

Author Meets Critics: a panel discussion of Jennifer Germon's *Gender: a Genealogy of an Idea* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), held at the Sociological Association of Aotearoa/New Zealand, Victoria University of Wellington, 9 December 2011.

Annabel Cooper (chair), Rhonda Shaw, Melanie Beres, Rosemary du Plessis and Jennifer Germon

Annabel Cooper:

It is one mark of a good book that it can make you change your mind. For me, Jennifer Germon's *Gender: a Genealogy of an Idea* resolved some of the questions that had been hovering around my first-year introductory paper on Gender – and made me change it. It asked some hard questions of a famous article which I had held dear for years. And it emphatically returns to the notice of gender scholars some figures many of us have not wanted to address seriously for some time now – most especially, that valorised and vilified alumnus of Victoria University, John Money.

Gender: A Genealogy of an Idea makes two key interventions, as I read it, into the prevailing feminist narrative of the term *gender*. The first is that it points out that the origins of the term were not in feminism but in sexology. We hadn't exactly forgotten this, but it has certainly been a while since we've given these origins much airtime. Jennifer's first two chapters deal in detail with this emergence of the term and its development in the work of John Money and Robert Stoller, beginning in the 1950s. She turns then to discuss how the concept migrated unevenly and intermittently across to the emergent field of feminist scholarship and was taken up as a core concept.

The second key intervention the book makes is to effect the return of the repressed in the debates around gender: the intersexed, whose bodies and subjectivities as she points out were Money's starting point, and have emerged at points in the genealogy since but only ever momentarily. At every turn, she contends, the intersexed problematise the binary structure of gender as we persist in reiterating it, but at every turn the theorist's gaze is averted from them, as binary gender is reasserted against the evidence. Even more damningly, eyes were averted from the medical and psychiatric practice of several decades in which surgical intervention to remove ambiguity was routine. The book asks us

to examine the grounds for the oppositional framework which has become such a habit of mind in thinking about gender, and entirely to rethink it as a result.

I think this is a brave and exciting book and that it may be part of a game-change occurring in Gender Studies. It critically re-examines the field as well as the idea of gender; and it is exciting to be in a field that is undertaking this kind of enquiry.

We have three speakers talking about this book today: Dr Rhonda Shaw of the Sociology/Social Policy Programme, Victoria University; Dr Melanie Beres, Department of Sociology, Gender and Social Work at the University of Otago, and Associate Professor Rosemary du Plessis, of the School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Canterbury.

Rhonda Shaw:

Thank you to the organisers of this session for inviting me to comment on Jennifer's book. I was interested to read the book because I have taught undergraduate courses on gender, in three different New Zealand universities, for eleven years. I want to focus on three aspects of the book in my comments today. Given the composition of today's diverse audience I will keep what I am going to say fairly general.

One of the important points that Jennifer makes right at the beginning of the book is that the concept of gender did not exist 60 years ago; it was introduced by John Money in 1955 and gradually entered social science discourse from the 1970s onward. The term has subsequently become so naturalised, particularly for English speakers that it is thoroughly taken for granted today, not just in academic circles but in everyday parlance as well. As Jennifer points out we 'nowadays assume the concept has always been available' (2009: 4).

Anecdotal evidence tends to confirm this. If people are forced to think about the meaning of the term gender they often assume we all have a gender, which corresponds to our so-called sex and that this is set in stone. To give you a sense of what I mean, for the last eight years I have been teaching a Stage I Sociology course on gender and social inequality and every year I set exam questions asking students to comment on sociological conceptions of gender, and to explain what sociologists mean when they say gender is an organising principle of social life. It is not difficult to imagine the variety of answers one

might get. Some of these answers not only sit on the margins of sociological thinking but also on the margins of common sense.

According to one stage I sociology student I had one particular year, ‘men are musculint and women are feminite’. I have also had comments on masculinity and performativity – possibly as an attempt to reflect on Hugh Campbell’s work on (pub)lic masculinity – such as: ‘Masculinity is something like drinking beer, where you stand around with your mates, talk bollocks and do masculine things like burp, swear, and chug beer down.’ One of my personal favourites, however, is a response to a question about gender and the sexual double standard, a statement leaving us in no doubt that female sexuality remains instrumentalised by contemporary culture. To quote this student: ‘Women are called bitches, skanks and hoes. They wear halter tops and mini-skirts, but of them most don’t look any good.’

Admittedly these are not the best answers we get. I tested this with my own daughter, who is currently doing a BA major in Philosophy and has been living with her feminist mother for 18 years, when I was preparing this presentation. Off-the-cuff she gave me her definition: ‘Gender is a social construction that we use to classify people as members of a binary system where they conform to one or other set of behavioural and identity norms corresponding to their perceived sex.’ By and large, however, our students recount trite sociological explanations of gender as culturally acquired and sex as fundamentally biological. Numerous teachers of gender will no doubt concur that they have received answers from students claiming, ‘biologically, your gentiles determine gender.’

