



## **Wrestling With Gender: Gender and Gender-Neutrality in the Mirror of the History of Scholarship**

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### **Abstract**

The history of feminism and gender studies is fraught with constant struggles to find applicable definitions for sex, gender, and sexuality, and understand their relationships and differences. This paper attempts to go through various theories in this regard, tracing their variations and evolutions through time, with a particular focus on gender elimination and discrimination. Some important issues explored in this research include experimentation with language, scientific investigations, and sociological research in the hope of defining and combating gender. Moreover, some manifestation of gender-neutrality patterns in literary works throughout ages and among nations have been represented in various degrees. The survey at hand, drawing on Foucault and Butler's theories on power and gender performativity, asserts the relative independence of sex, sexuality, and gender from each other as well as the nonessential role of them in the game of discrimination, relegating this role instead to power relations and personal perceptions. Literature, with its vast imaginative capacities and persuasive force, has been introduced as the site where all these intellectual endeavors of various fields about gender have converged, creating metaphors for a possible discrimination-free world, and effecting inevitable changes in the perceptions of their readers.

**Keywords:** discrimination, feminism, gender-neutrality, Judith Butler, Michael Foucault

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## **Introduction**

Looking at the history of feminism, sex therapy, and linguistics, one can see many definitions for gender, sex, and sexuality in various scales, while, in actuality no firmly applicable definitions have ever been proposed for these concepts. This brings about some theoretical questions with regard to sex and its subsequent variations. What makes coming up with a definition for sex and sexuality so impossible? Is sex based on or related to gender, sexuality, and their subsequent performativity? Or is it the inborn sex? In other words, are the sex, gender, desire, and sexual functions dependent on each other? And how have gender ambiguity and gender neutrality been approached in theoretical and literary worlds? How longer can gender-based discriminations be tolerated and what steps have been taken to remove them? The paper at hand aims to explore the questions above through inspecting some major sex and gender theories, proposed by some major theoreticians, and some literary works which highlight gender issues to maintain where we stand today with regard to our understanding of gender and gender neutrality and how far we have gone in combatting gender discriminations, after all these intellectual and artistic endeavors in the course of human history.

## **Theoretical Realm**

If we were to count in every single variation of sexuality, sexual desires, and assigned sex at birth, we would run out of words to name or explain all the dissimilar types. The scope of this issue is so vast and expanded that many schools and activists have attended to the subject at some point, and they have had different views on the subject of gender in general and non-binary gender in particular. In what follows, the concerns and issues of this research will be woven into the philosophical, critical, scientific, and literary trends on gender and non-binary gender, with the aim of clarifying the conceptions about gender-ambiguity and gender-neutrality as found in various fields.

As language can be claimed to be the main medium for humans' connections and thoughts, the discourses on sex and gender shall be the prior matter to attend to. The famous saying of poststructuralist philosopher, René Descartes "Je Pense Donc Je Suis" (I think, therefore I am) comes to one's mind. And it is language that makes the process of thinking possible. Descartes differentiates between the soul and the body. For him "the union between the soul and the body, the affective body, is what defines the human person" (Ong-Van-Cung, 2010, p. 44). In Descartes' view, the body is the sexed material, and the soul is the sexless metaphysic that thinks. Consequently, "I think, therefore I am" is a reference to a soul that thinks with its body. Kim Sang Ong-Van-Cung refers to these ideas, saying it is "a way of being in the world. Being a body-subject is not an '*I think*' but an '*I can*.' It is the grasp we have upon the world" (Ong-Van-Cung, 2010, p. 44). Yet, in another view, the phenomenologists relate everything to conceptual experiences; in parallel with Simone Weil who uses "I can, therefore I am" (Rozelle-Stone & Davis, 2018) instead of, *I think*. Through Phenomenological perspective, sexuality is the experience of the conception and understanding of the surroundings which is

possible only through the physical body that Descartes calls sexed. To put it briefly, body and soul are two individual factors but inseparable at the same time and sexuality is intertwined with thinking and forming conceptions through language.

