

Gender Dichotomies, Sexual Continua, and Emotional Taxonomy

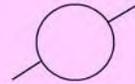


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How I see philosophy

- The vision of religion, and the rigour of science.



- By changing the caption, change the picture.
- People slot themselves into conceptual prisons: the possibility of a “rainbow” of sex may change self conceptions, and so the world.

The ubiquity of difference:

- Diversity is the first law of biology,
- But it's also a political imperative.

*We're for difference, for respecting
difference, for allowing difference, until
difference doesn't make any difference.*

(Johanna Cole, President of Spelman College, quoted in (James 1997))

My agenda:

1. Essentialism: three parallel debates:
Sex, Species, Emotions
2. Why it's no surprise that gender differences
are no surprise.
3. How many sexes are there?
4. How many genders?
5. How many emotions?
6. The Bell Curve all around you: Why care?
7. Fighting the gender police
8. How to be an aesthete: sex, gender & emotion.

1. Essentialism in Sex, Species, Emotions

- Early feminism (eg de Beauvoir) was an attack on essentialism—the view that just by virtue of being a man or woman, our dispositions, talents, emotions etc. were different.
- Later, “maternal feminism” and other forms of feminist essentialism defined such concepts as “lesbian continuum” and “woman identified women”. (A. Rich, A. Campbell....)

Anti-essentialism in philosophy of biology

- Biology has replaced essentialism (linked to fixed species) with “populationism” (E. Mayr).
- Don't ask: why this individual deviates from true type, ask why individuals cluster into types.



- [Cf Newton: “Don't ask why the arrow keeps moving, asked why it stops.”]

But essentialism is hard to get rid of in our own self-conception

“Suppose a particular woman desires sex more often than her husband. If this is a typical pattern that characterizes most relationships, she should probably accept her greater desire as a standard fact of life.... In contrast, if the typical pattern is the opposite (greater desire among husbands), then she may more appropriately wonder why her situation is different. Undoubtedly the worst outcome is if a woman reaches a self-critical view based on a false understanding of what the actual norms and typical patterns are such that she thinks something is wrong with her...” [Baumeister 2001]

The curse of the “typical” as norm.

- Recall one of the greatest benefits of Kinsey's reports on sexual behaviour:
- Most people, not knowing what others did, thought their own practice perverted.
- There was happiness in the mere knowledge that one was “normal”.
- But what does ‘normal’ mean?
- And – later – why should you or I care?

Essentialism in emotion theory

1. Two sources: neurophysiological studies of “basic emotions”: fear; anger; sadness and social attachment; “seeking” [Panksepp]; plus lust, care, play.
2. Evolutionary psychology: emotions as scripts that are honed to deal efficiently with standard life situations.

2. Why it's no surprise that gender differences in emotion are no surprise.

- **Stereotypes are robust:** in a study of expectations, “Two gender differences emerged women were expected to be more likely to react with sadnessto negative emotion-eliciting events... expected themselves to be more likely to react with sadness... to cry and to withdraw more when experiencing negative emotional events.... In contrast, men were expected to react with more happiness/serenity during negative emotional situations, expect themselves to... laugh and smile more and to be more relaxed in negative situations.... men tend to report more happiness when describing negative personal events. [Hess et al. 2000]

2. Situational influences are pervaded by stereotypes.

- “the basic emotion process is biologically grounded and universal, but ... the type of events attended to, the appraisal of these events, and the relevant norms for behavior may vary as a function of culture, gender, relative power status, as well as the relationship between the interaction partners.” [Hess 2001]
- So, in effect, what goes in is what comes out: e.g. stereotypes dictate that fathers' time spent with their children relates to the gender stereotype of the child; in turn, that may affect the child's learning of emotional expressiveness. [Brody 1997].

Other reasons to be skeptical of gender differences

- “Stereotypes may generally reflect reality, partly because they help to shape reality” [Brody 370]
- The “no difference, no publication” publication bias.
- Lots of evidence about cultural relativity of gender differences in emotional expression.
- Many such differences may be effects of social status gender typical emotion correlates not with gender but with greater/lesser status and power. [Brody 386]

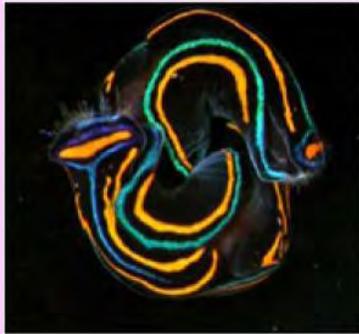
Looking behind the question

- How do the dichotomies of sex and gender that underlie the question arise?
- Biology?
- Ideology?
- Culture?
- Let's look at
 - a) sex and the determinants of gender,
 - b) the limits on our emotional repertoire.