To be fair, I am not surprised that some students are bamboozled by the concept, and I think this is compounded for undergraduate students taking different courses with a gender composition in different disciplines. So, I was keen to read Jennifer’s book to see how she would tackle defining the term. I soon discovered, as the concept “genealogy” in the title of the text indicates, that this is something Jennifer explicitly states she is not going to do (Germon, 2009: 2 & 15). My first question, on behalf of new students to sociology, is why Jennifer decided to omit a definition of gender in the text.

There is much to like about this book. One of the significant dimensions of the text for me is that it reintroduces John Money’s work to a new generation of feminist scholars and students of gender studies. That is important, especially for those of us who have pondered the sex/gender conundrum

through the lens of the post-structuralist feminist debates. In fact, the first account I read that critiqued the sex-gender distinction was Moira Gatens's essay, first published in a journal called *Intervention* in 1983 and subsequently republished in *Imaginary Bodies* in 1996. As far as Gatens was concerned, it was Stoller, not Money, who was responsible for naturalising the sex = biology, gender = socio-cultural conditioning binary, and it was Stoller's work that influenced a subsequent generation of feminist thinkers such as Greer, Millett, Oakley, Barrett, and so on. In Gatens's account Money isn't mentioned at all. So, it was significant to see Money reintroduced by Jennifer in this book, and then followed by a chapter on Stoller.

Of course one of the other players in these debates around this time was Harold Garfinkel. Garfinkel first collaborated with Robert Stoller at UCLA in 1959 on the case of Agnes, a young (19-year-old) woman who had first been referred to Stoller's clinic as an individual with confused sex identity who wanted sex-reassignment surgery. Garfinkel devotes a whole chapter to Agnes in his 1967 publication *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Jennifer, given that you've done such a great job of bringing these key figures Money and Stoller together, I wonder if there is a story behind the absence of Garfinkel in the book. My sense is that Garfinkel's absence may sit rather oddly for a generation of North American readers of sociology, especially those schooled in ethnomethodology and social interactionism and accustomed to the work of researchers such as Kessler and McKenna, West and Zimmerman, and so on.

Finally, to address the last point I want to make today: in the book Jennifer, you declare the usefulness of phenomenology to understand peoples' account of their lived experience of intersex identity and sexuality. You mention this in relation to Elizabeth Grosz's discussion about the phantom limb (2009: 178) and how phantom limb experiences as loss have psychic implications similar to intersex surgery; for example, the excision of excess phallic tissue in Intersex Case Management (ICM).

This grabbed my attention because phenomenology as I understand it provides a way round the nature-nurture debates by suggesting that the body is co-existent with personhood. So, changes to the body impact one's sense of self and identity. What I have discovered about phenomenology, in ethnographic work that I have recently done, is that it is an explanation of how we experience embodied subjectivity that doesn't always map onto peoples' actual accounts of their experience of body modification or bodily mutilation. For instance, where

organ transplantation is concerned some people do take a holistic view of embodiment and mourn the loss of their body organ (like a diseased heart or lung) that they have been with for the past 30 years, and they experience unease about the relocation and incorporation of an alien organ from a foreign body in their own bodies. Some other people however quite readily seem to adopt a mechanistic view of the body as made up of spare parts and bits that are completely divested of the subjective origins of their donor, and they have no qualms about this. There is also evidence to suggest that in terms of the psychosocial well-being of the two groups, the latter have better outcomes (physiologically and emotionally) than the first group.

Now, organ replacement and intersex surgery are not analogous. For a start, genital ambiguity is not life threatening, end stage renal failure is. You make the point in the final chapter of the book that intersexuality really only threatens cultural convention. Organ replacement may threaten religious and cultural convention too, but not to the same extent. Perhaps more importantly, “normalising” corrective genital surgery, when undertaken on infants, as it typically is, breaches almost every bioethical principle we consider inviolable in a way that organ replacement therapy does not. That is, it violates informed consent protocol, it is paternalistic, and it is often shrouded in deception and secrecy. And this is particularly the case with intersex surgery on infants and children who later argue that these operations constitute violation and denial of their rights as intersexed people and autonomous subjects.

My last question is whether there is any ethnographic evidence available from within the activist intersex community to show that adults who had surgery without their knowledge as children were glad they had “corrective” surgery now they were older. The relatively recent work of The Hastings Center’s Surgically Shaping Children project (see Parens, 2006) suggests there is little, if any. Granted, this more a question about biomedical ethics and identity that sociology per se but given that the book ends with a focus on intersex politics I wonder if you could comment on this, Jennifer.