Apparently, the role of language catches our attention not only in the definitions of sex and gender, but also in relation to the actual cases of gender discriminations. In this regard, one can pose the following questions: Does all the discrimination among genders come from language? Could men and women become equal social inhabitants if there were no such words to separate them in their language? Conversely, could they become more liberated with a word and definition for every variation and gender?

The above-mentioned questions are all important ones to be answered and this article tries to address them. However, starting with the last question in relation to the possibility of less discrimination with more possibilities for gender designations provided by language, we can make a comparison between the languages with binary pronouns and those with neutral ones. Countries in which the national languages make no distinctions between masculine and feminine nouns, such as Iran (Persian), Turkey (Turkish), or Korea (Korean), still show gender discrimination equally if not more than countries using masculine and feminine nouns and pronouns such as England (English), France (French), and Germany (German). Different feminist critics, and especially those who hold the French Poststructuralist linguistic perspective, have talked about the significance of this concept in language; unlike Irigaray, for Wittig, “language is an instrument or tool that is in no way misogynist in its structures, but only in its applications” (Butler, 2007, p. 36). If we take note of the feminists' views, the countries' developments and Foucault's ideas about power, sex and social rules, based on which sex is not as much in discourse, that it is in power and its subsequent social rules (Foucault, 1990; see also Falzon et al, 2013) and principles brought upon every feature of men and women, it could be concluded that each society's power and cultural elements have the upper hand against the utilized language in applying gender discrimination.

Therefore, what needs deconstruction or reconstruction is not the language primarily, but the social rules. Adding Butler's (2007) ideas, another deduction interprets gender to be a social performativity that is more based on nurture than nature. Birth sex, sexuality and desire, on the other hand, are more dependent on innate and mental factors. Among the numerous proposals for eliminating gender discrimination, the main ideas follow Foucault's path and post-structuralist approach by focusing on linguistics, which declare sex to “serve to reveal two critical, interrelated frameworks that shape these very discourses – truth and power” (Falzon et al, 2013, p. 157). Respectively, most critics and linguists prefer creating new gender and coining new words for each to eliminate the strict binary opposition.

A reason for coining new words is perhaps related to making the minor groups recognized and their needs answered in the society and law. This method had earned feminists large measures of success for needs that already existed but could not be expressed by the ones needing them – women. Of such words we can refer to “sexual harassment”, for which, there are various definitions and categories and as

well as laws and punishments now. Coining this word made the expression of many subjects possible for women, but still language lacks many vocabularies and pronouns to address minorities and their concerns, leaving them inarticulate and limiting them into the predefined binary categories, again as the means to serve the socio-political ends.

Inventing new words is not without repercussions either, since it might also bring more discrimination along that attention. Because, the more people learn about a fact, the more will be the judgment they would aim towards it. As Bersani has interpreted *Foucault's History of Sexuality* in his book *Homos* about power's function in our societies, "not by repressing spontaneous sexual drives but by producing multiple sexualities, and that through the classification, distribution, and moral rating of those sexualities, the individuals practicing them can be approved, treated, marginalized, sequestered, disciplined, or normalized" (Foucault, 1978 as cited in Bersani, 1996, p. 81). With such considerations, if there were no frames or expected performativity, would there still be as many people to change their bodies and go through the long-lasting and painful transformation to fit into the social definitions of normal?

Some critics presume sexual identity to be a result of social regulation, denying the need for any physical change under free self-expressions. Some other critics believe in the effects of genetics and biology in making a person a homosexual or transgender, claiming that freedom of performance would not suffice, and a transgender would have to gain the correct physical body in accordance with the mentality. Likewise, sexual desire for Foucault has a direct influence on the sexual identity of the subject and consequently their "sex" that categorizes and regulates their identity (Butler, 2007, p.130). Still some other critics limit this view solely to women and give the freedom of choice to men since it has always been believed that women seek out more and more masculinity within their own self. The basis for this statement is the Freudian ideas of phallus and phallogocentrism that put phallus as the central basis of sexuality and order, which women lack and seek out of envy. Plus, the phallogocentric theory of Derrida, supported by French school of *Écriture féminine*, states that men and/or phallus have the privilege over women in discourse (Holland, 2010). This theory also accounts for women's absence in society and their marginalization. The result is that the general social view would see power as parallel to masculinity and weakness to femininity.

