

GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS COLLEGE

GOD IN TRANSITION:  
PROCESS ANALYSES OF SEX/GENDER SYSTEMS

SENIOR THESIS

RELIGION 399

RELIGION DEPARTMENT

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## INTRODUCTION

### *In the Beginning, there was Flesh.*

That's where each of us started, isn't it? A bit of flesh, screaming, naked, newly out of the womb? And The Possibilities. Standing there, everyone in the room feels a little bit awed just thinking about The Possibilities for this new life.

### *And the Flesh Became Sex.*

☐ M ☒ F

"It's a Girl!"

Pink bows and pink  
cards and pink baby  
showers.

☒ M ☐ F

"It's a Boy!"

Blue shirts and blue  
cigars and manly back-  
pats all around.

☐ M ☐ F

"It's a...um...we're not

sure." *Intersexed.*  
Surgery. Hormones.  
Silence and fear.

### *And Sex Begat Gender.*

☐ M ☒ F

Dolls and princess  
costumes. "Act like a  
lady." Future mother.  
Maybe even a teacher.

☒ M ☐ F

Baseball. Trucks.  
Roughhousing. "Boys  
will be boys." Future  
Man of the House.

☐ M ☐ F

('Neither' doesn't exist.)

(Check only M or F)

"Really M." "Really F." Go to  
the doctor. Take your pills. Don't  
ask questions.

*And Sex and Gender Changed.*    M   x   F  x   M     F    M     F

Prom Dresses.

Football team. "Don't

('Either' doesn't exist.)

Boyfriends. Innocent

be a pussy/sissy/fag!"

(failure to check the

Young Woman.

Dad's porno mags.

correct box is a felony)

*And Changed (And Yet it Stayed the Same).*    M   x   F  x   M     F    M     F

Woman. Wife. Mother.

Man. Cubicle drone.

(N)Either doesn't exist.

Irrational. Bitch. Nag.

Beer-swilling football

excuse me. Intersexed at birth.

Working two shifts:

lover. Cheap strip clubs.

Surgery destroyed sexual function.

underpaid and unpaid.

Impossible porn fantasy.

Doctors lied. Told to be (fe)male.

Feel (fe)male. Feel erased.

*And Sex and Gender Begat Alienation.*    M   x   F  x   M     F    M     F

I'm a woman. I like

I'm a man. I like being a

I'm something else

being a woman. But it

man. But it shouldn't be

entirely. And I don't fit.

shouldn't be like this.

like this.

It shouldn't be like this

*\*Pause\**

Wait a minute. Weren't we supposed to have possibilities back when we were just flesh? Weren't there all sorts of different options for becoming all sorts of different things? How is it that when we got sexed and gendered that suddenly our possibilities

got so much narrower? We changed, yes. We outgrew the sexes and genders of childhood. From girls, we became women, and from boys, we became men. But we never quite escaped the expectations of that initial pronouncement of sex (even though for some of us, this pronouncement could be made only after surgical sex assignment), and we never felt like these expectations entirely fit us. We live in America in the New Millennium, in an age where we're so darn progressive and open-minded, and yet this rigid, dualistic, oppositional, and hierarchical sex/gender system remains both in place and largely unchallenged.

As we—individuals who feel uncomfortable with sex/gender categories as well as women and men who are frustrated by the limitations of sex/gender expectations—push against the boundaries of our boxes, we find that sex and gender are omnirelevant. We find that these categories are necessary for personhood in American society. A person must have a sex/gender and check the M box or the F box in order to be legally born, get an ID or drivers license, get a job, go to school, get a bank account, loan or credit card, get medical treatment, take out an insurance policy, subscribe to a magazine, get an email account, fill out surveys/forms/applications, and even to drop a class at Gustavus. And the requirements of gender extend beyond the statistical paper trail of sex/gender. It is not simply a part of forms or limited to them, but is a part of how people live (and are expected to live) their lives.

Society has expectations about how men and women should dress, eat, talk, walk, shave, not shave, dance, play, date, love, fuck, and look at their nails. Peeing is of great concern to society; where, how, and with how many good friends people pee is a major demarcation of gender lines. Not only are people to follow the gender rules, such as

peeing in the proper restroom and shaving the right places, but they are to do so in a way that clearly marks them as male and female. People are to display themselves in a way so that other people can discern their gender; to fail to do so is beyond impolite—it is a cruel hoodwinking of benign gender interpreters. That Pat, the ambiguously gendered character of Saturday Night Live, remains humorous and interesting to viewers, and that we feel nervous or embarrassed when unsure if someone should be called sir or ma'am demonstrates the reality of our societal need to know and display gender at all times.

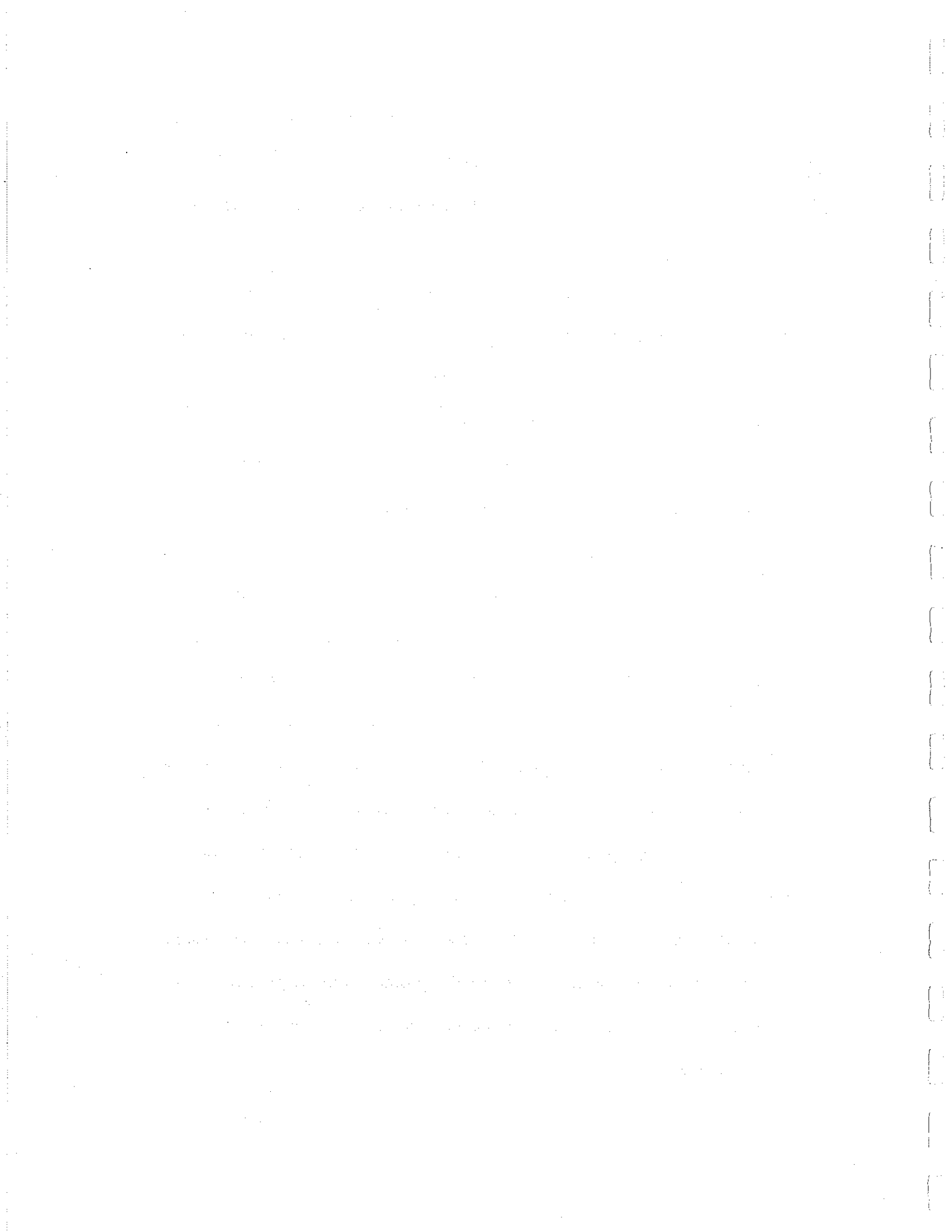
These expectations of sex/gender as well as the social sanctions for breaking them force each of us back into our sex/gender place. We continue enacting our sex/gender; we play our parts, and day after day after day we repeat our safe sex/gender dance. Even through this dance, however, we sense that there is more. There are other possibilities—other ways that we might be and other things that we might become. We are told to remain the same, but we sense our own change, our own transition. We are pulled towards creative transitions of self by the power of infinite possibility. The same limitlessness of possibility that we feel before flesh becomes sexandgender presents itself at every moment, and the same limitation that we experience through forced sexandgendering discourages us from this creative transition.

