

## **Response to “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough” by Anne Fausto-Sterling**

### **ABSTRACT:**

This piece examines different types of sexes that exist throughout the world. Author Anne Fausto-Sterling stresses that there is not just the traditional “male” or “female” distinctions for sex. In fact, she argues that there are five sexes that exist throughout the world. There are males, females, and intersexuals. However, the indication of “intersexual” in itself contains 3 subgroups. “Hermaphrodites”, “male pseudohermaphrodites”, and “female pseudohermaphrodites”. With these 3 additional sexes, it is clear that a distinction of just male or female are simply not enough and is unfair to those who do not “fit in” to those two categories. In the United States, an individual’s sex is determined by the state in which they live in. The English language also seems to only have pronouns that fit male or female. The author encourages readers to question why hermaphrodites, male pseudohermaphrodites, and female pseudohermaphrodites are not, for the most part, recognized as their own sex in Western Culture. Distinction of sex is not something that can be as clear-cut as “black or white”. Sex should be considered as a spectrum instead with male on one end, female on the other, and everything else in between.

Anne Fausto-Sterling brings a controversial argument of biological sex identification to light back in April of 1993. To this day, there have not been many, if any at all, changes in the United States to the distinction of an individual’s sex. It is not the case that intersexuals have just recently started existing. The word hermaphrodite derives from the Greek name “Hermes”, and intersexuals can be found in ancient writings like that of Plato. (Fausto-Sterling, p. 10) It is utterly surprising that there is not more talk in regards to this. When looked at from strictly a biological point of view, there are clear reasons as to why just two categories of sex are not acceptable in order to accurately portray individuals for what/who they are.

Fausto-Sterling explains that intersexual is not just one sex on its own. Three subcategories of sex can be found within the designation of intersexual. There are hermaphrodites, a term that is the most commonly and incorrectly used in order to describe all intersexuals. Hermaphrodites are those who have one testis and one ovary. Male pseudohermaphrodites have testes, some aspects of female genitalia, but do not have ovaries. Female pseudohermaphrodites have ovaries, some aspects of male genitalia, but do not have testes (Fausto-Sterling, p. 6). Even having these three subgroups within intersexual is not enough to even scrape the surface of their complexities. However, it would be enough to widely accept that instead of just two sexes, there are five. Not everything can be clear-cut when it comes to sex. That is why the author stresses that a spectrum of sex ranging from male to female with the subcategories falling in between is a better and more accurate way of identifying one’s sex (Fausto-Sterling, p. 5).

One thing that raises some attention and confusion is the fact that in the United States, an individual’s sex is determined by state law. The state which you so happen to live in decides what you will be identified as if you are not biologically male or female (Fausto-Sterling, p. 5). Another interesting point that the author raises is that “Western culture is deeply committed to the idea that there are only two sexes” (Fausto-Sterling, p. 4). This idea may not be as obvious or prominent to other. In fact, many who have read Fausto-Sterling’s piece may not have even noticed that this is the case. The English language is very complicated. But when observed in this instance, it is noticed that the only pronouns that are affiliated with sex are his/hers and he/she. There are no other pronouns that exist to describe the other sexes that fall on the spectrum besides male or female.

Many may wonder why this discussion is even relevant or why people should even care about this. They may think that the identification of sex is fine the way it is. But if one is to try to relate and put themselves in the shoes of someone whose sex is identified as hermaphrodite, male pseudohermaphrodite, and female pseudohermaphrodite, they might realize that these rules that are just assumed, accepted, and barely even noticed as such by the vast majority, are simply unfair for those that it does not fit. This might be a powerful way to invoke change.

## Journal I

In the article, *Throwing Like A Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality*, Iris Young brings into discussion the theories produced in the past that have tried to explain the physical and psychological differences between men and women. The differences being seen have been argued to be due to the biology of the individual. Since women are seen as feminine, they are considered to be weak and not have the ability to conduct physical activities the way men do. Their biology, such as breasts, does not allow for them to throw as hard as men do. Young argues back that this form of historic biological research has influenced the reduction in understanding women, even though it tries to increase knowledge of females. Other theories have included the idea that women are burdened with their own body, due to their biology of hormones and change of the body during puberty. Using psychological and biological rationality, Young challenges these ideas with observations of women's behavior in society. Whether socially or culturally, women's opinions are contracted and they act as though their bodies are less than men.

With selective observation on the way that women behave in public, Young views the lack of certainty that women have when dealing with physical labor. Women tend to keep to themselves and find the need to limit the amount of space that they give themselves in the environment. They try not to take a lot of space as a whole. This influences their confidence levels which are lessened due to their fear of both psychological and physical pain. Unlike men, women lack belief in their body's ability to do what it needs to do. Bodily existence is the basis of the objectification of women and their confidence in themselves. The way that they maintain

themselves in society shows that they want to keep themselves within the standards that society created for them

In a certain passage, Young discusses an example of object movement. This idea considers the fact that an object moving toward a woman is seen by them as coming at them (p. 148). The words “coming at them” gives the thought that every action pertaining to a woman is seen as aggressive and enforces the idea that they are submissive. They are never dominate not are they responsible for aggressive action. Women are often the ones who are having something done to them rather than being equally treated in certain situations. They are constantly being thought of as the individuals who are being acted upon rather than acting on something themselves. They are also seen as objects in society that are being mistreated with aggressive forms of actions. There is this idea, due to historical evidence, that women should be fearful in this society of their own behaviors. Whether physically or emotionally, Young mentions the idea of getting hurt and how it becomes a movement in society (p. 148). The woman’s body is seen by herself as a thing of that movement and not the creator of it. They are only being influenced by it and not the commanders who have the ability to start the movement. It is thought of as common knowledge.

Confidence and certainty are controlling factors for these feelings of being an object (p. 148). Rather than feeling in control the way that men do in society they aren’t able to maintain their confidence. The term, self-referred, is constantly being used in this passage to establish the idea that women are used to the low confidence that society establishes and they tend to believe it. They refer to themselves as unable to do physical work and not have the strength to control certain situations because they are the weaker sex. They were born physically weak unlike men.

This passage doesn't mention what society has made women believe but it shows that women themselves have been passing around these thoughts to other generations of women.

A woman must think of all her actions as she's conducting them in respect to what her abilities are. These abilities are determined by what she believes she maintains and not by trusting her own body. She has to physically manipulate her body into performing actions and behaviors. These behaviors also refer to societies expectations of woman's capabilities. They aren't allowed to exceed what their bodies, according to society's standards have the ability to do. Finally, it is discussed that women must perform her gender by watching her actions and having them being watched by others (p. 148). Her behaviors and movements are being observed, therefore she must worry about how she is being seen. Young tries to establish the understanding that a woman assumes her movement as what is assumed of her.

This article is significant because it gives insight into the theories that were created to understand the differences between men and women. Young focuses on the athletic aspect of differences and the feelings of space women tend to have. The understanding that women feel the need to underestimate their abilities is important to realize because it passed on through generations. Women have grown to believe that they shouldn't be allowed to establish their strength in society because they would be going against their assumed biological ways. Women are more aware of their bodies than men are and this still qualifies today. Women are more concerted with the amount of space that they take up as well as their appearance. Men do not have this challenge and awareness of this idea helps establish a change in society.

## References

- Young, I. M. (1980). Throwing like a girl: A phenomenology of feminine body comportment motility and spatiality. *Human Studies*, 3 (2), 137-156.