Luce Irigaray defies women to be sexed bodies or subjects declaring that there is one single masculine gender, eliminating women as a separate gender, turned into a category outside sex and marginalized into an imagination and representation under the phallogocentric totality (Irigaray, 1985). Monique Wittig restricts sex and gender into two binary man and woman categories and proposes lesbianism as a way against sexism (Wittig, 1975). The binary division is for political reasons with the aim of serving the heterosexual society and economical purposes, and only those who submit to that are categorized as men or women, while others that defy the binary relations of the society such as homosexuals have no

categories to fall into. The same is apparent in Ong-Van-Cung's essay that indicates "The sexed being and sexual difference are historical products of an aesthetic and ethical character. Desire is represented by selected fragments or elements: gait, gaze and voice" (Ong-Van-Cung, 2010, p. 46). Judith Butler, on the other hand, claims in her book *Gender Trouble* that while sex might be restricted to the physical body, each sexed body can take on many genders (Butler, 2007). Gender is neither limited nor relevant to sex, but it is gained through actions that can go beyond the binary gender definitions and rules. Following Foucault, we could relate all the gender differences and discriminations to the outer power force and hierarchy that require such categories for their own sake. "Later he questions whether the notion of a true sex is necessary at all" (Butler, 2007, p. 127).

Mustering all the ideas brings some light to the mind with regard to sex and gender. While like Butler, we can call for a third gender to address lesbians (Butler, 2007, p. 26), we might also go further by applying this to every single person. As the personal psychology and identity of every individual is unique to themselves, so is their gender identity as a sub-category of their personal identity. This idea is compatible with the views of many third-wave feminists, who are more committed to "openness, diversity and plurality" (Dean, 2009, p. 336) in comparison with the second-wave feminists. The third-wave feminists, in their poststructuralist bending, question "the insistence on certain forms of knowledge as truth" and opt for encouraging individuality and agency in defining one's identity (Hardin & Whiteside, 2013, p. 13). Thus, it can be claimed that there are as many gender identities in the world as the number of individuals, which goes the same for their sexuality, desires, and sex, a claim also supported by some poststructuralist theories. Therefore, instead of claiming new sexes for all discriminated groups such as women, lesbians, and gays, even supposedly superior straight men, we could avoid categorizing all these variations altogether by giving every individual their own unique sexual identity that is peerless in the outer world - like their names - and eventually avoid the consequential political discrimination and oppression of the minority. Based on this, another theory that can be proposed would be erasing all the names and gender labels totally, leaving no such name as gender. As another substitute, gender could be regarded as a style inspired by sex and sexual preferences. In fact, gender, sex, and desire may not be dependent as closely on one another as it has always been believed, and that being gender-neutral cannot simply be applied to physical features of an individual, neither is it a causal or consequential factor for sexuality and sexual desire, but a mental issue and related to the inner psychology of every individual.

When discussing the total destruction of all cliché binaries, we refer to gender neutral persons who defy any gender labels of man, woman, male or female. These people have an inner struggle in adjusting to the traditional gender definitions and find themselves acting differently from the sex they are born with or the opposite one. However, few words such as pronouns and names are available for them to express their true natures and feelings. If their acquaintances do not regard them as he or she, they would have to use the only neutral pronoun in English language "it", causing discomfort or insult as this pronoun is applied to animals and

objects. Due to the scarcity of knowledge about the nature of non-binary humans, more than often, all gender and sexual minorities are considered under the same umbrella of gay or double gendered. The problem does not remain among the critics only. Even people who identify themselves as gender-neutral or agender have different understandings of their own gender identity. Jasmine Xie (2015) points out that the internet websites like *Tumblr* have become the main platform for non-binary people to learn about and express themselves. Allie Sarfaty, in her study, interviewed some of these people receiving different responses from each: “Casey described being agender as a ‘rejection of gender itself’ while Max described genderfluid as, ‘float[ing] around the masculine and feminine spectrum’” (Sarfaty, 2016, p. 20). Even from a scientific point of view, there are no specific groups named gender-neutral under research and all the aforementioned groups are called non-binary or queer, developing a tendency among all groups to name themselves as queer for the sake of a more tangible self-expression. Although recent studies have started to differentiate those groups from one another and acknowledged their existence independently, they are not immune to controversy.

