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To Have and to Be: Sex, Gender, and the Paradox of Change

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NOTE: At the time of publication, the author Katherine Sender was affiliated with the University of Massachusetts. Currently she is a faculty member of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

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Abstract

The body is one locus of control in the organization of social life, a site upon which social order is maintained. Within that order, a fundamental structure relies upon the radical dichotomization of, on the one hand, female and male and, on the other, femininity and masculinity: gender is understood to be an immutable and consistent distinction which is natural to sex' and therefore to the organization of bodies. In this paper, I take three texts which address the mutability of both sex and gender through genital transformation. I suggest that while these texts challenge the idea that sex and gender are both fixed, they also reinstate a precise relationship between sex and gender, that is, between femaleness and femininity and maleness and masculinity. My main focus is on Will Self's paired novellas "Cock & Bull" (1992), where desires and anxieties about gender mutation play out in a fictional setting. This is complemented by Garfinkel's (1967) presentation of "Agnes," an "intersexed" person, who goes through sex reassignment surgery, and Bornstein's "Gender Outlaw" (1994), an autobiographical work on the same theme.

Comments

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To have and to be: Sex, gender, and the paradox of change

Katherine Sender

The body is one locus of control in the organization of social life, a site upon which social order is maintained. Within that order, a fundamental structure relies upon the radical dichotomization of, on the one hand, female and male and, on the other, femininity and masculinity: gender is understood to be an immutable and consistent distinction which is natural to sex' and therefore to the organization of bodies. In this paper, I take three texts which address the mutability of both sex and gender through genital transformation. I suggest that while these texts challenge the idea that sex and gender are both fixed, they also reinstate a precise relationship between sex and gender, that is, between femaleness and femininity and maleness and masculinity. My main focus is on Will Self's paired novellas "Cock & Bull" (1992), where desires and anxieties about gender mutation play out in a fictional setting. This is complemented by Garfinkel's (1967) presentation of "Agnes," an "intersexed" person, who goes through sex reassignment surgery, and Bornstein's "Gender Outlaw" (1994), an autobiographical work on the same theme.

Foucault (1973, 1978) has argued that the body has been successively reined into an increasingly organized - and organizing - system of discourses, including "demography, biology, medicine, psychiatry, psychology, ethics, pedagogy, and political criticism" (1978, p.33) since the eighteenth century. The consideration of the role of the body in the social construction of gender has also been a prevailing concern in feminist theory, including in recent works by Butler (1990, 1993), Garber (1993), and Grosz (1994), amongst many others. Each of these authors challenge essentialized notions of the body: for example Grosz argues that "it is not simply that the body is represented in a variety of ways according to historical, social, and cultural exigencies while it remains basically the same; these factors actively produce the body as a body of a determinate type" including "culturally, sexually, racially specific bodies..." (p. x-xi, emphasis added).

In her work on cross-dressing, Garber celebrates a range of transvestite practices, arguing that between the dichotomies of masculine and feminine, the transvestite stands as a third figure, where "'third' is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility" (p. 11) which disrupts the cozy dualism of female and male, woman and man, girl and boy, and simultaneously challenges the idea of the unified "one," who possesses a coherent (sexual) subjectivity. From Garber's thesis, I suggest that it is precisely the sexual indeterminacy of the clothed body which necessitates the often rigidly-enforced distinctions of male and female attire: we need to know quickly and reliably who we are dealing with. Enforcing an obvious sexual distinction in dress - and, by extension, the body itself - is thus vitally important for maintaining a gender-dichotomized social order.