Melanie Beres:

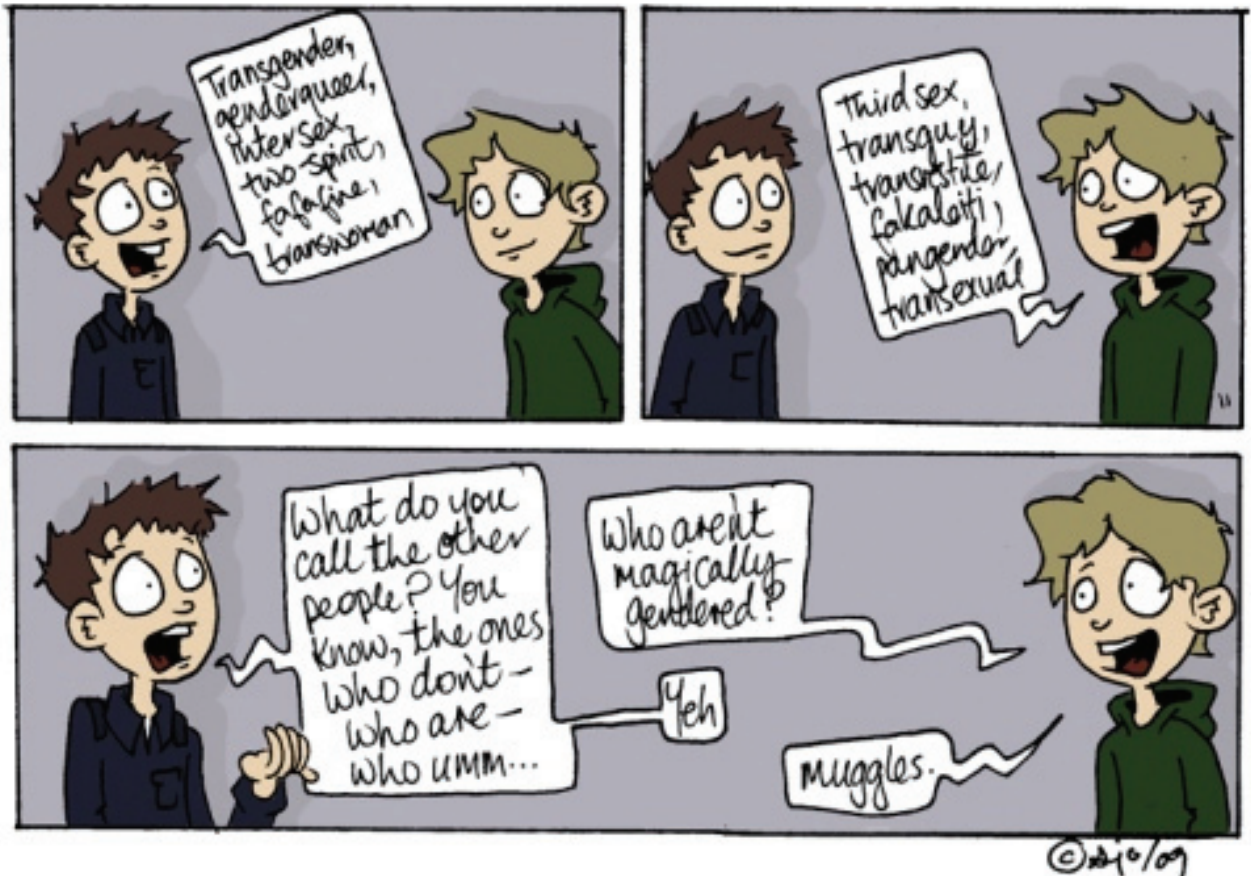
Thank you for inviting me here to engage with *Gender: a Genealogy of an Idea*. I enjoyed reading the book and it was a nice change of pace to be able to sit and engage with a single piece of work in this way.

To me, this book is about the place intersexed individuals have in the creation and development of our current understanding of gender, and to some degree sexuality. Today I would like to use some of what Jennifer was writing about to springboard into thinking about dimorphic (or what Jennifer refers to as bipolar) gender in some more detail. In particular I would like to engage with some activist writers who are attempting to forge new ground and position themselves in alternative spaces in between and alongside binary gender. The main issue I want to focus on is the opening up of possibilities for identities that sit outside of the traditional/conventional/normalized binary gender categories of male and female. Here I am going to speak broadly and discuss not only intersexed bodies, but the bodies and identities of individuals who are not “intersexed” yet also challenge dimorphic gender. Others, whose “sex” may appear to slot neatly into either “male” or “female”, may nevertheless feel that they do not fit into the category which was assigned to them. Many then come out as transgender, transsexual or genderqueer.

One of Jennifer’s core arguments is that intersexed people were at the heart of the development of the concept of gender. She reminds the reader that the “abnormal” (in this case intersexed bodies) is necessary to define the “normal”, yet the “abnormal” get erased once the concept is established. So, while the concept of gender was developed by Money through his work with intersexed bodies, we seldom implicate intersexed bodies in our understanding of gender. This got me into thinking about the way that language (as a rusty tool) makes intersexed and non-conventionally gendered people invisible while simultaneously rendering the privilege associated with being conventionally gendered invisible.