The main limitation of this subject lies in the view that the study is related to that of women studies and feminist attitudes, so much so that the sub-category of homosexuals has been solely related to lesbians, eliminating the gay men, while, quite contrarily, it was the start of the talks about the lesbianism, homosexuality, and queer gender that brought about recognition upon the gay men. All these bring us to the very initial question about gender: where do the differences come from? Mustering the peer expressions, it appears plausible to consider that there is a close relationship between the sexual arousal and the exposed part of the female body. For instance, in the Muslim countries where women cover up fully, more body parts are considered as sexual attractions to men than that of Europeans who have light clothing in their daily lives. This issue likewise has been pointed out by Bertrand Russell (2009), in his book *Our Knowledge of the External World*. It has always been taught to Muslim women that covering hair, neck, neckline, and body is a necessity to protect innocence, while no similar claim is made about men. Therefore, perhaps it could be claimed that sexual and gender discrimination is partly dependent on visual appearances. Adding the assumption that the first impression comes to man by visual observation, we would like to argue that physical appearance has a bigger role in bringing gender discrimination into existence. Meanwhile, in Foucault’s idea, it was during a specific time in history that sex was inserted in our discourse: “that it is a discursive fact, i.e., a set of knowledge about sex, which are produced within the framework of the technologies of power; “sex” therefore contributes to the formation of a matrix of knowledge-power” (Ong-Van-Cung, 2010, p. 43). For instance, in case of cross-dressing simply by changing the looks, a woman is perceived as a man and therefore is presented with power and liberty in the same society that was limiting her so far.

Gender studies and gender ambiguity do not remain in the world of theories, and they are also present in practical scientific studies. The physical studies of the body have depicted irregularities in the gender identifications of individuals that they are born with. By this we mean to refer to a study by Dr. David C. Page

regarding the chromosomes of men and women, in which 10% of the collected DNAs were in contrast with the normal expectation of XX = Female and XY = male (Page, 1987). That said, the irregularities revealed themselves in the genitals and hormones of the volunteers, and the name dysgenetic was given to them. If sexual identities were as easy to determine, it would have been futile to conduct any studies over genes and DNA for a mere cliché of predetermined and solid unwavering physical sex. That being said, we could conclude that being deprived of gender could not only be a possible lab experiment but also it can happen in real life through chromosome irregularity or artificial manipulation. Interestingly enough, the theory is proposed by the IEET organization active in the field of postgenderism, which seeks the elimination of gender in every sense such as physical, psychological, and social (Dvorsky & Hughes, 2008).

Their essay proposes using biotechnology and neuroscience to fully eliminate the binary gender and create a complete new singular gender, and the possibility of gender-neutral humans in future. It presents complete gender-neutral body physics as a plausible matter in today's world, crashing down all the predetermined roles and definitions of sex and gender and depriving people of any enforced sexual identity, which is not free of manipulation either, for its implication of a society of cyborg humans as utopia. In this new world, Lacan's childhood stages (Nebus, 2013), Freudian ideas of sexuality and the pre-Oedipal or Oedipal stages would not exist, since there is no sex among the members of a family to relate to. We should not turn a blind eye on the massive change in the childbirth. There will no longer be a mother or father for a child; mothering in particular will be eliminated, but every cyborg-human will be able to father a child. We say cyborg-humans, for its similarity to Donna Haraway's cyborg theories and cyborg feminism (Haraway, 1991). Another extremity of this world is virtual satisfaction of sexuality as a means to reduce the sexist perspective arising from sexual relationships. The postgenderists are sacrificing both genders and losing a natural process for the sake of equality. We could call it a move for women but also against them simultaneously. This future world does not sound utopian, neither is it appealing in the eyes of the modern human, not to mention its concern with the binary straight relationship, turning blind eyes on queer groups as asexual, pansexual, and homosexual. On a brighter side, similar to other feminist groups, the group suggests removing the masculine and feminine pronouns as well as sexual definitions and categories, replacing them by genderless ones like "'ve', 'vis' and 'ver'" (Hulme, 1986).