*In the Beginning, there was Process.*

Process theology is a model that seeks to explicate how actual things come into being and exist in relation to other actual things. It explains how possibilities for becoming, that which we sense we might be, are made into actualities, and it also explains how the events of the past influence our selection of these possibilities.

Additionally, process theology posits that God is inextricably interrelated with the world; God gives possibilities to the world and receives the world within Godself. If these claims are correct, and the process model is able to explain the way that existing things continue to exist, then the model ought to offer insight into the ways that social systems work and the theological significance of these systems. Specifically, a process-based analysis of sex/gender systems arises from the responses to this critical question: How does process theology explain the existence of sex/gender systems, and how do these systems, in turn, affect Divine/world relations in the process model?

This question is addressed in three steps. It begins in Chapter One with an explication of the process model, including its models of individual becoming, relational existence, and Divine/world relation. Chapter Two offers an overview of gender theory and critical analyses of sex/gender systems as they are understood outside of the process model. Chapter Three synthesizes the two schools of theory; it offers a process analysis of sex/gender systems and argues that these systems limit the fullness of relations between the world and the Divine. If process theology has the explanatory power that it claims to have, then the process model should offer a useful means of understanding not only how sex/gender systems come into existence, but it should also provide a new analysis of how individuals and society participate in the perpetual creation of these systems. Additionally, it should explain that it is not only humans who experience oppression and alienation because of sex/gender systems, but that God also feels within Godself this oppression and alienation. Sex/gender systems are not only limits to creative self-transformation of ourselves as humans, but they prevent our full and creative participation in the Divine.





## CHAPTER 1

### PROCESS

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore  
So do our minutes hasten to their end;  
Each changing place with that which goes before,  
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.

Shakespeare, Sonnet LX

Poets and theologians alike have pondered long and with varying degrees of eloquence on the nature of the progression of time. Shakespeare likens this to the persistent movement of waves; his words are a picture of ceaseless forward motion. Wave replaces wave; minute replaces minute. Each peak is distinct, yet the content of the wave is never separate from the body of water that is its origin. The arrival of each wave at the pebbled shore emanates its own lapping, crashing, thud-thud-thudding, yet the maritime cacophony is not sporadic, but it is a continual roar, a constant soft sloshing, a symphony of sea and surf. Minutes, too, travel separately, insistently forward. One follows another, "changing place with that which goes before," and yet they are not separate from the pool of time that is their origin. Seconds creep forward, individual and distinct as the tick-tocking of a pre-digital clock, and as intricately interwoven as the lullaby they compose. Moments, like waves, are distinct but never separate; they are in

perpetual motion, one after another after another. This is what process thinkers, in less eloquent and succinct terms, refer to as process.

### *Process Models of Existence*

The process model of theology asserts, aptly enough, that all actual things are processes. This theology affirms the primacy of change, dynamism, and perpetual creativity in the world.<sup>1</sup> Rather than arguing that God is an unchanging absolute separate from a world that languishes in sin, process theology is a theology of movement and complexity where God is fundamentally involved in and intertwined in an ever-changing world. Additionally, like Shakespeare's sonnet—although often somewhat lacking in poetic brilliance—process theology provides a language with which to discuss entities and occasions as part of a world that is perpetually in motion. In the same manner that Shakespeare tells of waves, process thought describes entities and occasions as processual actualities rather than static things.<sup>2</sup> Process thought looks to explicate dynamism, and for this reason, it uses a vocabulary of its own, one that aims to express movement and perpetuality of occasions. The process model, which I intend to explicate in this chapter, is the basis of further arguments about the ways in which process thought is useful for understanding sex/gender systems.

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<sup>1</sup> John B. Cobb Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 14.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, "actuality," "actual occasion," and "actual entity" are used interchangeably except in cases of reference to the divine. Marjorie Suchocki provides this definition of actual entity: "Each unit of process is called an actual entity; it is a drop of experience that comes into existence through the creative process of concrescence." Actual occasions are also units of processes; the primary difference between the two is that God is described as an actual entity but not an actual occasion. Marjorie Suchocki, *God-Christ-Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology*, rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1989), Glossary.

The process model first outlines the ways in which individual actualities (occasions and entities) come into being. The internal parts of individual processes are described in terms of *selection* of possibilities, *concretization* of possibilities into actualities, and *satisfaction* of the actualization of possibilities. Possibilities are understood to come from the *mental pole*, and completed actualities make up the *physical pole*, which is the context for becoming. Secondly, the model explicates how actualities are related to each other. This relationality is described in terms of *prehension*, *internal constitution*, and *repetition*. Third, the process model provides an understanding of how God fits into the processual becoming of worldly actualities. In this model, God is supremely related to the world and is also expanding infinitely beyond it to provide ever-new possibilities for the world. God gives and receives, prehends and provides.

#### Individual Processes of Actualization

To begin, processes need to be understood as very small units of time. While the vocabulary of process works well for understanding larger and more complex things, such as sex/gender systems, it is easiest to start at the smallest units of existence, called actual occasions. Each actual occasion has a past, a present, and a future. It senses opportunities for becoming, takes place in a specific context, comes into being at a particular moment, and influences future actualities. The past is called, in process-speak, the physical pole, and consists of all other actual occasions that have already happened. The possibilities for becoming are called the "mental pole," which is made up of possibilities for the future. The present is the moment in which possibilities from the mental pole are selected using feelings of the past from the physical pole and are then

made concrete. This is called concrescence; possibilities are actualized, experience satisfaction, and then become new influences for the future.<sup>3</sup> A diagram of the Process of Actualization looks like this:

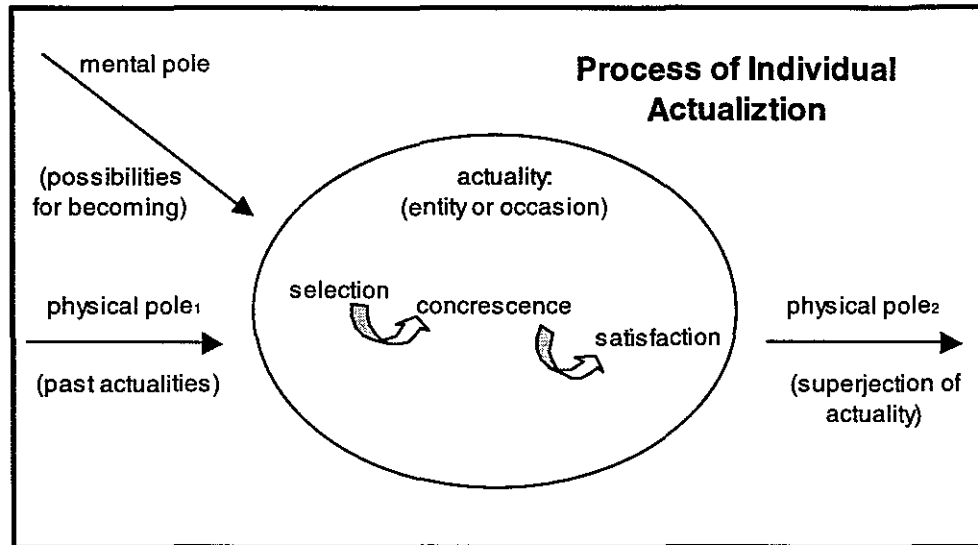


Fig. 1: Process of Individual Actualization

Each individual actual occasion comes into being in this way, but individual moments, while distinct, are never separate from the whole. An actuality is always related to both its past and future.

### Relation

If one studies only the individual process of actualization, it may appear that these individual bubbles of time are processes within themselves, but have little real relation to other processes. To illustrate the relation inherent in and necessary to the process model, Shakespeare's waves are once again useful. Not only are the waves not separate from the

<sup>3</sup> A more in-depth explication of the process model can be found in the appendix of Suchocki, *God-Christ-Church*, 237-246. I intend to focus on parts of the model rather than describing the whole.

water, but the waves could not exist without that body of water. Waves are distinct entities that are constantly changing, but they are connected to things that have existed in the past: other waves, moving bodies of water, wind, the shore, and the gravitational pull of the moon. Each individual wave is dependent upon and related to outside influences. It is that which goes before the wave that causes it to be; its existence contributes to the context in which further waves will become. In process thought, the physical pole of previously actualized occasions provides the context in which individual occasions come into being, and once an actualization has occurred, it becomes part of the context for future actualizations.