It remains to be seen, however, whether transgressing the binary oppositions of sex and gender (either through cross-dressing or by changing the sexual characteristics of one's body) necessarily constitutes political resistance to that opposition. Alternatively, these transgressions may always be at risk of being recuperated within dominant discourses,

through medicalizing, pathologizing or moralizing them. Nevertheless, defying the norms of sexual identification may be, for many, what allows for a tolerable, even pleasurable existence and, further, may also lead to structural transformations which allow for broader possibilities of individual sexual variation. Self: Spontaneous mutations of sex and gender The baby ... was of an age (about fourteen months), when each new morning represents nothing so much as a triumph on the part of the Continuity Department... [She] was delighted (albeit perplexed) that the actors playing her parents seemed to have remembered, once again, the parts assigned to them. (Self, 1992, p.157)

The child here gives voice to a knowledge which is fundamentally contested in Self's paired novellas "Cock & Bull"; a knowledge that assumes a guaranteed continuity of the reassuring binaries of sexual difference. Despite appearances, "the parts assigned" to characters in the novellas are not constant; neither body parts nor social roles are reliably fixed. The first novella, "Cock," is a story told by a stranger to the narrator on a train. It opens with a statement that the heroine, Carol, had "always felt at some level less of a woman when Dan was around" (p.3), establishing a problematic around the theme of femininity and womanhood from its outset. Where Carol is insipid, spineless and lazy, her husband Dan is "slight, sour, effete, unsure of himself" (p. 9), afraid of his own and anyone else's sexuality; that is, he is less than a "man". Carol becomes increasingly dissatisfied with her life with the inadequate, alcoholic Dan and so stops drinking and starts masturbating. On one erotic self-exploration Carol finds a "frond" (p. 32) growing around her urethra: while alarmed, her response is to ignore it and hope it will disappear, "leaving her genitals pristine, smooth, a delight to find and find again, just as she had been doing in the few short weeks since she had discovered the joy of wanking" (p. 39). However, this frond develops rapidly into a penis, which Carol initially finds repulsive.

"How one becomes what one is" (Chapter 6) describes Carol's journey into phallic potency. As her penis grows and responds to arousal by becoming erect, her personality develops in tandem: she gains an increasing sense of empowerment in the world, and "along with this came a velcro wrenching as the little hooks of Carol's will began to pull away from the little restraining loops of Carol's conscience" (p.77). She begins to prefer the company of men, and while she knows "that her penis didn't make her a man ... it did free her a little bit more from being anything else, it did unslip those surly bonds and surly girly locks" (p. 81). Thus Carol welcomes liberation from what is depicted as an inevitably whining, manipulative, weak-willed but ultimately ethical (though in the most passive conception of the word) state of femininity. The state of womanhood, as depicted in "Cock" is one to be escaped, if at all possible.

Carol increasingly enjoys her developing penis, prancing and posturing before a mirror. She begins to perceive her mutation as an enhancement which cannot remain solitary: she wants to utterly dominate Dan. She seduces him into drinking again, drugs him, throws him on the bed and rapes him. This is the "confirmation of what she truly was ... Crass isn't it? The idea that being able to fuck Dan, actually penetrate him somehow made Carol aggressive, made her a rapist ... Crass, but true" (p. 128). Dan dies from alcohol poisoning and head injuries; in a spiteful, manipulative and immoral resolution, Carol

frames their holier-than-thou Alcoholics Anonymous buddy for the rape and murder of her husband.

At the climax of the tale, the strange storyteller triumphantly declares that he/she is Carol, who, having been through "such a splendidly original and entire metamorphosis [is] well-placed for further theatricals" (p. 138) and proceeds to rape the narrator. In time with his thrusting into the narrator Carol asks "Do-you-see-to-rearrange-things?" (p. 143) raising the questions of who is rearranging what: Carol's sex and gender are rearranged, as are her power relations with the narrator. Invoking "rearrangement" implies that there is a natural order of things which, ironically, Carol's physical being has already violated. The narrator's subject position is feminized through rape and insults, and he feels that to go to the police would invite aspersions concerning his dress, his sexual orientation, and his foolishness in venturing out "into the fictional night alone" (p. 144). So in "Cock: a novelette" we are presented with a woman who becomes male, who rapes a man who is feminized by the scenario: the story thus contains multiple disruptions across sex/body and gender/subjectivity polarities, troubling the reassurances of each.