As Jennifer articulates throughout her book, intersexed individuals are rendered invisible in many ways. In the English language there are two and only two pronoun options. Maintaining a gendered identity that is other than masculine or feminine is rather difficult. Bodies are read as *either* masculine or feminine: many of us become uncomfortable when someone does not obviously fit into one or the other. This becomes particularly visible in public toilets where many trans-people regularly face stares, questions and outright abuse. Yet despite all of the invisibility of those of us who challenge notions of dimorphic gender, there is also an invisibility associated with those of us who fit neatly into gendered categories. This invisibility is illustrated here in a comic

by Sam Orchard, who is, in his own words – “a simple trans guy transitioning in New Zealand.”



[Reprinted with permission of Sam Orchard.]

As Sam’s comic illustrates there is an array of terms and words used to describe those of us who are “magically” gendered. Other terms I have come across recently include multi-gendered and tri-gendered. Yet even as I write this I struggle with what term to use to describe those of us who are, as Sam would say, muggles. The above comic is funny precisely because it demonstrates the way the English language fails us. The lack of an appropriate term renders talking about gender difficult, for what language are we left with? Normally gendered? Conventionally gendered? Traditionally gendered? Gender identity consistent with gender assigned at birth? All of these terms are lacking, for being wordy, and for reinforcing the privilege that such a term could make visible.

This is the invisibility of the privilege that comes with identifying with an unmarked category. To quote Calvin Thomas:

... straights have had the political luxury of not having to think about their sexuality, in much the same way as men have not had to think of themselves as being gendered and whites have not had to think of themselves as raced (2000:17).

That is, those with privilege just “are”, and those who lack particular forms of privilege become representatives of the “label”. This is perhaps most clear in relation to sexual orientation where it is only gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer individuals who need to “come out”, who need to name their sexuality.

In the case of gender identity not only is the privilege associated with being “conventionally gendered” invisible and taken for granted. This privilege has also remained largely nameless, making it that much more difficult to identify, discuss, question and problematise.

To address this glaring absence in the English language some trans-activist communities have begun using the term cisgendered. My first introduction to the term cisgendered came in an essay written by one of my students in a social inequality paper. My initial reaction was two-fold.

Firstly, it was a delightful flashback to my organic chemistry days, learning about the directionality of molecular bonds. In this context cis means “on the same side” and trans means “on the other side”. To that end then cisgendered individuals’ gender identity would be “on the same side” – presumably on the same side of gender they were assigned at birth. Trans-identified people would then be considered on the other side to which they were originally assigned.

The second instant reaction I had to reading the term cisgendered was one of relief and excitement. Finally, I thought I had been given a word that would allow me to talk about the privilege of being, shall we say.... cisgendered. Upon further reflection though, the term is not without significant problems.

Definitions of cisgendered have included “non-trans”, “conventionally gendered”, “someone who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth” and “a person whose determinations of hir sex and gender are universally considered valid”. An examination of any of the definitions reveals that we are still left with many questions and potential gaps where there is still limited space for diverse gender expressions and identities. These definitions are problematic for several reasons:

- Firstly, cisgender creates yet another dichotomy, the trans-cis dichotomy. This includes all the problems that come with any binary. At this point I am reminded of Jennifer’s discussion of genetics, and the wide diversity of

possible genotypes (XX, XO, XY, XXY). She points out that without widespread testing our “knowledge” that girls are XX and boys are XY is called into question. If genetics cannot easily categorize us into males and females, then we cannot expect to fit neatly into two categories after the added complexity of physiology, psychology and social forces.

- Secondly, the cis/trans dichotomy reinforces dimorphic gender, by implying that those who are trans are crossing gender lines as opposed to sitting in a gendered space that is neither or both masculine and feminine.
- Thirdly, defining cisgender as someone whose gender is considered valid seems rather short-sighted. While on the one hand it is open and not tied to bodies, on the other it is only a useful term for as long as “conventionally gendered” bodies are the only ones considered valid. The gender political movement is about building recognition for trans/genderqueer identities. Once these do become “valid” what happens to the term?

A final thought on the growth of the term cisgender. This last word is not so much a critique as it is a strength. That is, this term and its meaning have grown out of grassroots activist work, not medical or academic theorizing. This point is rather significant. Reading the history of the term *gender* as Jennifer describes it we become aware of how much our understanding of gender has rested in the hands of medical professionals and academics. The pathologising of intersexed bodies came from a medical assumption of what ought to be, not an engagement of what ‘is’.

After decades of medical professionals deciding the possibilities of gendered being, it is refreshing to see trans, intersexed and genderqueer individuals taking matter and language into their own hands. While similar activism has been ongoing for decades and perhaps centuries I am hopeful that with the technology and social media available today these challenges will find more purchase in the public realm.

I will end here with a quotation from Ivan E. Cayote, as she discusses her identity in relation to her work with high school students. In her words:

I have never cared too much about what you call me.
I’ve never been too hung up on labels, mostly because there are so few that stick properly to me.

Four decades of straddling the gender fence has taught me many things.

But it has been only recently that I figured out what to call myself.

For years I have secretly yawned and answered the ubiquitous gender

pronoun preference question with a noncommittal shrug, thanking the asker for asking and then answering that they could basically call it like they saw it, that I didn't really have a preference. And for years this was mostly true. Mostly. But lately I have been doing a lot more work in high schools, and it has changed me somehow.