3. How many sexes are there?

- Sex (biological) vs gender (psycho-social): the distinction is controversial but handy.
- Common reasons for thinking there must be just 2 sexes linked to 2 genders:
 - Two sorts of gametes: large and small.
 - Two sex-related chromosomes: XX, XY
 - The “obviousness” of the gender dichotomy in humans & close relatives “explained” by sex.

(but not all: most organisms don't use sex for reproduction; some change sex in midlife, some are hermaphrodite....)



Ten levels of sex determination

1. **Gametic sex:** In sexual species, large-small polarization form an ESS (evolutionary stable strategy).
- Analogous to the the contrast between K-type (few offspring, expensive care) & r-type reproduction (many offspring, hope for the best)
- This is sometimes said to spread dimorphism by extending from species to sexes.
- But in the animal world as a whole, there can be any amount of variation.

Factors largely relevant to sex:

2. **Chromosomes** (heterozygote XY, homozygote XX).
- But male birds, for example, are homozygotic: by Olympic standards, male birds lay the eggs.
- There are XXX's, XYY's, male XX's, female XY's....
3. **External anatomy** (controlled first by fetal hormones). Can fail to conform to (2).
4. **Gonadal sex (internal functional-anatomy:** ovaries, uterus). Doesn't always conform to (2) or (3).
5. **Physiological reproductive functions** (ovulation, menstruation, lactation, erection, ejaculation). Can also come apart from previous and following factors.

Factors largely relevant to gender:

6. **Secondary sex characters:** beard, voice, breasts.... variable, depending on variable facts including levels of hormone receptors and receptivity, .
7. **Social roles** in partnership, childraising
 - highly dependent on cultural factors,
 - Implying deep differences in emotional dispositions.
8. **Social roles** in wider social/political sphere “glass ceiling”, etc.
 - Also typically attributed to emotional differences (unwillingness to sacrifice family life, etc.)

9. Gender identity and style

- Paradoxical: formed by 18-24 months, long before any consciousness of the nature of sex differences.
- Subdivides again: cross-dressing is independent of sexual identity and sexual orientation.
- Attested by the strength of transsexual's insistence on the claim that they are stuck in the "wrong sex".

10. sexual orientation

- Not invariably tied to any of the other factors.
- A model – because of its history of being regarded as "deviant" – for considering the status of intersex persons.
- Guiding principle: the deviant are more likely to be "the real thing."

The superior authenticity of deviance.

- The difficulty of homosexual life – in all but rare recent liberal societies – guaranteed that "deviant" sexual orientation is the more reliably authentic.
- (cf. Freud in *Three essays on sexuality*: the development of adult heterosexuality is as much in need of explanation as homosexuality.)
- Similarly, the difficulty of intersex life, sex changes, etc. guarantees that deviant sexual identity is more reliably authentic than "default" sexual identity.

The five sexes (or more)

- For Anne Fausto-Sterling, recognizing 5 sexes should be the beginning:
- Based on gonadal and external anatomical sex:
 1. Male: testes and penis
 2. Female ovaries and vagina
 3. True hermaphrodite (1 testis+1 ovary)
 4. "Merm": testes, some female genitalia, no ovaries
 5. "Ferm": ovaries, some male genitalia, no testes.

But actually it's a (highly bi-modal) continuum
(of the general shape, but not any actual values, below.)



4. How many genders are there?

- Sexual dichotomy supports gender dichotomy.
- But sexual dichotomy is a myth.
- It therefore gets cultivated and enforced.
- (No one enforces the law of gravity)

Objection: You may need to enforce an Aristotelian norm.



- For Aristotle, each natural object O has a natural function.
- You discover it by watching the effects O has “always or for the most part”.
- Thus you read off Nature’s “intentions”.
- And you can then **help Nature along**.

That’s the way Aquinas argues:

- “ ‘vice against nature’: every venereal act from which generation cannot follow”
- Entails enforceable natural standards proscribing masturbation, homosexual acts, fornication, etc.
- But evolution is not providence. It cares nothing for the individual. Its effects benefit only genes or other reproducible entities.