In Self's second novella, "Bull: a farce", we are presented with the rugged, hypermasculine, rugby playing, beer drinking though sexually insecure protagonist, ironically named "Bull," who develops a rogue vagina overnight in the pit of his knee. We are given no explanation for this, except the preposterous notion that it could have been caused by the joke of the genitalia-obsessed comedian, Razza Rob ("Whaddya call a man with a cunt in the back of his leg? ... Fucked if I know, but any port in a storm, eh, old chap?" [p. 1701]) Bull consults his doctor, Alan Margoulies, for a diagnosis of the wound or infection he initially believes his new genitals to be. The sexually attractive, somewhat effeminate, self-important doctor is a "dedicated truffle" (p. 163-4), in constant search of an idealized "warm young snatch ... that had yet to be punched from within by a baby's head" (p. 164), which categorically excludes his wife's. Bull has a simultaneously pragmatic and childlike faith in medicine and doctors: he has a desperate need for diagnosis and "getting the appropriate treatment" (p.187). Alan "reveals" the truth of Bull's vagina to him, but only when the former's desire to fuck Bull has made itself all too clear to the doctor's consciousness. Alan's seduction of Bull at a moment when the latter wants "the dry, sensible touch of a doctor" (p. 230) is presented as a compulsive but self-conscious transgression of medical ethics, and leads to an ongoing affair which is broken only when Alan (inevitably) goes back to his wife, once the novelty of Bull's vagina wears off.

Bull is described as becoming increasingly feminine, without consciousness or volition, throughout the tale. When Alan "diagnoses" Bull's vagina, Bull understood it all. Understood the feelings of vulnerability that had been troubling him all day; understood the difficulties he had had in analysing the sensations that the wound, or burn, had provoked in him; understood Alan's behavior in the health centre. But worse, far worse, Bull understood certain deep and painful things about himself that had always shamed him. (p 227)

Thus the fragilities of and ruptures within Bull's robust masculinity are revealed to him in that moment. This is confirmed by the experience of being fucked by Alan as both emasculating and strangely pleasurable: Bull felt violated, traduced, seduced, bamboozled, subjugated, entrapped and enfolded. He felt his capacity for action surgically removed. He felt, for the first time in his life, that his sense of himself as a purposeful automaton, striding on the world's stage, had been vitiated by a warm wash of transcendence. (p. 234)

Afterwards, Bull feels for Alan, not love, but dependency. His subsequent depression and needy machinations about the possibilities of a continuing affair with Alan turn out to be symptoms of pre-menstrual syndrome, confirming that Bull's female "apparatus" is fully functional. Bull struggles with the integration of the knowledge of his "radically independent gender" (p. 276). Faced with two disembodied model legs - one in a sports shop, the other in a neighboring pharmacy - Bull notices that where one is coded as masculine, "poised and virile" (p. 260), surrounded by "trusses, socks, workmanlike garters, headbands, shirts, shorts and more socks" (p. 261), the other "was a sales display for tights and other feminine impedimenta" (p. 260). Bull asks himself "But which one is mine ... Who am I?" (p. 261). The answer, of course, is neither, since on the one hand the masculine integrity of his male leg has been compromised by the appearance of female genitals and on the other hand his leg is not female either, because the feminization of his body "marks" the very leg itself, which is supposed to be sexually encoded by other means, by appropriately "feminine impedimenta."

On later discovering his pregnancy, Bull does not commit suicide, as implied, but displays surprising resilience which, ironically, is a result of his increasing femininity, and goes to San Francisco to have "his and Alan's love-child" (p. 309). This is a boy, with whom Bull settles down in Wales, running a sports and memorabilia shop, the merchandise of which perhaps alludes to the remaining combination of masculinity (sports) and femininity (memorabilia). Bull is ultimately recuperated into normality, and while there is no mention of genital resolution, he remains, or becomes again, a man.