In process thought, therefore, no occasion takes place outside of the context of the established facts of the past; these "facts," must be taken into account when selecting possibilities. In process thought, "facts" are not understood to be things that are true, proven, or scientific. Rather, they are things that are part of the physical pole; they are past actualities that may be felt. In the case of Shakespeare's waves, the water, wind, and previous waves are all facts. Additionally, Shakespeare's observation of the waves is a fact. Even though it is an individual activity rather than an object and seems not to be something that traditionally might be considered a fact, process thought identifies all actual things that have already happened as "facts." Thus Shakespeare's observation is a fact. My writing of this sentence is a fact. A reader's reading of this sentence is a fact. Memories provide a particularly good example. People's memories are facts as are physical entities such as rocks and trees and bodies. Since all things in the past are fixed, they are facts. Our perceptions of them may change, but those changes necessarily occur in new processes that must take into account their predecessors.

It is for this reason that actual occasions, once completed, do become a part of the physical pole and do become static facts of the past, but at the same time they do not simply fade out into oblivion. Process theory states that actual occasions of the past have two natures, a subjective nature and a superjective nature.<sup>4</sup> The subjective nature of a process is what that particular occasion meant to itself; this meaning is internal. Occasions also have a superjective nature, meaning that past occasions have influence over future possibilities. Memories provide an example of the difference between the superjective and subjective nature of actual occasions. Memories are vignettes—fragments of stored information about the past. They had a meaning of their own, and we remember what certain events meant to us at the time that they happened. At the same time, memories tell us about future possibilities. We evaluate possibilities in light of our past experiences; while memories never dictate future occasions, they alter the context in which possibilities are valued and selected.

### *Prehension*

The context that the facts of the physical pole provide through superjection is never simply a neutral setting or a blank canvas on which to paint the future. In order for any possibility to become actual, it must be selected. This selection is based on a prehension of the superjected past. Prehension involves a “feeling” or sensing of the facts of the past; it is the means through which past actualities have effects on future possibilities. It is impossible for any entity other than God toprehend all past actual occasions, however. Even memories, most of which we do not invoke at the moment of making every mundane decision, do not include the entirety of past occasions. For this

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<sup>4</sup> Suchocki, *God-Christ-Church*, 239.

reason, some things are prehended, taken into account for decision-making purposes, and other things are negatively prehended, disregarded either temporarily or entirely. The mix of prehended and negatively prehended actual occasions of the past is the context and selection criteria for the concrescence of possibilities.<sup>5</sup>

One should not be misled into thinking, however, that prehension and negative prehension are entirely voluntary activities. Some facts of the past make compelling cases for prehension because they seem in all occasions to be true and carry serious consequences for prehensive failure. For example, people rarely negatively prehend gravity. In fact, they generally anticipate that it will, indeed, be affecting any chosen action since in the past gravity has always occurred. Because the paradigm in which people always have engaged in activities has always included gravity, prehension of gravity is not properly called a voluntary choice. Rather, people are compelled—on pain of potentially grave injury—to consistently prehend it. Also, prehension is not necessarily conscious. In order for a wave to have motion, it prehends the movement of the water and the air; this is not a conscious activity, but a response to previous occasions that have superjective influence over the wave's own actuality. In this sense, prehension is neither entirely voluntary nor conscious, but it is the process of taking into account one's context.

### *Internal Constitution*

The means by which actualities are related to each other is called, in process thought, "internal constitution." Prehension entails not simply knowing or recognizing

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<sup>5</sup> A more detailed discussion of selectivity and prehension can be found in Suchocki, *God-Christ-Church*, 242-3.

another actuality, but it involves taking a past actuality into one's being. It is a taking of account that changes the actualization of an entity in the moment of its becoming.

Prehended past actualities therefore internally constitute becoming entities. The substance of becoming is the prehended facts of the past. For example, as you (the reader) read this sentence, you are able to understand it because you take it into yourself. It has meaning to you because you have prehended it. It exists not only as ink on paper, but as a meaningful constitution of your own thought. This constitution is occasionally temporary; your continued prehensions of these sentences are not likely to continue to constitute you throughout the day. However, your prehension of things more close to you, such as your body, memories, family, friends, home, work, and so on tend to be prehended consistently in actualizations of yourself. It is your prehension of your life that internally constitutes you. Similarly, individual's prehensions of other people, systems, societal expectations, and so on come to constitute them. Sex/gender systems are one important prehended element of internal constitution. It is through this process of internal constitution that individual actualities are able to relate—that is, to meaningfully take into account—other individual actualities.

### *Repetition*

Not only do events from the past provide a context for valuing new possibilities, but they also push for their own repetition. Outside the context of process theology, language reflects the tendency towards and legitimacy of repeated actions. We speak in terms of morning routines, legal precedents, forces of habit, and every piano teacher's favorite aphorism: "practice makes perfect!" In process-speak, the power of repetition is



described this way: "The power of the past, at its most basic level is a call for conformity—but conformity, in the very nature of the case, is impossible."<sup>6</sup> In the case of the piano student who practices for perfection, this means that while the actions of playing a piece may be repeated time and again, no two times are exactly the same. Each time is done in the context of having practiced the piece x number of times in the past. The hundredth rendition of the piece is done in the context of having already played it ninety-nine times and aims toward further repetition with the hundred-and-first rendition.<sup>7</sup>

The force of repetition is indeed a powerful one in process thought, but repetition is never inevitable. While the physical pole encourages repetition of past occasions, the mental pole presents possibilities not only for the same actions to be repeated, but also new possibilities that have not yet been enacted. Novelty is the presentation of possibilities that are not simply modified versions of repetitious activities.<sup>8</sup> Instead of the hundred-and-second rendition of "chopsticks," what is presented to our young musician is an entire music library. Novelty is the set of possibilities that have never been actualized in the past; they are opportunities for creativity that are newly presented for each actual occasion. Through novelty, processes are dynamic and changing despite the power of repetition. The model of relational existence now looks like:

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<sup>6</sup> Suchocki, *God-Christ-Church*, 240.

<sup>7</sup> Suchocki makes a similar argument about the repetition of cigarette smoking. I think piano playing is clearly a more wholesome example, but credit goes to Suchocki, *God-Christ-Church*, 241.

<sup>8</sup> Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 27.

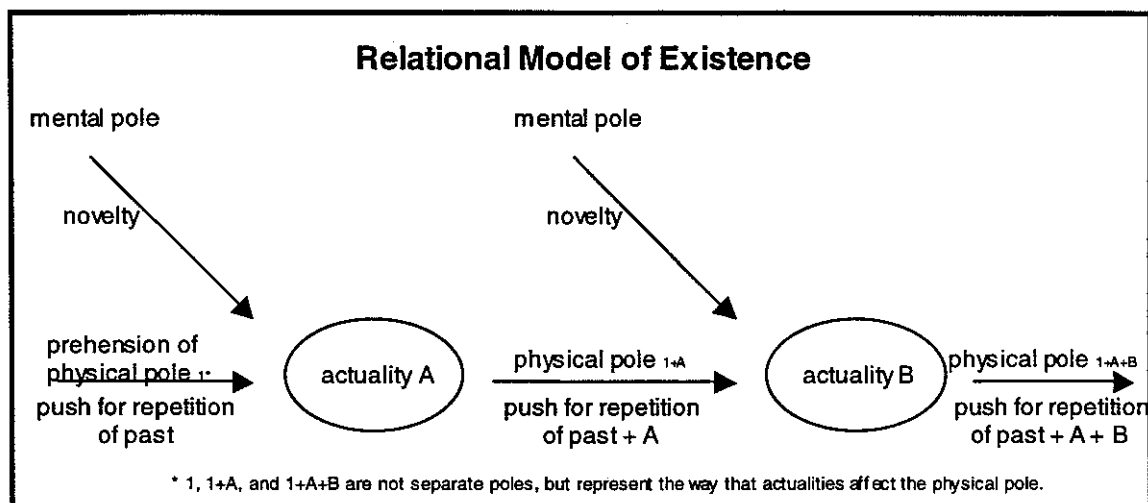


Fig. 2: Relational Model of Existence

### *Process Model of Theology*

Process thought divides existence into tiny segments and discusses the interaction of past, present, and future, of novelty and repetition, of prehension, selection, concrescence, and satisfaction, but, so far, the model of relational existence only hints at what or where God might be. To begin, the God indicated by process theology is one that is intimately a part of the relational existence model; that means that the concept of "God" departs from many traditional theological concepts. John Cobb and David Griffin point out five things in particular that the God of process theology is not: God is neither a "Cosmic Moralist," nor an "Unchanging and Passionless Absolute," nor a "Controlling Power," nor a "Sanctioner of the Status Quo," nor is God Male.<sup>9</sup> Rather, God is within and through the process model, which now looks like this:

<sup>9</sup> Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 8-9.