The postgenderists' proposed elimination would have been a future possibility if the conditions changed in favor of the minority, and removed their need for explaining themselves to the heterosexual surroundings and discriminators. But as long as the elements leading to hierarchy exist, so does the need for new words and better expressions. Furthermore, eliminating gender would require more than the literal meaning of removing it in the biological sense, which, alone requires a great devotion from scientists and critics to become even possible prior to being understandable and tangible yet. An interpretation of this stance could be that a child possesses every expression specific to all genders and sexualities, but grows out of



them through conditionalization and gaining the male or female performativity gender roles. For that matter, we would like to agree with eliminating any label and sexual pronouns, since equality is gained through eliminating differences and not focusing on them. Through our lens, studying and verbalizing sexual types is more for the sake of our own understanding and means of satisfying our curiosity, rather than being the signs of our caring. The human nature requires us to put names and labels on every variety and deviation to be able to define and understand its nature with no guarantee for the subsequent reactions

One significant movement influenced by postgenderism is in psychology through the new theory proposed by the American feminist psychologist Sandra Ruth Lipsitz Bem, named Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), which tries to show masculinity and femininity as dimensions that all human beings possess at different degrees, and she admires gender-neutral and androgynous natures as complete humans (Bem, 1977). The test is advocating the point proposed by Helen Cixous about the third body or the other bisexuality - bisexuality for everyone - delineated as going beyond fixed binary masculine or feminine binary gender in individuals who have both features of male and female regardless of their birth sex (Bray, 2004). Repetition of the Bem Sex Role Inventory test during the years indicates that women have faced a great reduction in the scores of the feminine features, while men have stayed about the same. This could refer to the social changes of feminine definitions or the advancement the female gender has had in breaking the stereotype expectations. By advancement we mean the mustered courage of women throughout the years, mainly after the Second World War, when women had to take charge of all the social activities and masculine works with their men away in the front lines. Another possibility could be the increasing attention to the androgynous nature and consequential appearance of more gender-neutral people in society.

Even though Bem Sex Inventory survey indicates a decrease in discrimination, discrimination still remains in every society due to the centralization of phallus, affecting transgenders among others, who are indisputable victims of discriminations in more patriarchal societies. The most famous transgenders of Iran – Ms. Tarane Aram and Mr. Saman Arastu – both of whom have a successful post-surgery physical and mental adaptation to their new identities, in their interview, agree on the fact that turning from a man into a woman is more difficult and less accepted by the society (Tvpluss, 2014). The reason, Ms. Aram believes, is the phallogocentrism shadowing the society, which makes the people more willing to accept the women who seek it, than the men who move away from it. Therefore, even if the transformation is supported by the law and governments accept the new identity, the society would still refrain from accepting the new person, because of the inherent patriarchal patterns. This problem has resonance with the views of radical feminists who see patriarchy as the root of all inequalities in society and seek to dismantle patriarchy rather than adjusting to it. As Robert Jensen (2017) in his book *The End of Patriarchy: Radical Feminism for Men*, puts,



It may be that in the long run, patriarchy has not been a successful adaptation and will lead to the extinction of the species. As we look around the world at the threats to the ecosphere from unsustainable human systems deeply rooted in patriarchy's domination/subordination dynamic, that's not only plausible but increasingly likely. That suggests that patriarchy is an evolutionary dead-end. (p.108)

Lack of understanding from society has also made the expression of thought and therefore the life of non-binary people extremely difficult; consequently, it seems to be more proper for these minorities and victims of discrimination to have words and ways to express their need, for the sake of gaining more understanding. Yet, questions remain if we can call the transgenders who changed from being a woman or to being a woman as androgynous or even genderless. One thing for sure is that the perception of sexuality is dependent on different factors and is relative and conditional. It is an individualized embodiment based on situations, era, geographical traditions, cultures, and even the industrial development of that country. It is an acquired identity rather than a natural possession. The relative perception is also under the influence of social and legal conditions, as well as taboos, traditions, and religious beliefs. David Hester expresses his interesting insight on intersex bodies in his essay as: "There is no such thing as gender, it is all *sex*. And lots of it" (Hester, 2010, p. 220).

