

## Journal Writing: Example of A Combined Reflection on:

### *Fausto-Sterling's "The Five Sexes," and Hale's "Are Lesbians Women" (Summary and Response)*

In her article, "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are not Enough," Anne Fausto-Sterling outlines her reasons and arguments concerning why the two socially and medically accepted (dominant) gender identities are not sufficient in identifying the genders of every individual. In most modern societies generally accept as "normal" the two obvious sexes: the male and the female, the one identified by having a penis and testicles in the physical sense and a Y-chromosome in the genetic sense, while the other is identified as having a vagina and clitoris, developed breasts, and lacking a Y-chromosome. Likewise, the male is further defined by the absence of these aforementioned female traits. Though these two genders, categorized using the above criteria, are most certainly the two dominant sex groups on the planet, Fausto-Sterling argues that this is simply not enough, that there are simply far too many intersexuals extant in societies all over the world for them to be simply written off as freak occurrences of Nature or anomalies. Reinforcing this claim, she cites Johns Hopkins University psychologist John Money, who "suggests intersexuals may constitute as many as 4 percent of births. As I point out to my students at Brown University, in a student body of about 6,000 that fraction, if correct, implies that there may be as many as 240 intersexuals on campus—surely enough to form a minority caucus of some kind." (34) Immediately before this quotation, the author outlined the parameters of her five-sex labeling system: First, we have the obvious males and females, after which come three lesser-known splinter groups of gender: 1) "true" hermaphrodites, identified as having one testis and one ovary, 2) male pseudohermaphrodites, who have testes and bear some suggestions of female genitalia, but no ovaries, and 3) female pseudohermaphrodites, who possess ovaries and some aspects of male genitalia, but not testes. (34) Furthermore, "their external genitalia and secondary sex characteristics do not match their chromosomes. Thus merms have testes and XY chromosomes, yet they also have a vagina and clitoris, and at puberty they often develop breasts. They do not menstruate, however." (35) More on this article shortly.

We move on to another article, one in which Jacob Hale asks a seemingly obvious question: "Are Lesbians Women?" Well, based on both what we take to be common sense as well as what we may have just read in Fausto-Sterling's piece, we would likely say, "As long as she has a vagina, clitoris, no male genitalia, and no Y-chromosome, then yes." Monique Wittig, an individual under close evaluation and interpretation throughout this piece, would disagree, primarily through the argument that, because lesbians do not live in a so-called "binary relationship" with men, they are not (socially) women. "'woman' becomes reality for an individual only in relation to an individual of the opposing class—men—and particularly through marriage...because they do not enter this category, [lesbians] are not 'women.'" (47) Hale tends to disagree with Wittig, accusing her analysis "too simplistic to handle the variety of ways in which people, including lesbians, are gendered," (49) a concept that harkens back to Fausto-Sterling's notion of possibly infinite gender deviations. On page 52, Hale goes on to point out that there are in fact "multiple candidates for contemporary negative paradigms in the dominant culture's representations of, for example, sex workers, pregnant women whose behavior could cause harm to their fetuses...dominatrices, women who cut off their abusive husbands' penises..." At the conclusion of the article, Hale goes through his personal thirteen characteristics that should be generally accepted in identification of a woman as a "woman." I will attend to these in my response to the articles.

How does one reconcile the two pieces by Fausto-Sterling and by Hale? After all, the very subject matter with which Hale concerns himself, as well as the parameters that he has set up within which he will discuss his topics, somewhat belie (at least in Hale's universe) the notions that Fausto-Sterling sets forth in her piece. Hale's title, "Are Lesbians Women?" caters to the exact cut-and-dried division of gender identification that the former seeks to disband in "The Five Sexes." Or do they? One may be tempted to view the article in this way, but remember that what Hale is talking about here is an individual that possesses all the necessary characteristics laid out in his own personal criteria; they are too numerous to list here, but suffice to say that they eliminate any possible deviations or complications that would aid in labeling the woman a hermaphrodite or a pseudohermaphrodite. Still, the two authors are discussing, to a certain extent, completely different subjects: Hale's article is primarily concerned with social implications, whereas Fausto-Sterling's is biological.

The very idea of Hale's article runs into a snag if Fausto-Sterling's article is first taken into account. The question that he asks, "Are lesbians women?" is, biologically (and somewhat socially) a moot

point; the fact that the word “lesbian” is used in a question that scrutinizes the gender identity of said word that, as a prerequisite, must accept “woman” as an identity, is considerably sloppy theorizing, or at the very least, careless phrasing. Taking a cue here from Fausto-Sterling, a specific gender must be decided upon before any kind of further definition which by its nature accepts said gender definition as truth can be attempted. That is, in a nutshell, the main problem of Hale’s article. If, however, we were to even accept the question as logically answerable, there are still one or two problems that arise within it. Towards the end of his article, Hale outlines his thirteen characteristics for defining a woman as “woman.” Many of them are biological, and are points that would likely be accepted by the most skeptical or forward-thinking gender philosopher: the absence of a penis, the possession of reproductive organs that would allow for pregnancy as a result of intercourse with a man, etc. It is when Hale begins to list societal implications of “woman” that the problem arises. For instance, number 7 states: “Having an occupation considered to be acceptable for a woman.” (54) What is acceptable? Waitressing? Coal mining? The responsibilities as CEO of the Crest Corporation? Refusing immediately afterwards to specify to any extent the definition of what is and is not acceptable only leads the reader to further skepticism of Hale’s logic. I would thusly like to list my personal characteristics of what is required to be identified as “woman.” They are few, mostly biological, and mostly taken from Hale’s list:

- The absence of a penis. This does not include the presence of an unusually large clitoris; if it is a clitoris, it is a clitoris, not a penis, though the woman may do with it as she chooses.
- The presence of developed breasts. Possible exceptions to this rule may include women whose breasts may have been removed, or women who, for some reason have not developed pronounced breasts.
- The presence of a vagina and clitoris. Again, I will allow for women who, as a birth defect or otherwise, are born without a clitoris.
- The absence of a Y-chromosome.

This is the primary flaw with Hale’s logic. Having thirteen characteristics, though extensive and not subject to as easy a refuting as is Wittig’s argument, is still plagued by his unwillingness to allow for any defects or natural biological deviations.

Fausto-Sterling’s argument is, on the other hand, very sound and very straightforward. The fact (if John Money’s study is to be taken as fact) that nearly 4% of births are intersexual constitutes a definite and recognizable minority of extant human beings. Ironically, the more we learn about this, the more society tends to repress it; as the author points out, dated books of Jewish law provide rules and regulations concerning the behavior of intersexuals; nowhere is there found any advocacy of altering them, either physically or socially. They are simply accepted into society and dealt with as a separate group from men and women. Today, however, we tend to want to “correct” these conditions either before or directly after birth in order to conform to one of the two dominant sexual identities, trying to push the “anomalies” into the background, and eventually into either memory or outright denial. It is indeed a tricky situation. Do we let the child grow up as they are, or seek to save them humiliation and prejudice by surgery? In Fausto-Sterling’s utopia, there would be no inherent prejudice against these people, as they would be conditioned to accept it as a normal minority. I am not sure, however, that we can accept this any time soon; Nietzsche says in his *Will to Power*, “We despise the secret and the unrecognizable.” (154) It will take many generations for this minority to be accepted and openly integrated into society as were African-Americans, homosexuals, and other similar groups.