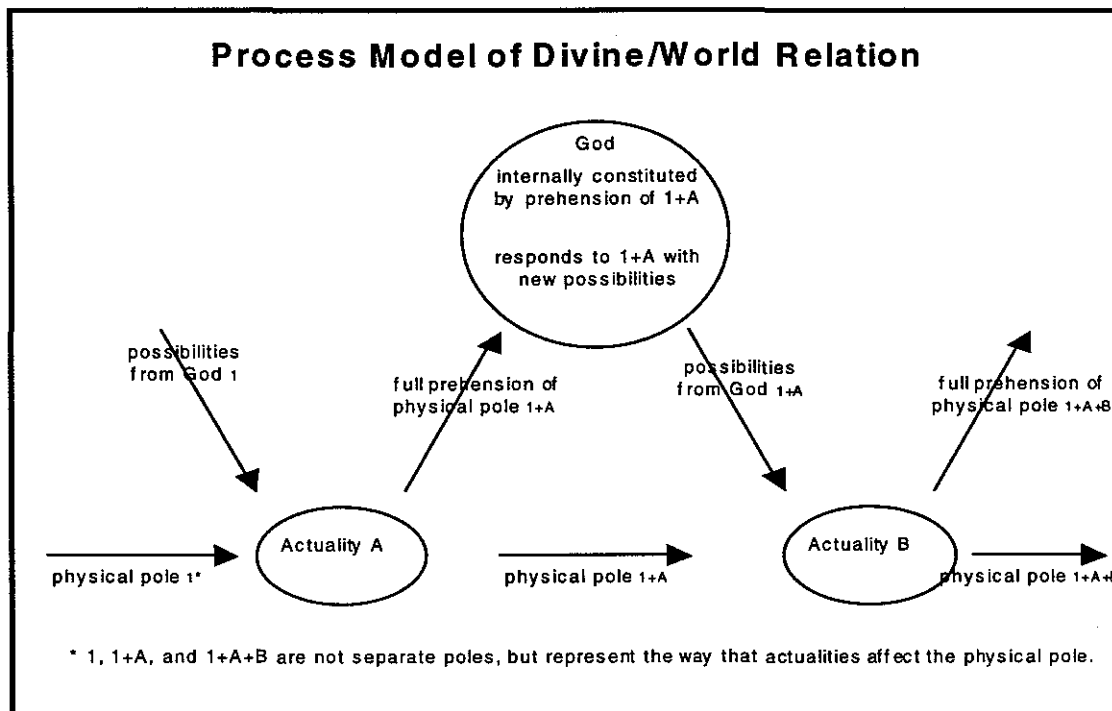


Fig. 3: Process Model of Divine/World Relation

### *God as Source of Possibilities*

In the process model, God first appears as the source of all possibilities. While the past has power over actual occasions through prehension of the superjective nature, the physical pole is not the sole influence over actualities. The future and the possibilities for novelty it presents also have a powerful pull over the present. Cobb and Griffin point out that it is in novelty that God is most evident. While the past encourages repetition, God presents previously unactualized possibilities to the world. "It is God who, by confronting the world with unrealized opportunities, opens up a space for freedom and self-creativity."<sup>10</sup> In process models, God is the source of possibilities that are different

<sup>10</sup> Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 29.

than the facts of the past—the power for creative transformation of the world. It is the power of possibility that allows and encourages dreams, hopes, and goals.

### *God in Relation*

God is not, however, simply a neutral source of possibilities. That would put God in a place of stasis, uninvolved with the world, nothing more than a grab bag of novelties. Rather, God experiences intimate interrelation with the world. Relation, as it is conceived in the process model consists of the prehension of actual occasions of the physical pole. Every becoming actual entity is related to prior actual occasions that it is able toprehend, but in most cases, complete prehension of the past is impossible. For example, when individual humans select possibilities for becoming, they do so in relation to selected parts of their own past, their families and friends, education, social conventions, and so on. However, they can never take into account all of their own experiences, all people and cultures, and every single event of the past; to do so would be, for a human being, paralyzing in its complexity. For this reason, human beings are always only in partial relation to the totality of the physical pole. In contrast, God is not only capable of prehending the entirety of the physical pole, but God does so in every instance. God experiences complete relation with the world.

That God fully prehends the world is not simply an academic statement. This notion does not simply convey a conviction of divine omniscience of past and present. Prehension is not reducible to knowledge or awareness; it is a taking account of entities in such a way that requires both internal and external responses. Like all actual entities, God is a process and therefore is the harmonization of possibilities and past actual

entities. However, unlike all other actual entities, God does not have to select certain possibilities and prehensions in order create harmony and satisfaction. God is capable of harmonizing all possibilities and all past actualities within Godself. This harmonization of all things is what defines God as the most supremely related being, but it does not make God unchanging. If God is in relation to all things, then the prehension of the world necessarily changes, at each instance of prehension, Godself. If God prehends actualities, then God must also respond to those actualities. God's response includes both a valuation of actualities and the perpetual provision of more possibilities.

While the substance, or internal constitution, of God is perpetually changing through prehension of the world, the way that God acts, is, in process thought, constant. If it were not in some way constant, it would be impossible to expect that God would continue toprehend the world and would continue to present possibilities to the world. The substance of God is thus changing, but the form of God is not. That God prehends the world and responds to it are arguments that posit some constancy of form of the Divine. Additionally, some parts of process thought argue that God's love and grace are constant in the same way that prehension and response are constant. By this argument, God prehends the world in love and responds in grace. This love and grace is an inextricable part of God's feeling of the world.

### *Internal Constitution*

How is it that God "feels" actualities in a way that surpasses a simple knowledge or awareness of their existence? Process theologians explain that God's prehension of the world necessarily requires that God is internally constituted by the actualities of that

prehension. Internal constitution means that actualities that take place within the world are received within, and actually constitute, Godself. For example, if one person kicks another, God does not simply know about or observe the kick, but God feels, in Godself, the kick. In fact, God feels every aspect of the kick. God feels the fleeting satisfaction that the kicker receives by giving the kickee a good whack in the shins, but at the same time, God also feels the shooting pain and anger that the kick has caused the kickee. Even though God Himself<sup>11</sup> has not been kicked, and God Himself is not the kicker, God prehends and feels internally every part of the action and every feeling of every actor. Therefore, God's feeling and valuation of the action of the kick takes into account precisely the amount of glee and pain that the action caused.

Due to the kick, God must also provide further possibilities for action. The parties may get in a brawl, settle out of court, spend months seething about the encounter, go to the hospital for shin stitches, and so on. These possibilities do not simply come out of God's big possibility bag, but they are uniquely created as a response to each circumstance. Their uniqueness is not always due to the fact that some types of actualities are completely new to the world; people have gotten stitches for shin kicks before. However, the possibilities take into account the prehension of the particular instance. The internal constitution of God is that of continually changing prehensions of all actualities and possibilities uniquely created as a response to those prehensions. God is therefore constituted by the actualities of the world.

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<sup>11</sup> "Hir" is an epicene pronoun used in place of "him" or "her." Throughout the paper, I intend to use the following gender-neutral third person pronouns: "sie" in place of "she" or "he," "hir" in place of "him" or "her" and in place of "his" or "hers." I use these both to refer to people and to the Divine. The use of these pronouns is growing mostly through web-based transgender communities, but their use is documented in: David Valentine and Riki Anne Wilchins, "One Percent on the Burn Chart: Gender, Genitals, and Hermaphrodites with Attitude," *Social Text* 52/53 15, nos. 3 and 4 (fall/winter 1997): 216-7.

