharaine Gasdalis. MS. "Intersectionality as a Regulative Ideal." Unpublished Abstract consulted on: http://www.alexmadva.com/?q=research-current-work. March 18, 2017.

Mallon, Ron. 2004. "Passing, Traveling and Reality: Social Consturionism and the Metaphysics of Race." *Noûs* 38 (4): 644-673.

Marques, Teresa. 2016. "The Relevance of Causal Social Construction." *Journal of Social Ontology.* DOI: 10.1515/jso-2016-0018. 2016

Mason, Rebecca. 2011. "Two Kinds of Unknowing." *Hypatia* 26 (2): 294-307.

_____. 2016. "The Metaphysics of Social Kinds." *Philosophy Compass* 11 (12): 841-850.

_____. 2015. *Social Ontology Naturalized*. Diss. NorthWestern University.

_____. "Social Ontology Naturalized." Unpublished Manuscript.

McKinnon, Rachel. 2015. "Gender, Identity, and Society." *Philosophy: Sex and Love*. Ed. Arthur Zucker and James M. Petrik. Macmillan. Macmillan Interdisciplinary Handbooks.

_____. 2014. "Stereotype Threat and Attributional Ambiguity for Trans Women." *Hypatia* 29 (4): 857–72.

_____. 2015. "Trans*formative Experiences." *Res Philosophica* 92 (2). DOI: 10.11612/resphil.2015.92.2.12

McKitrick, Jennifer. 2015. "A dispositional account of gender." *Philosophical Studies* 172 (10): 2575-2589.

McWeeny, Jennifer. 2014. 'Topographies of Flesh: Women, Nonhuman Animals, and the Embodiment of Connection and Difference." 29 (2): 269-86.

Mikkola, Mari. 2006. "Elizabeth Spelman, Gender Realism, and Women." *Hypati* 21 (4): 77-96.

_____. 2007 "Gender Sceptics and Feminist Politics." *Res Publica* 12: 361–80.

_____. 2009. “Gender Concepts and Intuitions.” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 39 (4): 559-84.

_____. 2010. “Is Everything Relative? Anti-Realism, Truth, and Feminism.” In *New Waves in Metaphysics,* ed. Allan Hazlett, 179-198. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

_____. 2011.“Ontological Commitments, Sex and Gender.” Witt, *Feminist Metaphysics,* 67–83.

_____. 2011. “Dehumanization.” In *New Waves in Ethics*, ed. Thom Brooks, 128-149. New York: Palgrave Mcmillan.

_____. 2012. “How Essential is Gender Essentialism?” Comments on Charlotte Witt’s *The Metaphysics of Gender*.” *Symposia on Gender, Race and Philosophy* 8 (2): 1-9.

_____. 2015a. “Doing ontology and doing justice: What feminist philosophy can teach us about meta-metaphysics.” *Inquiry,* .

_____. 2015b. “Sex in Medicine: What Stands in the Way of Credibility?” *Topoi* 34: 1-10.

_____. 2016a. “Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/feminism-gender/>.

_____. 2016b. *The Wrong of Injustice: Dehumanization and its role in feminist philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford UP.

_____. 2016c. “On the apparent antagonism between feminist and mainstream metaphysics.” *Philosophical Studies* doi:10.1007/s11098-016-0732-1 1-14.

_____. 2016d. “Feminist Metaphysics and Philosophical Methodology.” *Philosophy Compass* 11/11: 661-679, 10.111/phc3.12349

_____. 2017. “Grounding and anchoring: on the structure of Epistein’s social ontology.” *Inquiry*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2017.1312743

Mallon, Ron. 2006. “‘Race’: Not Normative, Not Metaphysical or Semantic.” *Ethics* 116: 525-551.

Miller, Alexander. 2016. "Realism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/realism/>.

Mills, Charles. 2005. “Ideal Theory as Ideology.” *Hypatia* 20 (3): 165-184.

Montero, Barabra. 1999. “The Body Problem.” *Noûs*. 33 (2): 183-200.

Nobis, Nathan. 2005. “Feminist Ethics Without Feminist Ethical Theory.” *Journal of Philosophical Research* 30 (Supplement): 213-225.

Nolan, Daniel. 2014. "Hyperintensional metaphysics." *Philosophical Studies* 171: 149-160. DOI 10.1007/s11098-013-0251-2

Ney, Alyssa. 2014. *Metaphysics: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge.

_____. Forthcoming. "Grounding in the Philosophy of Mind: A Defense." In K. Aizawa and C. Gillett, eds. *Scientific Composition and Metaphysical Ground.* Palgrave-Macmillan.

Nicholson, Linda. 1994. "Interpreting Gender." *Signs* 20: 79-105.

Nolan, Daniel, Greg Restall and Caroline West. 2005. "Moral Fictionalism versus the rest." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 83 (3): 307-330.

Nussbaum, Martha. 1995. "Objectification." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 24 (4): 249-291.

Papadaki, Lina. 2015. "Feminist Perspectives on Objectification," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/feminism-objectification/>.

_____. 2010. "What is Objectification?" *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 7: 16-36.

Putnam, Hilary. 2002. *The collapse of the fact/value dichotomy*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP.

Reilly-Cooper, Rebecca. 2014. "Am I Cisgender?" https://rebeccarc.com/2014/08/04/am-i-cisgender/

_____. 2015. "The attack on Germaine Greer shows identity politics has become a cult." http://www.politics.co.uk/comment-analysis/2015/10/28/comment-the-attack-on-germaine-greer-shows-identity-politics

_____. 2016. "Gender is not a spectrum." *Aeon*. https://aeon.co/essays/the-idea-that-gender-is-a-spectrum-is-a-new-gender-prison.