To clarify the point above, the example of Herculim Barbin would be the most expressive explanation. She is presented as a "happy limbo of a non-identity" (Foucault, 1980, p. xiii). With the birth name of Alexina, she was assigned as female but grew to realize her masculine body features during her twenties. Judith Butler purposefully uses the pronoun "'h/er' and 's/he'" (Butler, 2007, p. 133), about her in *Gender Trouble*. Morgan Holmes quotes Gilbert Herdt in her essay "Locating Third Sexes" who calls Barbin as a non-female and non-male, identifying with neither of the two sexes (Herdt, as cited in Holmes, 2004, p.6). Virginia Woolf and Jeffrey Eugenides use the inspiration to represent gender ambiguous heroes in their novels respectively entitled, *Orlando: A biography* (1945) and *Middlesex* (2002).

Numerous individuals suffer from similar struggles as Barbin due to their bodily features or psychology, or as Butler defines it, some sort of metaphysical homelessness (Butler, 1990, p. 134). Critics also have different approaches towards the source of gender and sexual identity, with one group believing sexual identity to be based on genes and another approaching it from social and psychological view. Dr. Siamak Zarifkar asserts that gender ambiguity and the feelings of wrong body have not been considered disorders as of the year 2015 (BBC Persian, 2016). Nevertheless, the most important point about gender, perhaps, is knowledge. Children who do not feel right with their assigned sex or have trouble performing the assigned roles do not have the insight into their sex and gender; therefore, what can bring a person to question their sexual and gender identity might be the expected behaviors of the parents and environment. But then again, referring to mustered data and the existence of homosexual transgenders, we might again shed doubt on the sole effect of nurture on this identity development.

## **Literature Realm**

Many literary figures along with other women have fought for equal rights in their own era, and their endeavors occupy the concerns of this paper hereafter. While some women fight for positions in economic fields and others in education, writers have the double role of fighting for equality in their own field and spreading the views about equality among common people. Literature and fiction's history goes as far as the emergence of language, simultaneously earning the attention of all philosophers and critics of history from Plato to Gilles Deleuze, with ideas about language converging or diverging from one another. Many contemporary critics believe that fictional works have a positive impact on the readers' ethical conceptions and perceptions of their surroundings and the world in general. As Nietzsche believes, literature's function is deconstructing: "it complicates, it confuses, it splinters; it confronts us with the alien and the unknown, and tends to undermine rather than refine our perception of the world" (O'Leary, 2009, p. 138). Foucault, also, follows Nietzsche's view favoring literature, particularly during the 1960s, when literature had taken a revolt attitude towards language, politics, and the socio-economic conditions of the era. Since literary works, in many cases, reflect the beliefs of the society in the most direct way, we can have a close realization of the common trends of thought in each era, through literary works.

What postgenderists proposed for the future of humanity has long been portrayed in fictional worlds created by writers and the gender-neutral language has been practiced by the fictional characters ahead of being theorized in the real world. Unlike reality, the only limit for writers is the expanse of their imagination. Fantasy can go as wild and as vast as desired, while reality is imprisoned by physicality and conditional relations. Through our lenses, not matching with the social definitions of the assigned sex drowns victims in a kind of mental-sexual abyss that can be interpreted as neutrality. However, this androgynous condition has been appreciated in literature and mythology throughout history for its complementary feature. Maybe for that reason, among gender ambiguity subjects, androgyny is the one with the longest history.

Aristophanes' story, as is told in Plato's *Symposium*, declares that originally, there were three sexes, not two, and we were doubly formed, not individual: male and male, female and female, and male and female. Zeus split the spherical creatures in two as punishment for their arrogance, causing each to experience the loss of the other – a loss that we long to redeem through sexual union. (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 2)