Both "Cock" and "Bull" challenge the fixity of sex and gender, but to what extent does this compromise essentialist notions of femininity and masculinity? While the stories represent mutations or developments of genitals independent of an "original" sex, both insist on some identity or temperamental features which correspond to the physical change. This implies an essentialist model: while the body may change, challenging the idea that sex is given, fixed and lifelong, the psyche must necessarily change in tandem with the defining sexual characteristics, suggesting a natural correspondence between body and subjectivity. Even in Bull's case, where his vagina need not compromise his still-intact penis, it is his blossoming femininity which achieves ascendancy. And while his increasing feminization is represented as a weakness, it is also shown ultimately to have done him good, compared with Carol's malevolent masculinity. Thus, not only is femininity yoked with the vagina and masculinity with the penis, these characteristics are doubly encoded with a moral value: femininity necessarily induces gentleness, and masculinity an amoral will to dominate. However, in terms of the subjective self-esteem of the characters, Self implies that masculinity is an enhancement, an empowerment,

even if it is a destructive, immoral one; femininity threatens masculine integrity, and as such is a diminishment of the self, even while it has a socially integrating effect.

Along with the representation of genitals as having some necessary psychic correspondence, issues of masculinity and femininity are also closely allied with homosexuality. In "Cock," Carol had a somewhat unsavory lesbian relationship prior to, and within, her marriage to Dan. As a "man" Carol seems to have a fascination with and desire for gay sex (specifically buggery) even while she/he includes homosexuals in a list of hated groups. Her/his homoerotic experiences both as a woman and as a "man" inscribe her/him as doubly, inversely transgressive, first as a lesbian and secondly as a gay "man." Bull, alternatively, is initially represented as relentlessly heterosexual, but in the crisis of realizing his feminizing predicament, reconsiders his history as he "joined the dots of memory and saw the sketchy picture of his latent femininity emerge from a myriad of locker-room blushes and missed emotional connections..." (p. 228). In sexual relations with Alan, Bull is profoundly feminized, and while the homoerotic component of this sex is (guiltily) enjoyed by both, it is suppressed beneath the normalcy of "heterosexual" intercourse between them.

Overall, Self's exploration of sex and gender mutability is not a utopian dream of equality and wholeness, it is instead a world of perversity, duplicity and moral compromise. His characters do not transcend the narrow limits of ascribed sex and gender to achieve a liberated state of human wholeness; rather, one set of gender limitations are replaced or, at least, modified by a second, equally limited array of possibilities. As such, his novellas raise questions about what a representation of an idyllic non-gender-limited human may look like, by suggesting that alongside a fantasy of a non-gendered society lies a reality of an, arguably, inherently alienated, gender dichotomized, sex-divided social structure. "Agnes" and Bornstein: Testimonies of lived experience

It would be possible to argue that the contradictions and recuperations of Self's novellas are a product of his working within a literary genre. However, two accounts of lived experiences (from very different historical moments and perspectives) raise similar contradictions around the conundrum of mutable sex and gender. The first (Garfinkel, 1967) documents the case of "Agnes," who applied for sex reassignment surgery at UCLA to make her a "real" woman; the second is an autobiographical account by a post-operative male-to-female transsexual and political activist (Bornstein, 1994). Agnes is "a nineteen-year-old girl raised as a boy whose female measurements of 38-25-38 were accompanied by a fully developed penis and scrotum" (p. 117).¹ Garfinkel argues that the cultural ascription of gender is "rigorously dichotomized into the 'natural,' ie. moral, entities of male and female" (p. 116, emphasis in the original). Transgressions of that dichotomy are thus regarded as immoral acts, in and of themselves; that immorality must therefore be included in the society's perception of the person, who will consequently be punished. Garfinkel is concerned to allow the benevolent hand of psychiatry and medicine both to help unfortunate transsexuals to re-assimilate into society as their chosen gender, and to educate broader society towards greater tolerance.