That God is internally constituted by the world does not mean, however, that God is nothing more than the collective past of the world. God incorporates into Godself not only the full prehension of the world but also every possibility for future action—including the possibilities that eventually become actualized as well as those that don't. These possibilities necessarily both exist in relation to the world and extend beyond any possibility of being that the world has yet imagined. God is therefore always simultaneously existing with the world and expanding infinitely beyond it. God responds to the prehension of every actuality by the creation of infinite new possibilities; God's being is therefore constituted the perpetual creation of infinite possibilities that continually changes through ongoing prehension of the world.<sup>12</sup>

### *Why Process?*

Process theology provides a way of thinking about the world and about God that, at its core, aims to challenge theological and worldly stasis, and at its foundation is an understanding of all things as being in a state of perpetual change. Each moment of occasion can be understood as an individual process that is related to past actualities, influencing future entities, and participating creatively in God. Process theology explicates inextricable relation and perpetual transition of being of God, the world, and individual entities. Additionally, it is also useful to create new understandings of social systems and how those systems have theological, as well as social significance. In particular, the process model is a resource for new theories of sex and gender. It provides a new means of understanding how systems work, and it situates the study of sex and

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<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Charles Hartshorne claims that God is the "self-surpassing surpasser of all." Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (Hew Haven, NH: Yale UP, 1948).

gender amidst a conversation of how we ought to speak about and participate in the Divine. In particular, in later chapters I employ the process model in order to generate new theories of "doing" sex/gender and its social construction. Additionally, I intend to argue that the being of God, by virtue of being internally constituted by the world and perpetually creating infinite responses to that world, is both affected by and exists in conflict with those sex/gender systems. I begin this argument in Chapter Two with a brief explication of sex, gender, and sex/gender systems.



## CHAPTER 2

### SEX, GENDER, AND SEX/GENDER SYSTEMS

Describing sex/gender seems to be much like discussing the presence of air. It is ubiquitous and yet largely invisible to members of society—even though they constantly participate in and reproduce those very sex/gender systems. Like air, it tends to remain unnoticed until suddenly it is lacking; a person of ambiguous sex/gender stands out among the hordes of sex/gender-signifying folks. Our discomfort and social ineptitude when confronted by sex/gender ambiguity demonstrates that it is more remarkable--or simply visible--when it is improperly done or not done at all. An argument about what sex/gender is and how it works therefore must take into account its ubiquity, omnirelevance, and presumed naturalness. Throughout the distinguished history of gender studies, theorists have attempted to do this in various ways. Feminist theorists have argued that sex and gender are separate entities and therefore need to be approached separately; in the past, this has proved quite politically useful. Currently, however, transgender theorists have been calling the distinction between sex and gender into question. In order to provide an understanding of sex/gender that is useful to a process-oriented theological approach, I will in this chapter give a brief overview of the critical perspectives on sex and gender that have been developed in recent years by feminist theorists, gender theorists, and sex researchers.

On the surface, gender seems easy. Gender is sex. Sex is gender. And both words indicate, at their most general level, the category or condition of either maleness or femaleness. Now, sex or gender can refer to individuals, groups, animals, and even

words (usually foreign ones), but it always speaks in terms of or reference to the categories of male and female. Most speakers of contemporary English either use the words sex and gender interchangeably or assume that "gender" is simply a more sophisticated or PC way of saying "sex."<sup>1</sup> Formally, gender and sex also appear as interchangeable words. Government documents such as birth certificates, driver's licenses, and passports refer to the M or F distinction as sex, but surveys, forms, and applications (formal but not official documents) often use the term "gender" to refer to the M/F field. Finally, modern authorities of language reflect to some degree the interchangeability of "sex" and "gender" in common usage. "Gender," as defined by both the American Heritage and Webster's Dictionaries can mean, simply, "sex," and "sex," according to Webster's, is "the fact or character of being male or female."<sup>2</sup>

While dictionary definitions do seem quite neat and tidy, they prove to be not entirely useful in the murky waters of gender studies, where intrepid intellectual explorers must wrangle with such linguistic beasts as "sex role," "gender identity," "gender theory," "sex category," "gender expectations," "sex/gender system," "sex characteristics," "gender bending," "gender blending," "sexing," "sexed," "doing gender," "gender performativity," "intersexed," "intersexual," "transsexual," "transgendered" "gender-transgressive," "genderfuck," and the rest of the perpetually growing list of daunting terminology.<sup>3</sup> Grappling with these terms using the formula of

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<sup>1</sup> I suspect these observations have a great deal to do with my social context, especially my age. I was born in the late 70's, and I grew up in an era where feminism was not uncontested, but undeniably present. The mark that feminism had made on language was taken for granted by my generation; "gender" had been, throughout our lifetimes, a word that referred to human masculinity and femininity. Although many of my peers who study or discuss gender make feminist theory's distinction between the two, in high school, "gender" was commonly used as a euphemism for "sex." The most memorable examples of this came from teachers who wished to avoid the inspiration of a juvenile giggle.

<sup>2</sup> *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (1989), 1st ed. s.v. "Gender;" *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (2000), 4th ed. s.v. "Gender;" [dictionary on-line]; available from <http://bartleby.com/61/59/G0075900.html>; Internet; accessed 27 March 2001. *Webster's Dictionary*, s.v. "Sex."

<sup>3</sup> Some of these terms are widely used and are attributed to no one theorist. Others have clear origins: "Sex/Gender System" comes from Gayle Rubin "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political

“Gender = Sex = Either Maleness or Femaleness” is the theoretical equivalent of bathing a bobcat with a brillo pad: preposterous, destined for failure, and potentially quite dangerous.

### *Sex vs. Gender*

The political and theoretical meanings of “sex” and “gender” have evolved rapidly over the last half-century. The word “gender” was historically a literary term, and traditionally referred to grammatical categories of nouns.<sup>4</sup> It was only during the Second Wave of feminism of the 1960’s and 70’s that it began to come into use as a term to indicate categories of human masculinity and femininity. While fighting for equal rights for women, feminists of the mid-20th century faced both a long medical history that empirically demonstrated the physical inferiority of women, as well as (male) scientists who argued that this physical inferiority correlated to social and cognitive inferiorities. In order to refute this claim of women’s intellectual inferiority, feminists argued for the separation of sex and gender. Sex, they argued, referred to the physical aspects of maleness and femaleness, such as biological, anatomical, physiological, reproductive, and genetic characteristics. Gender, on the other hand, referred to the socially constructed aspects of maleness and femaleness, such as character, intellect, (gender-specific) roles, behavior, and psychology.<sup>5</sup>

This distinction initially proved quite useful. Feminists argued that women’s

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Economy’ of Sex” *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1997). “Doing Gender” comes from Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, “Doing Gender.” in *The Social Construction of Gender*, ed. Judith Lorber and Myra Marx Ferree (Thousand Oaks, Cal.: Sage Press, 1991). “Gender Performativity” comes from Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, (New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> “Gender: Sexist Language and Assumptions: Gender/Sex,” *American Heritage Book of English Usage* [reference on-line] (n.p.: Houghton Mifflin, 1996, accessed 27 March 2001); available from <http://www.bartelby.com/64/C005/010.html>; Internet.

<sup>5</sup> Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*, 1st. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 3.

biological characteristics, such as menstruation, child-bearing, and comparatively smaller physical size and strength, had no ramifications for women's intellect or social capabilities. Social scientists, psychologists, and philosophers developed complex explanations of how human babies were socialized into masculine and female genders. Through these theories, masculinity and femininity came to be understood as social constructions rather than qualities governed by biology. Gender theorists began theorizing about gender by defining it as a system rather than an inherent personal quality. In this sense, gender is not an innate or acquired quality of individual human beings, but it consists of sets of social interactions and processes that are based on commonly accepted means of social organization.

Feminist theorists and social scientists point out that masculinity and femininity are cultural constructions that are imposed upon and enacted by people throughout their lives. People in contemporary American society as a group agree that all people are sexed, and therefore gendered, either male or female. The moment a baby pops out of the womb, the baby is spanked, cleaned, and pronounced either male or female--unless, of course, the child has ambiguous genitalia, at which point the child is rushed into surgery where they are made to be one or the other. Friends, relatives, neighbors, and complete strangers spend the next year or so congratulating the parent and saying, "What a beautiful baby! Is it a boy or a girl?" The proud parents answer with one of two acceptable responses, either boy or girl, since it is generally considered socially unacceptable to say "Well, we're not sure," or "Sie's intersexed," or "We don't believe in sex assignment, so we're raising the child to be a lovely, multiply gendered human being."<sup>6</sup> The latter would likely prompt a social services investigation.

