

GENDERSEX

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SOMETIME AT THE beginning of the 1930s, a physician in a Danish village advised **his** patient Vigga Heidi Klausen to go to Copenhagen for an examination by Professor Knud Sand, an expert in sexual development. Sand, the physician believed, would be able to determine whether Klausen could be surgically transformed into the male sex, and granted a name change (Holm 2017, 224). The suggestion indicated that **he** regarded **his** patient to be a male person who had erroneously been assigned the female gender at birth, and that this mistake could be corrected. Klausen looked at things differently. **She** knew that, at **hes** birth, there had been doubts about whether **she** was a girl or a boy. Asked by Klausen's parents for an opinion on this when **she** was one year old, another physician had answered that "on the one side was the female sex [*køn*], and on the other side was the male sex [*køn*]," and that nothing could be done about this (Holm 2017, 214). Klausen had been assigned female sex and name based on the fact that **she** urinated from the same place as (other) female persons (Holm 2017, 173). **She** grew up with no specific opinion about this choice until, during puberty, **she** did not get a period, but a beard started growing on **hes** chin and **hes** voice deepened. "I then became aware that I couldn't conventionally be characterised as a woman," Klausen stated in **hes** unpublished autobiography (Holm 2017, 218). The unexpected development sparked consideration about whether it would be better for **hem** to be "transformed to the male sex [*køn*]" (Holm 2017, 218). However, for many years, Klausen

hesitantly rejected this idea, because “anyway I had to be as nature had made me” (Holm 2017, 218). Like a majority of people in the population, Klausen had a notion that some people were male, some female, and some a combination of both. In other words, some were born bisexed – or, in the medical terms of Klausen’s time, as hermaphrodites. In **hes** autobiography, Klausen **hem**self expressed an experience of neither fully being a woman nor a man. However, over time, **she** came to feel more comfortable wearing male attire, being perceived and treated as a man, and having a not too physically demanding man’s job. Eventually, this led **hem** to apply to the Danish Ministry of Justice for a change to a male name and legal status twenty years after **hes** physician’s suggestion (Holm 2017).

Klausen’s story points to the complex ways in which specific bodies, available narratives of selfhood, social relations, and self-experience come together, and change over time, to establish entangled configurations of what is presently talked about as “sex” and “gender.” The term *gendersex* is a neologism, which communicates that it is not possible to make absolute distinctions or to draw clear-cut boundaries between physical, mental, and social phenomena associated with these two terms. I have suggested this concept as a response to gender and feminist studies discussions about the relation between biological bodies on the one hand, and social relations and identity positions on the other, that are reflected in the use and critique of the terms *gender* and *sex* (Holm 2017). For the past sixty years, these two have been regarded the most essential terms within gender and feminist studies, and to understand why, it is useful to consider the history of their emergence in their present notions.

Until the beginning of the 1960s, one single word, *sex* – in Danish *køn*, in Swedish *kön*, and in Norwegian *kjønn* – was used to refer to biological characteristics and physical processes, social categorisation, and sexual behaviour and encounters alike. The dominant understanding in both medical and mainstream contexts was that biological processes determined social and sexual behaviour as well as a person’s sense of self, and the latter were regarded as produced by, and being an expressions of, the first. This understanding gradually changed during the first

half of the 20th century, and became evident conceptually, when, in the mid-1950s, the American sexologist John Money and colleagues (1955) introduced the term *gender* in relation to studies on intersexed people. Money argued that an individual's congenital body structure does not determine their social position or sense of self, but that these are primarily shaped by social categorisation and inter-personal relations, and to emphasise this difference between a person's physical characteristics and functions and their social categorisation and sense of self, he introduced the concept of gender.

The distinction between *sex* and *gender* not only became extremely influential within sexology, but also in Western public cultures at large. Especially activists of the second wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s made it the heart of their arguments for equality and the possibility for a radical change of society and social relations. The concept of gender became so synonymous with this movement that its origin in sexological intersex studies was largely forgotten both in mainstream culture and feminist contexts (Germon 2009). As the name suggests, the concept of gender was also essential to the change of name and scope of many women's studies institutions in the early 2000s. Gender studies was chosen as the new disciplinary term in order to emphasise a focus on social relations and to distinguish the knowledge production of the field from studies of sex characteristics, which were left for the fields of biology and medicine, and of sexual behaviour, which was left for sexology, psychiatry, and, in the 1980s, LGBT and sexuality studies. The separation and specification of gender from sex and sexuality thus marked a crucial break with the determinist understanding that biological functions and aims, body structure, human character, and sexual behaviour were an inseparable unity where the first produced the latter.

In the past couple of decades, various feminist and queer scholars have questioned how productive the sex/gender distinction is in the present academic and political situation. During the 1990s, feminist biologists such as American scholars Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000) and Donna Haraway (1991) argued that the division had left the study of the biological and physiological aspects of bodies to researchers uninformed by fem-

inist and gender studies perspectives and insights. Consequently, in most studies, aspects theorised as “sex” appeared as universal, transhistorical, stable, and largely unchangeable; and, more importantly, essentialist claims that innate sexual differences and processes determined gender formations were almost never challenged. Furthermore, feminist scholars critical of the modernist way of understanding the world in binary and hierarchical terms, such as Italian philosopher Rosi Braidotti (1994), pointed out that the binary distinction between “sex” and “gender” problematically reproduced this view. American philosopher Judith Butler (1990; 1993) added to this critical approach by theorising “gender” and “sex” as equally discursively produced, and by pointing out that the performative production of gender materialises bodies in specific ways that over time changes their materiality, structure, and function.