Greek mythology has had an immaculate play on gods and goddesses, like Aphrodite and Hermes' pretty son, Hermaphroditus who turns intersex after showering in a cursed river. His name became the source name for the later intersexed physics in biology both in humans and animals that can function as male and female simultaneously. Another more famous example is Tiresias, also mentioned in *The Waste Land* (1922) of T.S Eliot, the priest who gets cursed to have a female body for seven years. Tiresias as a woman, gets married, bears children and is even believed to be an infamous prostitute. Tiresias has a key role in the third part

of *The Waste Land* (1922), entitled *The Fire Sermon*, as the main narrator, because for Eliot, experiencing the life both as a woman and man is what makes Tiresias complete and enables him to see the world fully and completely: "I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives, / Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see . . ." (Eliot, 1922). Therefore, he narrates the story in the most neutral way and with the utmost wisdom required, while any other narrator with the perspective of only a man or a woman would not only be insufficient for a complete perception but also could add judgments to events and meanings. The point is that being androgynous in the previous works have been received differently both by the characters, the writer and reader. In case of the mythology, Hermaphroditus disliked his female and male body and wished that anyone showering in the same river face the same transformation he underwent. Tiresias, however, highly praised his own gender ambiguity. In a more recent work, *Orlando: A Biography* by Virginia Woolf, a man changes into the body of a woman and lives for 300 years without aging. The novel depicts other non-binary characters such as the androgynous Archduke Harry and Orlando's last husband. Woolf's *Orlando* praises gender ambiguity as a means for taking attention into gender matters, which has attracted the attention of feminists for the most part. Like Tiresias, Orlando grows to like the advantages of being a woman, "Praise God that I'm a woman" (Woolf, 1928, p. 96).

Cross dressing as the means of neutralizing and adding ambiguity of the gender had been utilized as frequently in literature as in the real life. The method has been used by many women in history to gain more freedom, from George Eliot who used a male pseudonym partly to sell her works to people actually disguising as a member of the other sex. Most talented young girls enthusiastic about the world would disguise as men to attend school, learn science, and even buy books and carry out chores that are considered forbidden, shameful or too difficult for the same person clothed as the woman she is. Compared with the Western literature, cross dressing has a bigger role in Eastern works. For instance, the Chinese legend of Mulan portrays a woman dressing as a man, and she has many things in common with the visual character of Éowyn in the series, *The Lord of The Rings*, since both girls dress up as men to help their fathers so that they cannot be prevented from joining the army because of their gender. A similar story has been written in Persian national epic poem, *Shahname*, about Gordafarid, a young girl who fights against one of *Shahname*'s heroes, Sohrab and delays his army from reaching her country. Among the works of western literature, perhaps the most familiar cross-dressing character is Portia in Shakespeare's famous play, *Merchant of Venice*. Portia along with her waiting maid disguise themselves as a doctor of the law and a clerk respectively to be able to enter the court and save the main protagonist, Antonio. Perhaps this change of social roles gained by these characters, simply through changing clothes, is the best proof for the performativity and social constructed nature of gender roles.

Considering the fact that society considers anything outside the realm of straight men and women dangerous, and any agency for women a threat, many writers point that sometimes non-binary gender performativity arises from the oppressions and searching for liberty and equality, rather than biology. In this

regard, in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the matter of homosexuality and queer gender made its way more emphatically into the works of literature. For instance, many of Sylvia Plath's works are in relation to gender and the oppressed life of women, among which we can refer to the poem "Lesbos" which directly attends to the matter of homosexuality, showing the affair with another woman as a way to move out of the imposed oppressed role (Plath, 2015), to gain liberty and agency and reclaim the lost power inside women:

I should sit on a rock off Cornwall and comb my hair.  
I should wear tiger pants, I should have an affair.  
We should meet in another life, we should meet in air,  
Me and you. (Plath, 2015, pp. 29-32)

Still, in general, the concept of androgyny is considered a gain for women in patriarchal societies, since gaining a masculine side in this form will help them not to have the lacks and limitations of female sex as Freud believed. On the other hand, it is a disadvantage for men, descending on the stairs of hierarchy, and giving up on the privileges of masculinity in a phallogocentric world. It could be concluded that this new gender is used mostly by feminists and it is equally received better by female readers. In line with the feminist movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the world of literature has focused on sexuality matters in late 90s, concentrating on homosexuals, lesbians, and transgender people, calling for lesbianism as a method to eliminate gender or to add extra gender types to the binary male / female tradition.