For years I told teachers to call me she, because it seemed simpler. It seemed like this would let the kids focus on the stuff I really wanted to talk to them about. I wanted to talk about how to make schools safer for everyone, not my gender identity. I convinced myself that who I was and how I identified was not all that important to the discussion.

Then just recently, I started to tell the teacher to call me she for a whole different bunch of reasons. Somewhere along the line I realized that who I am and what I call myself might matter a whole lot to them. Because I want to stand up in front of a whole bunch of bodies coursing with newly minted hormones and prove to them that female bodies can look like just about anything their owners want them to. I want to stand up there and say, "That's right, folks. Here I am. A big old freak with tattoos and muscles, boys' pants and an AC/DC shirt. I look like a dude and you can call me Ivan. I am your principal's worst nightmare come true. I am here to tell you that you can be whatever the fuck you can dream up. You can call me she, and I will call you whatever you want me to. I am a proud butch. Because for me, right now, in this body, on this planet, this feels like the most revolutionary thing I can do, and the most hardcore fuck-the-binary creature I can be. But that's just me.

Rosemary Du Plessis:

Jennifer Germon's *Gender: an Genealogy of an Idea* is a fascinating piece of intellectual detection. Its key purpose is to explore how 'gender' entered the social sciences, the humanities and everyday life as a way of talking about the social significance given to the categories male and female, women and men, boys and girls. It challenges some taken-for-granted assumptions about 'gender' and charts the ascendancy of this term in psychology, sociology, anthropology and feminist scholarship.

This book is much more than a well-researched, densely-footnoted and intellectually engaging review of how the concept of gender was introduced into psychology by John Money, picked up by Robert Stoller and then reworked, debated and integrated into feminist scholarship in the 1970s. It is a book with a keen political edge. Woven into Germon's critical intellectual history is

attention to the implications for those variously defined as ‘hermaphrodite’, ‘intersex’ or more recently ‘DSD’ (disorders of sexual development), of the prioritisation of social gender over biological sex. Ideas count—they have power and are closely related to social practices, in this case the practice of intersex case management (ICM). Over the last 60 years this has often involved surgery on anomalous sexed bodies in the interests of facilitating their integration into binary gender categories, or what Germon refers to as gender as “ $n = 2$ ” (Germon, 2009: 195).

By the 1970s, what was termed the sex/gender distinction and the challenges to biological determinism associated with it were a vehicle for feminists to challenge sexism within social theory, push the boundaries of what girls and women can be and do, and extend their human rights. Germon argues that the focus on the significance of social gender rather than embodied sex had very different consequences for those whose genitals did not conform to what was defined as ‘normal’. It was not until the 1990s that those who were constructed as ‘intersexed’ by the medical profession started to have collective conversations and organise politically on the use of genital surgery on babies and children. At this point they directly challenged the arguments and practices of the medical profession and the psychologists whose analyses of the social significance of gender often underpinned this surgery.

While Jennifer Germon’s book engages intellectually with the development of the concept of gender in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, its project is fundamentally utopian. It looks forward to a time when the discipline of binary gender categories might be subverted, not only by the few courageous intersexed people, like New Zealand’s Mani Mitchell, who resist categorisation as either male or female, but by others who share their interests in a world less dominated by binary gender categories (Keir, 2002; MacDonald and Swan, 2009). This is a world in which babies with genitals that doctors do not define as ‘normal’ will not receive ‘corrective’ surgery that puts at risk their capacities for sexual pleasure. It is a world in which people with complex combinations of chromosomes, gonads and genitals make decisions as adults about how they negotiate the social meanings, images, ideals and practices associated with gender. The world imagined is one in which transitions between gender identities are more openly accepted and living across and beyond categorisation as female or male would be understood and accepted. For these reasons, it is

very appropriate that the concluding session of a conference on ‘Looking forward: Trends, horizons and utopias’ is devoted to discussion of this book.

While we live in a transforming, increasingly digital and globalised world and increasingly encounter uncertainty and mutability, we also live in a world in which gender binaries persist and discipline the lives, not just of people who are intersexed, but everyone, even the yet to be born. This was brilliantly highlighted in Professor Anna Reading’s keynote address on gender and global memory fields (Reading, 2011). Scanning and imaging technology mean that previously neuter fetuses are identified as male or female in the womb and begin their ‘premediated’ gendered biographies at twelve to fourteen weeks of a pregnancy. Depending on context, knowing the gender of the fetus may be the basis for terminating a pregnancy, the purchase of the ‘right’ clothes and toys as presents or even the information necessary for decorating the rooms they will occupy. Since up to ten percent of babies do not have the genitals anticipated on the basis of the ultrasound scan at 14 weeks, some children are now ‘reassigned’ at a later scan or at birth. For their parents, other family members and close friends they have, for a time, occupied a different social identity.

