

LANGUAGE AND GENDER IDENTITY.

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Summary

You and I might identify as all sorts of things: as an American, a woman, a teacher, a student, a hip hop enthusiast, a vegetarian, a knitter, a computer nerd, a chef, a caucasian, a runner, a news junkie, a bleeding heart liberal, a member of the tea party, a football fan, and so on. Call everything on that list a *practical identity*. Some practical identities are optional—we can choose or whether or not to adopt them—while others, such as gender, are such that the law requires us to adopt them. But in each of these cases, there is a question as to whether the relevant practical identity has a prescriptive or a descriptive flavor. When I tell you I'm a vegetarian, am I describing the way I am, or laying down a plan for how I'd like to be? Are vegetarians a special kind of person all of whom share a special, deep, common core, or are they just the set of people who happen to follow the convention of not eating meat? Does the way we talk about vegetarianism affect what it means to be a vegetarian—what vegetarians are or could be?

This quarter, we will approach these questions through the specific case of gender identity. You might think it's straightforward to say what it means to be a man: you're a man just in case you have a Y chromosome, and a woman just in case you have two X chromosomes. But what about an intersex baby who is arbitrarily assigned a gender at birth? Or someone with Klinefelter syndrome, who according to the above definition would be both a man and a woman? What about someone who was born biologically female, underwent sex reassignment surgery as an adult, and now identifies as a man? What about someone who prefers not to adopt any gender identity? There is often a temptation to dismiss these examples as aberrant borderline cases. But the past few decades have seen an explosion of new gender categories, many of which may very well take center stage in our culture sooner than we think. If we decide to write them off, we need to tell some story about how our gender concepts license us to do so. If not, then we are faced with the interesting challenge of explaining what gender now is, in light of these developments.

The course is broken down into two parts: during the first five weeks, we will look at various accounts of what gender is. We will see whether we can apply the insights of those accounts to the phenomenon of transgender, then reflect on whether these lessons have anything to teach us about cisgender. In the second half of the course, we turn our attention to language. We will begin by discussing speech act theory, a branch of the philosophy of language that studies how uttering a sentence can literally make something the case. Next, we will consider whether the way we talk about gender could have an effect on what gender actually is, using as a case study a particular grammatical formulation sometimes called the *generic statement*. We will conclude by considering whether changing the way we talk about gender could be a way of effecting change in the phenomenon itself, and whether changing what gender is or which genders there are might be a worthwhile political endeavor.

Course Requirements

Work for the course consists of readings, weekly exercises, and two papers (5-10 pages each). The final grade breakdown is as follows:

70% Weekly Exercises

30% Paper

...and a final adjustment of the final grade by at most one +/- for class participation

Attendance is required and regular participation is expected. Frequent, on-point participation receives a '+' mark, regular, on-point participation receives a '0' mark, and infrequent or irrelevant participation receives a '-' mark.

Each weekly exercise will ask you to briefly address difficulties that came up during the previous week, and are geared towards practical implementation of the ideas we discuss. These assignments are somewhat open-ended, and thus will often have many different correct answers—though note that this is not to say that every possible answer is a correct answer. Your principal goal in doing each exercise should be to come up with well-reasoned discussions of the problems you encounter, followed by clear arguments in favor of your proposal. Although **late assignments will not be accepted**, your lowest assignment grade will be dropped.

You are only required to write one paper for the course (5-8 pages), and you may choose to write it either halfway through the term or at the end. The paper will involve either critically responding to or building on one of the main arguments we discussed in class.

Assignment Schedule

Marked below are the dates by which you should plan to have read the various texts for the course, as well as the due dates for the assignments. All readings will be made available on chalk.

	Mon	Wed
Week 1	Introduction	Sally Haslanger, 'Gender and Race: (What) Are They?'
Week 2	Simone de Beauvoir, <i>The Second Sex</i> , pp. 273-294 Exercise 1 due	Elizabeth Barnes, 'Going Beyond the Fundamental'
Week 3	Exercise 2 due	Ásta Kristjana Sveinsdóttir, 'The Metaphysics of Sex and Gender'
Week 4	Exercise 3 due	Emi Koyama, 'The Transfeminist Manifesto'
Week 5	Miqqi Alicia Gilbert, 'Defeating Bigenderism' Exercise 4 due	Jacob Hale, 'Are Lesbians Women?' Midterm paper due
Week 6	J. L. Austin, 'Performative Utterances' Exercise 5 due	John Searle, <i>Making the Social World</i> , chap.5
Week 7	Sally McConnell-Ginet, 'What's in a Name?' Exercise 6 due	Ian Hacking, 'The Looping Effects of Human Kinds'
Week 8	Sally Haslanger, 'Ideology, Generics, and Common Ground' Exercise 7 due	Sarah-Jane Leslie, 'Hillary Clinton is the Only Man in the Obama Administration'
Week 9	Judith Butler, <i>Undoing Gender</i> , intro Exercise 8 due	Judith Butler, <i>Bodies That Matter</i> , intro
Week 10	Katharine Jenkins, 'Amelioration and Inclusion' Exercise 9 due	Final paper due