For the first few years of its life, the child is inundated by pink or blue, if not bestowed by parents to ward off the "Is it a . . .?" questions, then the color-coded gifts are

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<sup>6</sup> Again, "Sie" is an epicene pronoun used in place of "she" or "he."

sent by well meaning friends and family who desperately search for appropriate gifts at the pink-and-blue store. Baby girls may wear elaborate lacy bows around their heads to indicate their femininity, and some even have pierced ears. Boys may or may not be wearing blue at all times, but few of them are routinely dressed in all pink. Thus begins the indoctrination of another human being into the gender system. Beginning at the moment of birth, children learn the rules of gender through both observation and direct teaching. Parents and friends exhibit a great deal of concern regarding the appropriate gendering of children. So-called "pro-family" groups constantly express concern about child's lack of gender role-models in families headed by a single-parent or same-sex couple. Gender-appropriate behavior is modeled and enforced by parents and other adult role models, television, books, toys, older children, and so on. Nearly every portrayal of people and society that a child is exposed to reflects and perpetuates gender systems—just as people and society do.<sup>7</sup>

As they mature, children begin to self-regulate their gender. They are well aware of cultural norms of gender, and express them in ways that are not unlike adult expressions of gender, but simply lacking in the subtlety that comes with years of gender practice. Young children establish sex-exclusive clubs and pronounce "No girls/boys allowed!" Boys refuse to play with "girl toys" and call emotional or unathletic boys "sissies;" athletic girls are branded "tomboys," and young girls emulate adult female roles in playing house, school, and dress-up. These activities are clear reflections of social beliefs about gender. In establishing clubs that exclude the opposite sex, children first demonstrate belief that there are two genders that are oppositional in nature. Secondly, they emulate the social practice of dividing and excluding people based on gender; all-boy clubs are prominent in such arenas as professional sports, military institutions, and the Catholic priesthood, and physical separation of males and females in

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<sup>7</sup> A useful account of the process of gender construction can be found in: Judith Lorber, *Paradoxes of Gender* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), 14-18.

dorms, restrooms, etc., is routine.

These examples of gendering are typically regarded as natural childhood development, and psychologists refer to this as “sex role socialization,” but neither the individual experiences themselves nor their psychological explanation offer a distinct definition of what gender is.<sup>8</sup> However, our gender vignette did elucidate some of the principle characteristics of some of the steps that are involved in gendering. First, we see that individuals are routinely assigned to one of two sex categories, M or F. This is done for the first time when a baby is born, but for the rest of hir life, people will routinely place hir in the correct and necessarily unchanging M/F category. This person is then expected to have particular tastes, abilities, appearances, characteristics, desires, dreams, goals, and conceptions of self that correspond with hir M/F designation. Additionally, sie is to believe these categorizations and expectations to be natural for both himself and for all other people, upon whom sie, in turn, places the expectations of gender.

While individuals do participate in the “doing” of gender, a description of individual gender enactments does not a theory of gender systems make.<sup>9</sup> Rather, gender is “done,” or constructed, on a societal level through institutions of power. These include scientific, religious, governmental, social, and economic institutions whose assumptions both depend on and perpetuate a rigid two-gender system. For example, capitalism has long depended on the division of labor along gender lines, and has traditionally assumed a system where people arrange themselves into family units around the institution of heterosexual marriage, and the male half of this pair works outside the home for wages while the female half works inside the home and does not earn wages. Governmental systems actually legislate that gender, officially called “sex,” must, by law, be assigned to individuals as a matter of identification. False representation of gender on a

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<sup>8</sup> Lorber, *Paradoxes of Gender*, 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> The concept of “doing gender,” which I intend to use throughout the paper, comes from Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, “Doing Gender,” in *The Social Construction of Gender*, ed. Judith Lorber and Myra Marx Ferree (Thousand Oaks, Cal.: Sage Press, 1991).

government document--checking the wrong box-- is actually a felony offense.<sup>10</sup>

Religious institutions recognize and perpetuate gender through heterosexual marriage ceremonies, sex-specific coming of age rituals such as Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah, and by excluding women from full participation in the church body.<sup>11</sup>

In a gender system, then, social institutions constantly define, reinforce, and reify social conceptions of gender. These institutions are the frameworks within which individual and group interactions take place, so people come to "do" the gender that is required of them. In fact, because gender is so pervasive a system that it is one of the most basic organizing principles of human interaction, every social situation requires that people enact their gender. This doing of gender, although done with little choice or alternatives--failure to do gender has serious consequences, including social stigmatization, arrest, violence, denial of civil rights, and so on--provides empirical evidence that people consistently act in gendered ways. This, in turn, is interpreted as proof that gender is legitimate and real. Additionally, because individuals live in a system where gender is regarded as a real thing and in every interaction they display and recreate this thing, gender is reified in individuals' narratives of self. So what is gender? Gender is a system that is rooted in, constructed for, and perpetuated by institutions of power. It arbitrates criteria by which human beings are separated at birth into categories of male and female, and sets rules and expectations for how individuals should live the rest of their lives in these categories. In this way, it systematically limits the creativity and potential for certain kinds of individual human expression.

Gender is not simply a systematic limit to human creativity, however. Feminists point out that gender differentiation is not simply done for its own sake or to simply produce two separate groups of human beings. Rather, they argue that gender

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<sup>10</sup> Leslie Feinberg, *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 21.

<sup>11</sup> Of course, the degree to which individual religious bodies exclude women or condone non-heterosexual unions varies widely; most mainstream groups, however, function within and as a part of a dual gender system.

differentiation is designed to create two hierarchically arranged groups of humans. Gender does not only limit all humans, but it also puts very specific limits on those gendered female. According to feminist arguments, gender is done in such a way to systematically oppress women and privilege men. In history, the rights of women to vote, hold a job, own property, choose whether or not to marry, have sex, or bear children, and so on, were sharply curtailed. Simply by virtue of being gendered male, men are granted privileges such as educational advantages, elevated social status, economic opportunities, and so on.<sup>12</sup> Feminists have labored for decades to secure women's rights, and have been successful in many instances, often due to the usefulness of separating sex from gender.

Yet the hierarchical distinction between male and female continues, and women still face oppression that prohibits full social inclusion. Women are still less likely to be employed, promoted, or paid at the same level as men. Women are unequally represented in governing bodies as well as scientific, business, and academic arenas. Women's bodies are systematically devalued and degraded by a society that objectifies women and allows rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence to continue, and women who attempt to speak out against these types of abuse are routinely silenced and stigmatized. Because these forms of oppression continue, there is a demonstrated necessity for continuing to discuss the construction of gender as something separate from physical sex. However, gender theorists are beginning to question the separation of sex and gender and are asking critical questions about the necessity of the split.

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<sup>12</sup> I do acknowledge, as do most feminists, that male privilege is not universal; other factors, such as race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, etc. do mitigate the privilege that males in general are given by a male-centered society.



*The Social Construction of Sex*

While the separation of sex and gender allowed feminists to make incredible progress on theories of social construction of gender and claims of women's abilities to compete socially and intellectually with men, the separation of the two is in many ways problematic. In arguing that only half (the gender, or behavioral, half) of maleness or femaleness is socially constructed, feminists allowed the supposed naturalness of the criteria for physical differentiation of men and women to remain unchallenged.<sup>13</sup>

Focusing on only behavioral and cultural aspects of the constructions of maleness and femaleness allowed room for arguments of female inferiority based on sex differentiated physical characteristics. The argument that gender and sex could be separated into distinct categories often left feminists unprepared to answer criticisms that the physical, or the supposedly "real" and "natural" parts of men and women, act as limiting factors to the social categories of gender. This weakness is most clearly demonstrated in cases where discrimination against women is defended on the basis of women's physical inferiority, especially in cases where women are excluded from military units, fire departments, sports teams, and so on.