This highlights the ongoing social significance attached to gender, more than 40 years after western feminists used arguments against biological determinism to challenge how women and men might live, then and in the future. Things have changed as a consequence of that challenge—the place of women in political life, the professions, the academy, the armed services and sociology is very different—but the significance of gender distinctions continues. Sometimes I think that the quantity of pink clothes for girls (including gumboots), fairy outfits and princess costumes multiplies exponentially as women assume positions as prime ministers, judges, engineers, governor generals and CEOs. It seems that symbolic gender differences must be intensified, at least for preschoolers, as women penetrate some fields once seen only appropriate for men. There is an expanding popular literature on the continued marketing gender differentiation to girls and boys (Brown et al, 2009; Lamb and Brown, 2006; Orenstein, 2010).

Jennifer Germon’s book ends with a focus on intersex politics and possible futures. But earlier chapters took me back to my first engagement with the work of John Money (1965) and psychologists like Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) and Sandra Bem (1972). Like many others in the 1970s, I used the sex/gender distinction to challenge assumptions about inherent differences

between women and men based on genetics and hormones—prenatal and postnatal. This challenge was linked to thinking about alternative futures for women and men—different ways of organising family, work, political processes, education, the economy. Many of those perhaps naive expectations about what was possible have not been realised. However, the idea that most differences between women and men were at root social made it possible to look forward, to anticipate new horizons. I did subscribe to the view Germon (2009: 86) ascribes to 70s feminists - that “what was learned could be unlearned or in fact replaced by something altogether different”.

I vividly remember encountering Ann Oakley’s definitive assertions about the difference between biological sex and social gender which Jennifer discusses as a distortion of Money’s ideas in her chapter on ‘Feminist Encounters with Gender’. Oakley’s discussions of Money prompted me to read his work and I can remember debates about it in the opening weeks of the first Sociology of Gender honours course I taught in 1976. We looked critically at his John/Joan case and his assertion that the re-assignment of Joan was ‘successful’ because she exhibited stereotypical feminine behaviour. As I remember it, discussions of Money’s work on sex/gender and intersex morphed into discussion of Sandra Bem’s work on androgyny and then a critique of how that work still rested on the reification of conventional models of masculinity and femininity.

Counter to what Germon suggests, this analysis of ‘gender’ did not involve exclusive attention to a cognitive ‘gender’ divorced from sex, sexual pleasure and the physicality of bodies. Gender for me at that time was not an exclusive attention to ‘consciousness’ divorced from ‘the body’— a trend Germon identifies in some feminist thinking (Germon, 2009: 86). This was, I think, because the contributions of psychology to thinking about the meanings and practices associated with being male or female were always running up against and complemented by other ideas—for example radical feminist body-focused analysis and materialist Marxism. And in the small world of New Zealand feminist politics and academia, alternative theoretical positions were just down the corridor or across the room.

Unusually for a woman academic who identified as a feminist, but not perhaps for a sociologist, I taught ‘sex roles’ and ‘sociology of gender’ courses with a male colleague, Charles Sedgwick, who shared with me training as an anthropologist. In our classes reflections on biology and gender were

supplemented by cross-cultural analyses of gender and the challenges posed by other big conceptual agendas of 1970s and 1980s sociology – Marxist materialist analysis and its relationship with the theory and political practices of what was variously referred to as ‘the women’s movement’, the ‘women’s liberation movement’ or ‘feminism’.

As a result, the sort of gender analysis we taught focused on material relations between women and men and the ways in which erotic relationships and child-rearing occurred in the context of control of material resources such as land or money. For some years we used Yolanda and Robert Murphy’s ethnography of the Mundurucu Indians of Brazil, as a way to illustrate the intersection between material, sexual, embodied and ideological facets of the relationships between women and men (Murphy & Murphy, 1972). This was the basis for a gender-inflected attention to colonisation and political economy in this country and, finally, attention to local feminisms. Courses we taught ended in some ways where Jennifer’s book ends—with attention to theoretical and strategic debate among political activists and with ideas about what might be different. And I now want to return to the final chapters of this book.

As supervisor of several excellent doctoral theses that have problematised gender binaries (Roen, 1998; Phibbs, 2001), I was already acutely aware of both the inadequacies of binary understandings of physical sex and social gender. I had previously encountered the position that gender is learned, but also that “bodies are active participants in this process” (Germon, 2009: 190). But the theorised, carefully-documented tensions among intersex activists and their different strategies gave me a new appreciation of the complexities of intersex politics. Some of the differences among intersex activists mirror some of the tensions in the 1970s between liberal, radical and socialist feminists. There are strong parallels in debates among feminists and intersex activists about the dangers of collaboration with professional and bureaucratic institutions (especially medicine), but also links between the consolidation of difference through identification as ‘intersex’ and the inevitable tensions around organising as ‘women’ in the 1970s—which continue today.