Using Agnes' case, Garfinkel attempts to show that "passing," where the transsexual aims to maintain a coherent public persona as their "elected sex status" (p. 118), requires constant effort to sustain because of the "omnirelevance of sexual statuses to affairs of daily life as an invariant but unnoticed background in the texture of relevances that comprise the changing actual scenes of everyday life." (p. 118) The effort of passing meant that Agnes "was self-consciously equipped to teach normals how normals make sexuality happen in commonplace settings as an obvious, familiar, recognizable, natural, and serious matter of fact" (p. 186, emphasis added). Agnes, therefore, is in a unique position to recognize - and perform - "appropriately" sexed social behavior. However, neither Agnes nor Garfinkel address the ontological issues of gender identity; both fail to address where Agnes' sexual identity may originate, and instead choose to trust the "evidence" of her "large, well-developed breasts" (p. 119) as proof enough of her femininity. Agnes reportedly saw her case as one of "natural error" (p. 127) which surgeons could quite legitimately repair: in her view, she was entitled to a vagina, since nature had swindled her out of one. She valued her breasts as "essential insignia" of femaleness and was adamant that she had "always been a girl" (p. 128). Garfinkel emphasizes that Agnes' hyperfemininity was not a choice, in that Agnes was not able to switch gender roles with any ease (let alone desire). He concludes that while there was no "natural" feminine identity to accompany Agnes' "essential insignia" of femaleness (breasts), only by knowing and practicing the "art" of femininity in a coherent, stable and credible way, can the impression of femaleness be managed in the outside world.

Bornstein (1994) provides a very different account from Garfinkel's of the choice to disrupt the gender identity ascribed to morphological sex: declared a boy at birth, she struggled with this ascription for thirty years, and ultimately underwent male-to-female transsexual surgery. In contrast to Agnes, whose concern was to pass as a "real" woman as convincingly as possible, Bornstein's project is to use her body as a site upon which to challenge the assumptions about the natural immutabilities of gender at both the physical and subjective levels. She argues that "there are as many truthful experiences of gender as there are people who think they have a gender" (p. 8), raising the question of what it might mean to be, or identify as, a man or a woman. "I know I am not a man - about that much I am very clear, and I've come to the conclusion that I am probably not a woman either, at least not according to a lot of people's rules on this sort of thing" (p. 8).

Contrasting with Agnes' concern with successfully passing, Bornstein perceives her self-representation prior to her sex reassignment surgery as marked by lies and secrets, and her change of sex as an act of honesty. On deciding to undertake the surgery she was advised to make up a past as a little girl in order to present a credible persona to the world as an "authentic" woman. "Here I was, taking a giant step toward personal integrity by entering therapy with the truth and self-acknowledgment that I was transsexual, and I was told 'don't tell anyone you're a transsexual'" (p. 62). Bornstein was committed to avoiding the safe resolution of passing as a "real" woman; from the time of her conversion, her project was to exist in a space of not-male, of challenging the very notion of both maleness and femaleness, of masculinity and femininity, by eluding recruitment into either camp.

Bornstein is thus concerned to radically dislocate sex, gender and the apparent naturalness of difference. A paradox in her work, however, is this: if there is no necessary correspondence between gender and bodily sex, did she need to have surgery in order to divest herself of an identification with maleness? If one can invest one's identity with qualities of femininity and masculinity (or even qualities which are yoked to neither polarity) irrespective of genitalia, surely it would not matter whether Bornstein continued to possess a penis. When asked this at a lecture at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, she responded that although she had enjoyed having a penis, she wanted to know what it was like to have a vagina; what was surgically possible she then chose, rather than using the rationalization of needing surgery to rectify "natural error" of being a "woman trapped in a man's body". Secondly, she implied that while she had a penis she could not know what it was like to be without one. But this turns us back to a potentially essentialist binarism: it seems that it would not have been possible for Bornstein to have both a vagina and a penis, and still experience herself as not-male. At the level of the body, it seems, one still needs to choose one's sex: we may transgress across the boundary from one to the other, but cannot remain equally situated in each, or neither, sex. "S/he" may be a linguistic possibility, but not a bodily one, at least not yet. Sexual subjectivities: problems and possibilities

In the works of Self, Garfinkel and Bornstein, we thus have not one fictional representation of gender change and two real ones, but three different struggles with the complex relations between sex and gender. In Self's "Cock & Bull" we are presented with two (more or less) innocent victims of a particularly perverse natural disaster, which profoundly destabilizes the gendered subjectivity of each character, though (interestingly) not only as a result of interactions with the outside world (both Carol and Bull pass without too many problems) but rather, as an inherent result of their shifting biological, sexual reality. The relationship between sexed genitals and masculinity or femininity is presented as straightforward: one becomes what one "naturally" is, where natural is defined by genitals, even those in a far-from-conventional place on the body.