Today, sex researchers, philosophers, and biologists are beginning to question the easy dichotomy that the male/female system assumes. Rather than treating sex as the natural component of the sex/gender system, they are asking critical questions about the ways in which people are assigned sex. These researchers and theorists acknowledge that human beings have bodies that have particular anatomies and physiologies, but they question the ease with which these bodies are assumed to fit into one of two distinct

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<sup>13</sup> Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 4.

groups. Of particular interest to these critics of sex is the case of intersexed individuals, people who, due to some combination of anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal characteristics, are neither clearly male nor clearly female. Both the history and science of sexuality and intersexuality can be cited to support the claim that sex differentiation is not always based on clear, natural evidence.<sup>14</sup>

### History

While the job of assigning sex currently falls under the jurisdiction of medical practitioners and scientists, and assignments are made on the basis of scientific or biological reasoning, historically, this has not always been the case.<sup>15</sup> European history of sexuality, as recorded since ancient Greek and Roman times, gives evidence of the existence of hermaphrodites.<sup>16</sup> In some eras and cultures, such as early Greece, hermaphrodites were considered to be a third sex, and in others, they were considered to be of intermediate sex—some mixture of male and female. Early physicians believed that sex was a continuum rather than a sharply dimorphic system. They thought that the difference between men and women was one of temperature variation; men were hot, women were cool, and hermaphrodites and other sexual variants were warm. Others

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<sup>14</sup> Due to the restrictions of my topic, I am unable to present a full and detailed criticism of sexual assignment and a dual-sex understanding of human sexuality. More in-depth arguments about the construction of sex can be found in Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*, 1st. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2000), and; Alice Domurat Dreger, *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> For a more detailed account of the history of hermaphroditism, see Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 32-44 or Alice Domurat Dreger, *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> Intersex activists and researchers do not use the term "hermaphrodite" and discourage contemporary use of the word. However, it is historically appropriate to use "hermaphrodite" when referring to the history of intersexedness; my use of the term is limited to this sense.

believed that males came from fetuses that developed on the right side of the womb, females from the left, and hermaphrodites from the middle. Rather than forcing hermaphrodites into the categories of male or female, scientific theories of these eras took account of and made allowances for those who were neither male nor female.<sup>17</sup>

The job of determining how hermaphrodites ought to behave in society historically belonged to those in places of legal or religious power. Jewish law required that hermaphrodites not shave or be secluded with women (laws that applied to men) and also prohibited them from serving as priests or inheriting property (laws that applied to women). The courts were often responsible for enforcing sex since sex had special legal importance in legal systems that gave certain rights to men and restricted the rights of women. Hermaphroditism was recognized, but individuals were expected to choose a single, or dominant, sex and live only in that role. On occasion, doctors were consulted by the court to give their opinions about whether the individual was truly male or truly female, but medical science became the primary managers of sex only as recently as the early nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup>

### Biology

There are a number of distinct biological elements that are typically used to distinguish male humans from female humans: chromosomes, genitalia and gonads, hormones and secondary sex characteristics, and sex-typed physical characteristics. Society assumes that these elements always work together to create individuals who are

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<sup>17</sup> Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 32-34.

<sup>18</sup> Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 32-34.

unquestionably sexed either male or female. Males have XY chromosomes, a penis, testicles, testosterone, facial and body hair, and low-pitched voices. They do not have breasts and tend to be bigger, faster, and stronger than women. Females, on the other hand, have XX chromosomes, a vulva, ovaries, high-pitched voices, estrogen, breasts, and lack facial hair. They are smaller and weaker than men, menstruate, and are capable of bearing children. Most people fit reasonably well within these criteria and are quite comfortable and even happy with their sex assignment. However, examination of each of these categories of criteria indicates first that none of these elements, on their own, can be considered a singular essential marker of sex, and second, that enough exceptions to each element exist to call into question their given-ness as sex criteria.

In the age of genetics, Americans who are scientifically savvy believe that chromosomes are the simplest and most clear marker of sex. Indeed, in many cases, chromosome tests seem adequate and useful, most females have XX chromosomes, and most males have XY chromosomes. Genetics also shows us, however, that this is not always the case. Turner Syndrome (XO females) and Klinefelter Syndrome (XXY males) are the most common chromosomal variations; other variations exist but occur less frequently.<sup>19</sup> Even individuals with XX or XY chromosomes may not develop sex traits that “correctly” correspond with their genetic makeup. Individuals with Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH) are XX but develop masculinized genitals;<sup>20</sup> this is the most common form of intersexuality. Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS) occurs in XY

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<sup>19</sup> Turner Syndrome appears at a frequency of approximately 0.0369 infants per 100 live births. Klinefelter Syndrome occurs in approximately 0.0922 infants per 100 live births, and other variations other than XX or XY occur in 0.0639 of every 100 live births. This means that non-XX or XY chromosomal combinations occur in nearly 1 out of every 500 live births. Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 53.

<sup>20</sup> What constitutes “masculinized genitals” can vary, but often includes an enlarged clitoris/phallus that resembles a penis and/or enlarged or fused labia that resemble a scrotum.

individuals whose bodies do not respond to testosterone; they develop female genitalia and secondary sex characteristics. Most AIS individuals live their lives as typical women, and many are surprised to find that they are not XX females.<sup>21</sup> These cases demonstrate that chromosomal sex does not in every case divide people into two distinct groups of people. Additionally, if sex was determined based on chromosomal combination, 1) there would be more than two sexes, and 2) some individuals would be assigned sexes with which neither they nor society would likely agree.

Additionally, genitals are not always the clear indicators of sex that we suppose them to be. Far from being radically different structures, male and female genitalia develop from the same tissue, and the difference between a penis (a phallus with a urethra) and a clitoris (a phallus without a urethra) is not always easily distinguishable.<sup>22</sup> When infants who have indeterminate genitalia are born, doctors and surgeons immediately begin the process of determining the child's "true sex" and assigning that sex, often through surgery and hormonal treatments, to the child. If the infant is XX, the gender assignment is nearly always female in order to preserve the child's capacity to reproduce. If the infant is XY or some non-XX/XY variation, assignment is made on the physician's assessment of whether or not the child has a viable penis; viability is judged on the basis of whether or not the infant is likely to be able to urinate while standing and whether or not the penis will be large enough to penetrate a vagina in heterosexual intercourse.<sup>23</sup> Based on these standards, if the infant has a urethral opening on the

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<sup>21</sup> CAH occurs in approximately 1.51 out of every 100 live births. Masculinized genitalia may be present at birth or may appear in puberty (late-onset). AIS and partial AIS occur in approximately 0.00836 of 100 live births. Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 52-53.

<sup>22</sup> A helpful diagram of external genital development can be found in Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 50.

penis/clitoris and the structure is 2.0 centimeters long or longer, the infant is deemed a boy. If, however, the structure is in between these lengths, it is deemed medically unacceptable and the (XY) infant is deemed female.

Sex assignment of intersexed individuals involves more than simply pronouncing them members of one sex category, however. Once infants are assigned either male or female, they face a vast array of surgical and hormonal treatments to ensure an appearance that corresponds as much as possible to their assignment. Intersex infants who are determined to be female (XX or XY but not acceptably male) usually have clitoral surgery since a clitoris larger than .8 centimeters is considered to be “too large” even though it poses no medical risk. The clitoris is either surgically removed or reduced in size in order to become an aesthetically (if not functionally) acceptable clitoris.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, female-assigned children may undergo vaginoplasties in order to create a vagina, labio-scrotal reduction, or removal of undescended testes.<sup>25</sup> Male-assigned

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<sup>23</sup> Critics point out that the notion of a viable penis is not only based on cultural norms that expect heterosexuality and value large penises, but it is also based on criteria that is scientifically questionable. The ability to pee standing up is determined on the basis of the location of the urethral opening, which “normally” is located at the tip of the penis. According to researchers, only 55% of men have “normal” penises by this standard. The other 45% of men have some degree of hypospadias, which is the condition where the urethral opening is located somewhere other than the center of the tip, yet most of these men are successful at urination while standing. Additionally, researchers point out that the size of the penis at birth does not directly correlate with penis size after puberty; therefore, the ability (or even potential) for an infant’s penis to penetrate a vagina cannot reliably be assessed at the time that sex assignments are made. Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 56-59.

<sup>24</sup> Most clitoral surgeries result in partial to complete loss of sensation. Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 59-61.

<sup>25</sup> Although these surgeries are regularly performed on intersexed infants and children at the insistence of medical professionals, intersex advocates are pointing out the extremely troubling nature of these surgeries. First of all, parents are typically provided with incomplete information about intersexedness and expected to make rapid decisions about appropriate courses of action. Surgeries that are performed alter or impair sexual function, and some, especially vaginoplasty, involve repeated sexually invasive procedures performed on young children and provide no medical benefit. Vaginoplasty, in particular, involves the surgical creation or expansion of the vagina. In order that the walls of the vagina not grow shut, the vagina must be dilated daily by the child’s parents for months or years using a penetrating implement. This practice, which provides no medical benefits and in other circumstances

infants face operations to repair hypospadias and free the phallus from restrictive body tissue; these surgeries may cause scarring and impair penile function.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, both assigned-males and assigned-females are commonly treated with hormones to insure proper sexual development.