Jennifer Germon charts differences in intersex politics with care and respect, while at the same time articulating her own position. This respect and acknowledgement of the work of those she assesses is a key feature of this book. John Money’s work is subjected to critique and yet he is in many ways the intellectual star of this book. She criticises his lack of attention to the

implications of his own evidence, but appreciates his recognition of the human capacity to exhibit what are conventionally defined as both ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ characteristics. She argues that: “The strength of Money’s theories lie in his ... cognizance of the intricate relation between cells, environment, and experience; and in the capacity of his framework to readily accommodate temporal and structural change” (2009: 189). Money’s work is used to deconstruct the sex/gender binary and envision a future that is not dominated by gender binaries. Germon looks back through a detailed, critical and controversial analysis of Money’s ideas in order to look forward—to envision different futures.

The opening session of this conference addressed the relationship between sociological work and social change and involved several references to the Occupy movement. Jennifer Germon invites us to look at a social movement, definitely ‘globital’ (global and digital), involving a small group of activists who receive much less media attention. Together with an increasing number of intersex activists outside university contexts, she envisages a future in which what we currently call ‘gender’ is more genuinely multiple and dynamic – a project that I thought would have advanced much more rapidly by 2011.

I am interested in how intersex activists are responding to this book and how trans and gender diverse individuals, organisations and communities are reacting to its arguments and its analysis of aspects of current intersex politics. Does it provide them with useful tools to think and work towards different futures? Or is this just a book for intellectuals, those who attend the conferences of the Sociological Association of Aotearoa New Zealand or read the *New Zealand Sociology*? Can it convince others that we are all what Marcus Hirschfield referred to as “sexual intermediaries” (Germon, 2009:193-5), dynamically and uniquely combining and recombining biological attributes and behaviours defined as the qualities of different genders—but not under conditions of our own choosing?

Jennifer Germon:

Well, first I would like to acknowledge the fabulously rich engagement with my work by all of the panellists and to thank you all very much. It’s great to be coming back to home territory to talk about this work, and to hear how people are engaging with it in a local context. Thanks also to my fabulous hosts for this

trip: the Gender and Sociology crew at Otago including Annabel Cooper and Chris Brickell.

I'm going to start by responding to Rhonda's question, on behalf of those puzzled students, about why I didn't define gender. As good scholars we are of course supposed to define our terms. Yet it was clear that if I locked gender into a set definition, I wouldn't be able to achieve what I was attempting to do. Specifically that was to explore the production of knowledge about gender across different domains, clinical, scholarly, and political. I was also interested in its material effects, effects borne out of the way in which gender was taken up in medical discourse particularly. What this project taught me was that gender is an incredibly dynamic concept. In fifty short years gender has become so naturalised into the English language that it appears to have always been available on the one hand, and completely self evident on the other. Not only has gender weathered a number of challenges and transformations, it appears to have thrived as a result. Therein lies its promise.

Gender had long been used in linguistics as a tool to determine which pronouns went with which nouns. John Money's innovation was to take the term, retain its traditional denotations of masculine and feminine, and use it to explain how intersexed people were able to establish a rock solid gender identity as women or men. He went on to extend his ideas about gender acquisition to the wider population, providing an account for how everybody acquired their gender. At that point the concept of gender begins to move out of the clinic and take on a life of its own. That was aided in no small part by Robert Stoller's intervention in the 1960s (the sex/gender distinction), and gender's subsequent promotion by a number of key and influential second-wave feminist scholars during the 1970s. By the 1980s gender had become feminism's central organising concept and as they say, the rest is history.

Of all the definitions of gender currently available it seems to me that Money's model remains considerably more sophisticated than many that have followed in his wake. That is because Money remained cognisant of the interrelationship between cells, environment and experience. Bracketing the body from gender was as ludicrous in his view, as trying to bracket the mind. This is unsurprising perhaps for someone whose first monograph offered a strong critique of Cartesian dualism. For Money the sex/gender distinction represented the mind/body split in a contemporary guise and thus was untenable.

So is gender a social construction? Well yes, but no more so than the category of sex. One of the things that I find really exciting about Money's understanding of gender, is his insistence that we remember that learning is a function of biology. Often when I make that statement in a classroom context, there is often an audible gasp from students [sound effects] "But what do you mean? We know that gender is a social construct." What I mean is, that all the experiences we have across our lifetimes, and every idea that we're ever exposed to – including the idea that gender is socially constructed –are all mediated by the central nervous system. We cannot extract our bodies from our experience of being in the world. That is what appeals most to me about Money's concept of gender. In saying that I'm not trying to elide any of the problematic aspects of his work, many of which I attend to in *Gender*. Nor is it to deny the price paid by the intersexed for the broad cultural investment in an oppositional way of knowing of gender.

As to Rosemary's question about the response to my work from intersexed communities, I'm not going to make any claims to a homogenous response, since there is no homogenous way of doing politics or being gendered, or for that matter, intersexed. What I can say is that my work has been taken up in some quarters with interest. There is for example, a link to my PhD thesis on one of the intersex organisations' website. But the type of response depends very much on what part of the political fence you're referring to. What I would call the mainstream approach to intersex politics was not so enamoured of my work because by such an account, intersex has nothing to do with gender. I'm not able to say how trans communities have engaged with my work thus far: I simply don't know.