This contrasts with the work of Garfinkel (1967) and Bornstein (1994), where the relationship between the body and identity is far more problematic. Bornstein, in particular, presents a radical constructionist model of identity, arguing that there is no necessary correspondence between physical and psychic gender. Both Bornstein and Garfinkel fail to address, however, what it means to reject the physical manifestations of a sexed self; why is the body experienced as anathema to psychic reality? While there may not be any natural correspondence between sex and gender, given the absolute distinctions made in our culture between the binary opposites of the feminine female and the masculine male, the only routes available to Agnes and Bornstein, as well as Self's protagonists, was to maintain an integrity between the physical and the psychic, that is, between sex and gender.

In both essentialist and constructionist analyses of gender, the relationship implied between identity and the body is that the body accurately reflects the sexed identity, whether this reflection is "natural" or a fabrication necessary in order to function in a sex-dichotomized culture. This does not address the question of "'core gender identity'"

(Garber p. 101), either in relation to transsexuals or, importantly, in a wider cultural context: "is their [transsexuals'] gendered subjectivity mimicry, or a 'real one'? What would 'real' and 'mimic' mean in the cultural milieu in which all gender roles are constructed?" (Garber, 1992, p. 101). Garber argues that discourses which endorse surgery and hormone treatment as "'solutions' to gender undecidability" (p. 102) effectively function as a "new essentialism" (p. 108) where the body is changed to fix gender - here "fix" implies both to "make right" and to "make stable". Indeed, Irvine (1990) argues that in a post-1960s era of increasing flexibility of gender roles, with its accompanying anxieties, the medico- psychiatric category "transsexualism" has gained popularity and sex reassignment surgery has become routine. The creation of "gender dysphoria" as diagnosable disorder "allow[s] for the distancing of cultural conflict and signaled that gender diversity was not a collective problem requiring society to confront rigid stereotypes and inequality; it was the dilemma of individuals with a dysfunction" (p. 260).

Similarly, Kotz (1992) introduces Judith Butler as someone who both argues that gender transgressions can be profoundly subversive, but "at the same time cautions against understanding the realm of fantasy and representation as a 'domain of psychic free play' unencumbered by relations of social power" (p. 82). Butler rejects readings of her work, "Gender Trouble" (1990), which interpret gender performance as a kind of consumerism, where any choice is available to anyone at any time. Gender is not a free choice, in that "the very formation of subjects, the very formation of persons, presupposes gender..." (p. 84, emphasis in original). She argues that challenging the supposed fixities of gender by mimicking heterosexual conventions through cross- dressing or role play is not necessarily a political act; "for a copy to be subversive of heterosexual hegemony it has to both mime and displace its conventions" (p. 84, emphasis added). She uses the example of Livingston's film "Paris is Burning" (1991) to show how the actions and aspirations of the young disenfranchised male transvestites potentially both reinvest gender ideals and endorse their hegemonic power.

In resisting notions of the naturalness of gender, that is, inevitable forms of social and sexual behavior which depend upon an unproblematic notion of biological sex, transsexuals may challenge the constructedness of gender identities, inviting others to engage with the artifactual status of gender. However, this raises significant questions regarding the political status of transsexualism: on the one hand, some transsexuals may seek allegiances with transvestites and others involved in the political action of "genderfuck"; on the other hand, the underlying disparity between physical sex and the subjectively sexed "self" which transsexuals (in many cases) seek to resolve through sex reassignment surgery, may reinstate a notion of essential sexual identity. This paradox, therefore, arises between the liberatory and the normative potentials of transsexualism in relation to ideas of "natural" sex difference and appropriate sexual socialization. As long as two sexes are ascribed unique and exclusive genders, the need to transgress their division will be necessary, if not, in certain circumstances, encouraged. While the sex/gender alliance is so rigidly enforced, disciplining discourses such as medicine, psychiatry and sexology would rather endorse a "natural" integrity of the body in order to maintain a consistent, even though (surgically) constructed, association between female