In response to these critiques, feminist scholars within the natural and social sciences and the humanities have critically studied scientific and medical knowledge production on sexual differences, for example the historical construction of the two-sex model, determinist views on sex hormones, and neurological differences between men and women (e.g., Fausto-Sterling 1985; 2000; Laqueur 1990; Dreger 1998; Rippon 2019). Haraway (1991; 2008) and American physicist Karan Barad (2003; 2007) have developed a language full of neologisms communicating a non-binary perspective, by for example describing modern humans as cyborgs, exploring the interdependency of human and non-human animals, and by describing phenomena studied in physics as material-discursive, entangled, and intra-acting. Furthermore, Butler (1993), Fausto-Sterling (2000; 2019), Australian feminist scholar Jennifer Germon (2009), and Danish transdisciplinary feminist scholar Nina Lykke (2010), among others, have developed non-determinist, non-binary dynamic theories and ways of writing about the relation between “gender” and “sex.”

Inspired by this body of knowledge production and theorising, I suggest gendersex as a queer theoretical and feminist materialist concept. Some scholars such as Germon (2009) and Lykke (2010) have already respectively suggested the terms sex-gender and gender/sex for com-

municating the entanglement and inseparability of “gender” and “sex.” However, I propose that completely removing any distinction or divide that a hyphen or a slash may signal is more productive.

The term gendersex entails an understanding that various material-discursive phenomena are *gendersexed*, that is, performatively produced in relation to specific norms and ideas about differences between human beings. Gendersex has historically been and is still predominantly associated with bodily differences and social and symbolical positions that are connected to (imagined) abilities of reproduction, a binary two-gender-sex model, and informed by hetero- and cisnormativity; but this could be configured differently in the future. Although it is analytically productive and necessary to distinguish between different aspects and levels where the performative production of gendersex is taking place (e.g., biological and social), the process should be regarded as one that is fundamentally material-discursive, non-determined, and non-hierarchical, and in which specific gendersexed entities exist and come into being through their relation to others. Finally, it should be emphasised that gendersex is produced and co-constructed in intersections with other material-discursive aspects of phenomena that are associated with the categories of sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, age, and dis/ability, among others.

The concept of gendersex and the perspective it entails can be used productively as an analytical tool to understand stories like Klausen’s – and many other life stories – and to explore their complexities beyond a binary understanding of “sex” and “gender.” In Klausen’s story, the physical body appears as a trickster, who is not easily defined as either male or female, and the evaluation, experience, and naming of it changes over time and is never fully stabilised. In the autobiography and the medical documents of Klausen’s application case, the articulations of *hes* body slide between different understandings that there are more than or only two gendersexes that are, in various senses, physical, mental, and/or social. Sometimes one or the other of these gendersexes is described as an unchangeable nature and at others as a construction, which might change spontaneously of its own accord or by an act of human will. Klausen describes how *hes* bodily structure and functions

and their development in certain ways guide and shape **hes** own and others' perception of **hem**, but there is no predetermined or necessary way in which this happens; rather, the configurations are relational and situated and often contains hesitations and ambiguities.

Unlike many other researchers inspired by queer theory, I do not invoke a story like Klausen's to demonstrate that the bodies and selves of intersexed persons destabilise binary understandings of "sex" and "gender." Nor do I claim that certain bodies or gendersexed behaviours automatically challenge or reproduce dominant normative notions of gendersex. Other life stories of persons diagnosed as hermaphrodites differ radically from that of Klausen's by, for example, presenting a narrative that, in spite of the fact that a person's bodily structure and functions have led to doubts about **their** gendersex status, **their** way of thinking and **their** social and sexual relations reveal **their** male/masculine or female/feminine nature (see e.g., N. O. Body 2006). My aim of focusing on Klausen's story here, is to exemplifies how an analysis of the gendersexing of a person by various agents based on different perspectives may show us how some persons, and not others, are being *intersexed* while others are *cisgendered* or *transgendered* in certain contexts and situations, and how this changes for individuals and groups over time.

Studies of intersexed and trans persons' live stories show that not only has the way persons have been perceived as being in-between binary gendersexes or as a third (or fourth or fifth) gendersex differed historically, but also within a particular historical context (Dreger 1998; Meyerowitz 2002; Cleminson and García 2009; 2013; Reis 2009; Bondestam 2010; Klöppel 2010; Mak 2012; Holm 2017; Stryker 2017). These studies clearly illustrate that there is no fixed, stable, or predetermined way in which we always with certainty throughout our lifetime will be gendersexed as belonging to one of two binary gendersexes or as falling out of this system. Such an insight may challenge and redirect an approach of counter-identification applied by some scholars, who neither experience themselves as, nor are associated by others, with a trans or intersex position, when analysing the embodied lives of intersexed and trans persons (see, Raun 2014). Analyses of the changing processes

of gendersexing may make visible to us how the perception, materialisation, and categorisation of all embodied selves changes like the image of a kaleidoscope every time one or more elements moves or is transformed. By teasing out these differences and exploring how they change over time, we may get a deeper and more complex understanding of how gendersex is configured in contemporary and historical contexts and situations in the lives of all kinds of persons – not just of those of us whose gendersex is most often presented as materially-discursively destabilised.

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