The “natural” has no evaluative force.

- Arguments from nature are all like the lady in Gardner Rea’s (*New Yorker*) cartoon:

“No thank you, I don’t think Nature intended us to drink while flying.”

After Darwin, Aristotle’s scheme fails.

- It assumes fixity of species: the natural is also what is normal.
- It assumes that nature works *for us*, or that there is some intrinsic value in the natural.
- But every biological innovation on the road to *homo sapiens* was once an exception.

If all your ancestors had been normal, you would be an ameoba.

- At each step on the way from our single-celled ancestors to us humans, there must have been a statistically rare genetic change.



- **We all descend from millions of freaks.**

So the issue for us is:

- Not: is it “natural”?
- Not: is it the most common?
- Not: is there some natural process that fosters it?
- BUT: should we value it? Is it compatible with our ethical ideal of fundamental equality of claims and rights?

Pulversizing gender: individual natures

- A student's *cri du coeur*:
- ***If I couldn't be a girl, I couldn't live!***
- Could we imagine not identifying each person we meet first as some gender?
- One implication would be: the de-regimentation of emotions.

5. How many emotions are there?

According to Descartes, 6; Ekman, 6 plus...

Panksepp: 7, of which he identifies 4 governed by comprehensive systems in the brain.



Figure 3.5. The major emotional operating systems are defined primarily by genetically coded neural circuits that generate well-organized behavior sequences that can be evoked by localized electrical stimulation of the brain. Representative behaviors generated by the various systems are indicated and the approximate locations of the SEEKING, FEAR, and RAGE systems are depicted on a small frontal section through one side of the hypothalamus. As is evident, there is considerable overlap and hence neural interaction among systems. Some of the possible major interactions are indicated by the various interconnecting lines that suggest various excitatory and inhibitory influences among systems.

An alternative approach

- Scherer's multi-dimensional appraisals, placing emotions in the context of a large space of potential emotions.

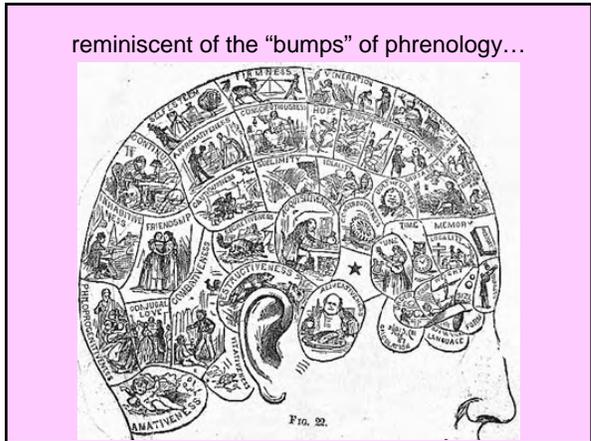
Patterns of Stimulus Evaluation Checks (SEC) Predicted to Differentiate 7 of 14 Major Emotions (Scherer et al. 1993, p332)

	EN/J/IA/P	EIA/JOY	DISP/ISG	CON/SCO	SAD/DE	DÉSPAIR
Suddenness	low	H/med	open	open	low	high
Familyity	open	open	low	open	low	v low
Predictability	medium	low	low	open	open	low
Intrinsic pleasantness	high	open	v. low	open	open	open
Goal significance						
Concern relevance	open	Self/rela	body	rela/order	open	open
Outcome probability	v high	v high	v high	high	v high	v high
Expectation	con/xunanl	open	open	open	open	dissonant
Conduciveness	conducive	v conducive	open	open	obstruct	obstruct
Urgency	v low	low	medium	low	low	high
Coping potential						
Causal Agent	open	open	open	other	open	oth/nat
Cause: Motive	intent	distant	open	intent	cha/neg	cha/neg
Control	open	open	open	high	v low	V low
Power	open	open	open	low	v low	V low
Adjustment	high	medium	open	high	medium	V low
Compatibility Standards						
External	open	open	open	v low	open	open
Internal	open	open	open	v low	epic	open

Order of magnitude of Scherer's space.

- Of 16 dimensions, about 10 are potential continua.
- The other 6 are at least bivalent.
- Assume at least 10 degrees of discriminability for the first type.
- We get a space of roughly 640,000,000,000 discriminable emotions

There will be attractors or hot spots



These hot spots will cluster around stock situations crucial to survival.