The most iconoclastic genre to follow this trend has been Science fiction works and female writers that attended the matter more abundantly and profoundly. Theodore Sturgeon's *Venus Plus-X* (1960) explores a completely new society in the future of earth. The book is very similar to Ursula Le Guin's (1977) novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Both of those novels attend to the matter of gender-neutrality and gradually develops from the confusion of such gender ambiguity towards the appreciation of it by the main character. In this regard, the narrator of *The Left Hand of Darkness* explains that, "Our entire pattern of socio-sexual interaction is nonexistent here. They cannot play the game. They do not see one another as men or women" (Le Guin, 1977, p. 49). Another book, in the same style is *Ancillary Justice* (2013) by Ann Leckie that is usually compared to that of Le Guin's for the dissent language and conflicting pronouns. A point worth mentioning is the imaginations of mutual use of unisex future as a utopia, which again lies in the hands of complementary dualist elements, delineated as light and darkness in *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

Light is the left hand of darkness  
And darkness the right hand of light.  
Two are one, life and death, lying  
Together like lovers in kemmer,  
Like hands joined together,  
Like the end and the way. (Le Guin, 1977, p. 153)

## Conclusion

All said, in our modern/postmodern world, the last judgments are left to the receivers of the texts, whether they are readers, viewers or downloaders, to decide on the message and nature of the presented gender neutrality, ambiguity and androgyny. For, as the phenomenologists believe, the meaning lies in the conception and perception, which will never be the same from one person to another, as all individuals connect differently with their surroundings (including the texts they read) and perceive everything in a unique way to themselves, eventually developing as unique a meaning and understanding as their perceptions, yet leave with everlasting changes and personality revolutions.

From this review of the developments in the gender studies, we can also conclude that sex, gender, and sexuality are physical and mental functions that might affect each other, yet they do not define one another. Discrimination, per se, does not arise from gender but as a subsequent of all discriminations, it arises from lack of knowledge and cultural bugs that are under the power systems of societies, as Foucault has proposed. This is not to underestimate the impacts of literary works and other cultural products in this endeavor, as they have consistently been the primary sources of insight into the lived experience of discriminations, including gender discriminations. Of course, the fictional texts have the additional advantage of bringing the readers inside the story and earning their sympathy and relying on the imaginations of the readers for the part of visualizing the characters flavored with emotional bounds, and, with imagination being boundless, such texts are the best vehicles for representing gender ambiguous characters, who normally defy conventional visualizations of body.

This article attempted to go through many noteworthy views of the scholars of different fields on the concept of gender with a particular emphasis on gender neutrality and the ensuing discriminations. Some of the views which were reviewed were attempts for defining gender, some for defying gender, and some for fighting against gender discriminations. As concluding notes, and as related to the particular emphasis of this article, here we would like to highlight Judith Butler's (2007) views on gender as trouble, postgenderists' views and of course the works of literature which have any bearing on the subject of gender. Taking note of Butler's theory, we can claim that gender discrimination explicitly can be reduced if people pay more attention to the nonessentiality and constructedness of gender. The postgenderists' ideas might seem farfetched and controversial for the extreme changes and manipulations of natural life that they propose, but their views can be applied more usefully to the real world if we can think of the actualization of their dreams of complete equality of genders as metaphors applicable to the human mind instead of the body. The same can go with the literary works that let us imagine characters who do not identify with the conventional genders. What postgenderists have proposed in the physical sense and what the writers and artists have defined in their gender-neutral worlds could be metaphors for a possible real world in which gender discrimination is considerably reduced, and instead of body of the inhabitants, the perspectives of its citizens have genderless and gender neutral. All in all, there is a long way for actualization of the dream of acceptance of all varieties of gender

orientation in societies, but the incessant struggles of the people in the realm of intellect for this purpose, whether philosophers, critics, scientists, and writers, along with many grass root activities such as changes in the parenting styles, can make us think that the dream of being at ease with one's gender is perhaps not an impossible one to materialize. This study can further be expanded outside of literature studies by relating the gender-neutral concept to social studies of queer-gender and non-gender people living in the real society around us, challenging the traditional negative views about them

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