and feminine, and male and masculine. However, at least theoretically, it would be possible to conceptualize a model in which such extreme and risky procedures would not even be relevant. Grosz(1994) argues that "bodies can be represented or understood not as entities in themselves or simply on a linear continuum with its polar extremes occupied by male and female bodies (with the various gradations of the 'intersexed' individuals in between) but as a field, a two dimensional continuum in which race (and possibly even class, caste, or religion) form body specifications...." (p. 19-20). Grosz, therefore, attempts to dislocate binary oppositions of gender, instead situating bodies in complex, multilayered systems of constitution which allow for greater diversity and flexibility.' This disruption of systems of bodily organization could be compatible with Foucault's (1978) aspirations for sexualities which shift existing power relations. If dominant discursive practices currently control people within the social body across gender (among other) divisions, in part through the regulation of desire and sexuality, dismantling some of those divisions may also necessitate exploring different notions of pleasure. Perhaps this would be compatible with Foucault's call to arms to counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance. The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures. (p.157)

It may be possible to envision a state of affairs where sex and gender are not indissolubly joined; where both could be conceived of as mutable and relational; where sexual possibilities would be defined, not by opposites, but according to a more fluid idea of sexual variation; and where the pleasures of the body would not necessarily be yoked to currently enforced and eroticized sexual practices. While this type of sexual anarchy has its appeals, it also poses daunting challenges to some of our most precious identities: those of us who identify as lesbian, gay or heterosexual would have some rethinking to do. It also potentially threatens the premises of much feminist analysis which relies upon tangible, identifiable differences (albeit constructed ones) in both sex and gender as a basis for theory. What would it mean to be a feminist in a post-gendered world? To what would we turn to structure an analysis of power? If Butler's (1993) premise that subjectivity itself is predicated upon gender (and thus, I would add, a consistent relationship with sex), it is difficult to imagine from what stuff the sense of self would be made. Or would the western notion of 'the self' as a logocentric, individualized and solitary entity (Chang, 1996) also be forced to change?

The consistency of the relationship between sex and gender in the accounts of Self, Garfinkel and Bornstein - even despite the gap in time and political developments between them - attests perhaps to an ongoing attachment to the comforts of the sexual order, even while we lament its strictures. Perhaps the dark humor of Self's "Cock & Bull" reminds us that the psychic and social determinations of gender remain irresistible, even when the possibilities of the sexed body are, in theory, open. Notes

1. Throughout this paper, I use "sex" and "gender" as distinct terms, where "sex" refers to a naming of babies at birth, as female or male, according to their possession of a vulva or penis. In the case of babies with indistinct genitals, the ascribed sex corresponds to the form the genitals are surgically "resolved" to be. "Gender," alternatively, refers to the

social and behavioral qualities which are tied to ascribed sex and which we most familiarly refer to as femininity and masculinity.

2. It is interesting to note that alongside the perverse mutability of gender in "Cock and Bull," race remains fixed: this suggests a greater comfort with - and erotic potential of - fantasizing gender shifts in a way that comparable shifts across racial lines would present far too great a threat to the status quo of white privilege.

3. Note the way of marking Agnes' body as feminine, that is, by invoking the "vital statistics" of beauty pageants.

4. In the appendix to this chapter, Garfinkel related that a number of years after Agnes' surgery, she revisited the UCLA clinic and "with the greatest of casualness" (p. 287) revealed that she had taken her mother's estrogen pills from age twelve, which had given her the secondary sexual characteristics of a female and suppressed the development of male secondary characteristics.

5. A less delimited system of social relations potentially produces a fragmentation of groups who may otherwise organize as political allies around broader agenda (e.g. feminism, lesbian and gay activism, and so on). While this may be a risk, it could also be argued that the rigid demarcations of gender, race, class, sexuality and age, among others, is ultimately more fragmenting and alienating than a more fluid model of identity and belonging could ever be. References

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