- They will be particularly conducive to action tendencies (Frijda 1986)
- But they needn't in equal measure limit the range of experienced emotions.
- Insofar as we are comfortable enough to be able to detach ourselves from urgent life needs, we can take an aesthetic view.

6. The Bell Curve all around you: Why care?

- In sex and gender characteristics, as in most things biological, curves are largely overlapping.

- One curve can be flatter than another.
- Most bell-curves tracing biological traits overlap.
- We're all more likely to be in the green zone.
- So it's absurd to identify oneself as “blue” or “yellow”.

Groups you belong to:

- Blue-eyed people
- People whose name begin with a K
- German nationals
- Kind or cruel people
- Chess players
- Philosophers
- Readers of Homer
- Tall people
- Women or men
- How is a fact about a group I belong to a fact about me?

- I'm already where I am regardless of where the other members of my group may be.
- I need to make an additional effort to *identify* myself with the group.
- (Actually I don't even have to belong to it.)
- But why make that effort, and how do we pick the group we identify with?

Compare: the novelist who uses me.

- My friend "put me in his novel", or so I think, under a different name. I complain that he has distorted, betrayed, maligned me.
- But if I'm not like that character, then shouldn't I conclude instead that **the character is not me.**
- If there are subtle satiric intentions, or evidence that he meant me but really got me wrong....
- But that can't be the case with the bell curve for my group.

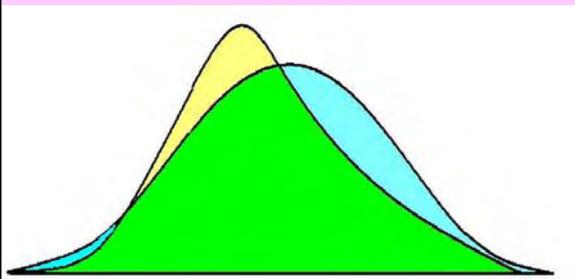
The Summers affair

"if one is talking about physicists at a top twenty-five research university, one is not talking about people who are two standard deviations above the mean`... it's talking about people who are three and a half, four standard deviations above the mean in the one in 5,000, one in 10,000 class. Even small differences in the standard deviation will translate into very large differences in the available pool substantially out."(Summers 2005)

The typical complaint:

- "Women in a longitudinal study who heard news reports about girls's differential math ability had lower expectations of their daughters' math abilities than before" (James 1997: 220, citing Eccles)
- But why should it make such a difference that the probability of succeeding if she is a woman is 1 /10000, while a boy's is 2/10000? Both figures are ridiculously low.

But look at that graph again.
Surely there are better tests of where I'm likely to be on it than whether I'm yellow or blue..



7. Fighting the gender police

- In North American schools, social workers "treat" children "at risk" in their gender identity.
- All that A. Rich listed in "Compulsory Heterosexuality" can be applied to "compulsory gender":
 - No middle ground, no "continuum".
 - Reassignment to a "default" gender of doubtful cases.
 - Compulsory conformity to emotional stereotypes.
 - These are filtered through and confounded with cultural expectations.
- **Adding genders is good; dissolving them, better.**

8. How to be an aesthete: sex, gender, and emotion

- Feelings, perceptions, desires and beliefs get funneled into yes/no decisions (the limited range of emotions tied to agency).
- By contrast, **experienced emotions** have no unifying function to make them one thing.
- Each carries meanings enriched by unique genetic predispositions and paradigm scenarios.

Full-colour emotional experience

- Each involves an evaluative response which may, but need not, exhibit a positive or negative valence/behaviour preference.
- There are no a priori limits to the number of distinct emotions that can be experienced...
- any more than there are limits to the number of thoughts one can have.

How far might this utopia take us?

- Instead of thinking we have a “sexual orientation”, we will respond to individuals as sexually desirable without first sorting them into the qualified and the disqualified.
- In any case, the real causes of sexual attraction and affiliative emotions are deeper than gender.
- The smelly t-shirt test may well restore a distribution more similar than some expect to the trad.
- But we wouldn't be forced to think of the stereotype *first*.

We can instead focus on other traits



"Sheriff! Ben Wiggins is ridin' into town, and he's wearin' that same little chiffon number that he wore when he shot Jake Sutton!"

But if we take an aesthetic view of human diversity, in sex, gender, and emotions,

THE SKY'S THE LIMIT



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