So where is Harold Garfinkel in this book? He was of course a very important sociological thinker whose key legacy is a methodological one. Because my interest lay in gender's movement through and across biomedical and social discourse I would say that Garfinkel's work was somewhat peripheral to my project; it lay outside of the story I was telling. Stoller's work was of more direct relevance to what I was doing in *Gender* because when he cleaved sex from gender Stoller was making an intervention at the level of discourse. Yet I think the spectre of Garfinkel is everywhere in the Stoller chapter of my book, writ large through my discussion of the case of Agnes. Agnes was a 19-year-old young woman who turned up at Robert Stoller's clinic at UCLA seeking the removal of her fully formed penis and testicles. Agnes

recounted spontaneously experiencing the growth of masculine genitals at puberty. The source of great shame, she just wanted to be rid of them. Agnes puzzled the clinicians; they considered all the possibilities of how this ‘naturally feminine’ young woman came to have ‘normal-appearing’ male genitalia. All the involved medics discounted the possibility that she could or would have self-medicated with exogenous hormones since it was unlikely a teenager would get the timing or the dosage right. Agnes was assigned a diagnostic category of intersex that her body actually contraindicated, tissue samples were taken and sent off to pathology, consultations among the consulting clinicians were held, and at the end of the day, Agnes was supported through sex reassignment surgery. After the surgery, Agnes disclosed that she had in fact taken her mother’s estrogen pills as a teenager and that her story had been a ruse to access surgery.

As to the limits of a phenomenological account of the embodied experience of say, amputation, organ transplantation, or intersex genital surgery, I take your point Rhonda but I wonder if we’re not talking about two distinct issues here, neither of which cancel the other out. I think that the various ways people respond to those kinds of embodied experiences, and their subsequent health outcomes are important issues for primary health care. I don’t know that such data diminishes the usefulness of Grosz’s ideas to my project however. Embodied phenomenology understands the body as a key instrument for experiencing the world and as a vehicle through which meaning is generated. Grosz’s discussion of the phantom limb suggests that in addition to a physical wound, such loss also leaves a psychic or spiritual wound, if you like. That analogy does resonate in some of the stories that intersex people tell about their experiences of medical and surgical mediation and the ways in which that mediation impacts on who and how they are in the world.

Finally I’d like to turn now to important point that Melanie made in relation to the issue of invisibility, an issue that haunts gender at every turn. Melanie honed right in on that most perverse of paradoxes with her analogy of the ‘rusty tool.’ While our understandings of gender are derived from the intersexed, under the terms of an oppositional model there is no place in gender for the intersexed *as* intersexed. This is what stimulates case management practices that are designed to fashion male- and female-like bodies from the bodies of intersexed people. Just as the intersexed are rendered materially and conceptually invisible by binary gender, so too is the privilege that comes with

being conventionally gendered. And while much of today's discussion has turned on populations we would describe as sex and gender diverse, it's important to acknowledge that these issues concern each and every gendered subject.

I'll conclude by flagging my next project, which follows on from the work I did in *Gender*. I have the rather modest ambition to develop and test a model of gender that is not reliant on oppositional thinking. I think that in the twenty-first century, our very complex socio-cultural worlds require a concept with a bit more bite. Rather than call for an end to gender, I'm interested in what insights might come from expanding our understanding of what the 'difference' in gender difference looks like. What would happen if we accorded differences among genders with the same bearing that differences between genders are currently accorded? What, and importantly who, might be made visible?

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Rosemary Du Plessis is Associate Professor of Sociology at Canterbury University with a long interest in feminist theory, research and teaching and the politics of knowledge. She co-edited *Feminist Voices: Women's Studies Texts for Aotearoa/New Zealand* (1992) and *Feminist Thought in Aotearoa New Zealand: Connections and Differences* (1998) and has recently been involved in editing entries for *Te Ara*, the online encyclopedia of New Zealand. During the last decade she has also been involved in research relating to the politics of new biotechnologies and decision-making about the uses of genetic science.

Jennifer Germon is a lecturer in the Department of Gender and Cultural Studies at the University of Sydney. She holds a BA and MA in Sociology from the University of Auckland and a PhD in Gender Studies from the University of Sydney. Her work is informed by more than a decade's experience working within the community and health sectors, and a long-standing commitment to social justice and social inclusion. Her first monograph is *Gender: A genealogy of an idea* (Palgrave, 1990).

Rhonda Shaw is a sociologist interested in the contribution of sociology to bioethics. Her work has appeared in *Social Science & Medicine*, *Sociology*, *Health*, *Health Sociology Review*, *Current Sociology*, *The Sociological Review*, *Sociological Research Online*, *Feminist Review*, *Australian Feminist Studies*, *Feminist Theory*, *Women's Studies International Forum*, and *Body & Society*. She is co-editor of *Giving Breastmilk: Body Ethics & Contemporary Breastfeeding Practice* (2010).