Rich, Adrienne. 1980. "Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence." *Signs" Journal of Women in Culture and Soceity*. 5 (4): 631-660.

Richardson, Sarah. 2013. *Sex Itself. The Search for Male and Female in the Human Genome*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press.

Ritchie, Katherine. 2015. "The Metaphysics of Social Groups." *Philosophy Compass* 10 (5): 310-321.

_____. 2013. "What are groups?" *Philosophical Studies* 166 (2): 257-272.

Rodriguez-Pereya, Gonzalo. 2016. "Nominalism in Metaphysics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/nominalism-metaphysics/>.

Rorty, Richard. 1979. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

_____. 1991. *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

_____. 2010. "Feminism and pragmatism" in *Radical Philosophy*, ed. Marianne Janack. Pennslyvania State University Press.

Rosario, Esther. "Feminism, the Life Sciences, and the Making of Liveable Lives." Unpublished Manuscript.

Rosenkrantz, Gary. 2012. "Ontological Categories." *Contemporary Aristotelian Metaphysics*. Ed. Tuomas E. Tahko. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 83–93

Roughgarden, Joan. 2004. *Evolution's Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and People*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rubin, Gayle. 2011 [1975]. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader*. Durahm: Duke UP.

Salamon, Gayle. 2010. *Assuming a body: Transgender and rhetorics of materiality*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Saul, Jennifer. 2006. "Philosophical Analysis and Social Kinds: Gender and Race." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*. Supplementary vol. 80: 119–43.

Sayre-McCord, Geoff. 2014. "Metaethics." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2014/entries/metaethics/>.

_____. 2015. "Moral Realism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/moral-realism/>.

Scheman, Naomi. 2011. *Shifting Ground: Knowledge and Reality, Transgression and Trustworthiness.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

Schroeder, Mark. "Value Theory." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2012/entries/value-theory/>.

Scott, Joan. 1986. Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis. *The American Historical Review,* 91 (5): 1053-1075.

Searle, John. 1995. *The Construction of Social Reality*. New York: The Free Press.

_____. 2010. *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

_____. 2015. Are There Social Objects? In *Perspectives on Social Ontology and Social Cognition,* eds. Mattia Gallotti and John Michael, 17-26. New York: Springer.

Sider, Theodore. 2016. "Substantivity in feminist metaphysics." *Philosophical Studies.* doi:10.1007/s11098-016-0739-7

Spelman,Elizabeth. 1988. *Inessential Woman*: *Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*. Boston: Beacon.

Stollar, Silvia. 2005. "Asymmetrical Genders: Phenomenological Reflections on Sexual Difference." *Hypatia* 20 (2): 7-26.

Stoljar, Natalie. 2011. "Different Women: Gender and the Realism-Nominalism Debate." Witt, *Feminist Metaphysics* 27–46.

_____. 1995. "Essence, Identity, and the Concept of Woman." *Philosophical Topics* 23 (2): 261-293.

Stone, Allison. 2004. "Essentialism and Anti-Essentialism in feminist philosophy." *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 1 (2): 135-53.

Superson, Anita. 2005. "Deformed Desires and Informed Desire Tests. *Hypatia* 20 (4): 109-126.

Talbot, Brian. 2016. "GThe Best Argument for 'Ought Implies Can' Is a better Argument Against 'Ought Implies Can.' *Ergo* 3 (14): DOI: http://dx.doi.org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/10.3998/ergo.12405314.0003.014

Taylor, Elanor. 2016. "Groups and Oppression." *Hypatia* 31 (3): 520-536.

Thompson, Naomi. 2014. *Structuring Reality*. Diss. U of Birmingham.

Van Leeuwen, Anne. 2010. "Sexuate Difference, Ontological Difference: Between Irigaray and Heidegger." *Continental Philosophy Review* 43 (1): 111-126.

van Roojen, Mark. 2015. "Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-Cognitivism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/moral-cognitivism/>.

Webb, Mark Owen. 1995. "Feminist Epistemology and the Extent of the Social." *Hypatia* 10 (3): 85-98.

Wilkes, Kathleen V. 1984. "Is consciousness important?" *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science:* 223-243.

Witt, Charlotte. 2011. *Feminist Metaphysics: Explorations in the Ontology of Sex, Gender and the Self*. Dordrecht: Springer.

_____. 2011a.What is Gender Essentialism?" *Feminist Metaphysics* 11-25.

_____. 2011b. *The Metaphysics of Gender.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

_____. 2015. "Feminist Metaontology." Unpublished presentation for MIT Workshop on Feminist Ontology.

Wittig, Monique. 1992. *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. Boston: Beacon.

Wodak, Daniel, Sarah-Jane Leslie, and Marjorie Rhodes. 2015. "What a Loaded Generalization: Generics and Social Cognition." *Philosophy Compass* 10 (9): 625-35.

Worley, Sara. 1995. "Feminism, Objectivity, and Analytic Philosophy." *Hypatia* 10 (3): 138-56.

Yap, Audrey. 2016. "Feminist Radical Empiricism, Values, and Evidence." *Hypatia* 31 (1): 58-73.

Young, Iris Marion. 1997. *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy.* Princeton: Princeton UP.

Zack, Naomi. 2005. *Inclusive Feminism.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.