Both the existence and the treatment of intersexuality calls into question the common notion that human genitalia is clearly and naturally dimorphic. The fact that some people are born with genitalia that is neither clearly male nor clearly female poses critical questions to the idea that there are two and only two sexes. While infrequent, intersexuality certainly is not rare; 1.7 of every 100 live births display some degree of intersexedness.<sup>27</sup> Not only do intersex individuals demonstrate the exceptions to the two-and-only-two-sexes rule, but the way in which they are assigned sex also indicates that cultural values are not separate from the practice of medical science. Even though the bodies of intersex individuals typically pose no medical threat, their bodies are altered medically to fit into social expectations of what males and females are supposed to look like. Sex is so important that if sex is not apparent and distinct (which it is not always), it must be created, and the necessity of the creation of sex outweighs the medical and personal risks involved in its creation.

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would be considered sexual abuse, is considered medically appropriate for intersexed children. See <sup>25</sup> Katherine A. Mason, "The Unkindest Cut" *New Haven Advocate*, 22 March 2001 [Periodical Online]; available from <http://www.newhavenadvocate.com/articles/unkindcut.html>; Internet; accessed 9 April 2001.

<sup>26</sup> Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 61-3.

<sup>27</sup> Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 52-3.

### *The Sex Critics*

For these reasons, sex is newly being scrutinized sex/gender theorists. Far from being “natural” or “real” categorizations, these theorists argue that assigning sex to people is both a political activity and a social construction, and it is therefore subject to critical examination. Despite the fact that intersexed individuals present a clear demonstration of the problems with a sex system that allows and demands only two natural, separate, and distinct sexes, both science and society cling tenaciously to this model. Science claims to work objectively; empirical data, according to the scientific method, are a way to determine facts and truth. Feminists argue that the establishment of fact and truth is far from objective; rather, it is an intensely ideologically-driven endeavor. One theorist notes that:

... scientific disciplines are aptly named—they discipline thought by making some ideas seem natural and others almost unthinkable. The practices of science involve commitments to such disciplines, and the commitments of the scholarly community to certain ideas and ways of thinking seem to stand in the ways of new theories, however useful they might be in the long run.<sup>28</sup>

In regards to the institution of assigned sex, this assessment of the scientific disciplines seems to hit the mark quite handily. The notion that there are two distinct and easily discernible sexes has indeed been made to seem natural, and it is certainly unorthodox, if not unthinkable, to argue that the distinction between sexes is a social, rather than physical or natural, one.

These arguments of the social construction of sex do not mean, however, that physical characteristics of human beings are in any way meaningless. People do have bodies that are very real and do real things. Rather, this argues that the categorization of these bodies as male and female, and the criteria used to make this distinction are

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<sup>28</sup> Myra Marx Ferree, Judith Lorber, Beth B. Hess, eds., *Revisioning Gender*, The Gender Lens, vol. 5 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999), xvi.



constructed rather than natural. Additionally, it seeks to dethrone science as a privileged arbiter of what is natural and factual. Kate Bornstein, in the way that only she can, indicates that the very idea that biology should be the authoritative determiner of sex is somewhere between absurd and ridiculous:

For so long, we've bought into a biological imperative that has labeled genitalia as "male" or "female"; what's more, we've dignified that imperative by giving it its own word: *sex*! Anyway, who says penises are male and vulvas are female? . . . I know too many male men with vaginas and too many female women with penises to any longer buy into some wishful thinking on the part of old-guard scientists who'd like to have things all nice and orderly in some predictable binary.<sup>29</sup>

Bornstein makes it clear that while penises and vaginas do exist, they aren't the essential markers of maleness and femaleness that science would have us believe. Additionally she questions not only the naturalness of these categorizations, but also the right and competency of biologists to make such distinctions.

This unorthodox argument that physical sex is based on social criteria is precisely that which theorists such as Anne Fausto-Sterling, Alice Domurat Dreger, and others are making. By drawing on the cases of intersexed individuals and their historical and contemporary medical treatment as examples, they argue that the criteria for determining physical sex of human beings is not natural but socially determined. Both science and society patrol the borders of these "natural" categorizations of physical sex characteristics. If the system is to be objective, factual, and natural, exceptions to the sex rules must be either erased through surgery or portrayed as hermaphroditic freaks of nature and social outcasts. In light of the experiences of those who do not fit neatly within a two-sex system, the understanding of sex as the physical parts of maleness and femaleness that are given, natural, and factual comes under the scrutiny of sex/gender politicians. Sex, gender, and sex/gender systems, rather than describing natural elements

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<sup>29</sup> Kate Bornstein, *My Gender Workbook: How to Become a Real Man, a Real Woman, the Real You, or Something Else Entirely* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 26.

of human beings, construct and manage the physical as well as social aspects of the systematic creation and separation of human males and females, men and women, boys and girls. These coercive social systems are the basis of the alienation of men and women and the oppression of sex/gender outsiders and the subjects of critical analysis through the lens of process theology.

### CHAPTER 3

#### PROCESSING SEX/GENDER SYSTEMS

The medical assignment of sex is an actual occasion; it happens. The parent who dresses hir male-assigned child in blue performs an actual occasion. The teenage boy who sneaks peeks at his father's *Playboy* magazines, the woman who studies engineering, and any person who walks into a restroom that is clearly designated for women (or one that is clearly designated for men) all perform actual occasions of sex/gender. In fact, the argument that sex/gender is omnirelevant claims that every human actuality is one that incorporates actualities of sex/gender. Chapter Two offered analyses and definitions of sex, gender, and sex/gender system, but the elements of these analyses are not only subject to the critiques of feminism and gender theory, but they are also usefully analyzed by process theory and theology.

According to the process model, everything that is experienced in the world is an actuality, and additionally, all actual things must be processual. Because activities and systems of sex/gender are demonstrably experienced in the world, the process model defines these as actualities. Now, it is important to note that in the process model, an "actual" thing is simply something that has happened or is happening. This understanding of "actuality" does not necessarily imply universality, truth, or naturalness. All that it means to say that something is actual is to say that it happens. Because these things happen, sex/gender activities must be understood as processual actualities, and they are therefore subject to the analysis of the process model. The process model both predicts the means of sex/gender actualizations and relations and provides tools for theological and theoretical analysis of these systems.

### *Process Model of Sex/Gender*

According to the process model, all perpetually becoming actualities come into being through the selection and concretization of possibilities. This selection is always made in the context of facts from the past, or the physical pole, and it is the prehension of these facts that internally constitutes every becoming actuality. Additionally, once something has already come into existence, it pushes for its own repetition in the future. The particular actualities of sex/gender must necessarily come into being in the same way that all actualities come into being. Occasions of sex/gender are therefore actualized through the selection and concretization of possibilities for becoming. The selection of sex/gender possibilities is based on the prehension of past actualizations of sex/gender, and these actualizations of sex/gender then push for their own repetition in the future. The application of the process model to gender theory argues that sex/gender systems can be explained through the processual and relational ways in which sex/gender actualities come into being.

### Prehension

As the feminists and gender theorists of Chapter Two argued, sex/gender systems are ubiquitous and omnirelevant; this social context of pervasive relevance is located within the physical pole of sex/gender. Every doing of sex/gender through prehension takes into account this social context. While individual prehension is never total—no human can possibly take into account the entirety of human history, nor could anyone possibly completely understand the complexity of sex/gender construction—there are certain elements that people are generally compelled to take into account. The social context of sex/gender includes not only previous individual occasions, such as a boy playing with a truck, but also overall societal expectations that say that the boy ought to be playing with trucks (rather than dolls). Society demands, as Chapter Two illustrates, that certain truths about sex/gender exist: clear sex/gender distinctions are necessary and

indeed natural; people with penises and XY chromosomes are male and naturally live their lives as manly men; people with vulvas and XX chromosomes are female and naturally live their lives in a ladylike fashion; only freaks and social misfits fail to fit naturally into one of these two categories; it is acceptable and appropriate, by means including but not limited to surgery, hormones, discrimination, threats, intimidation, and violence, to force these misfits to conform.

In this context, prehension is not simply a voluntary activity. In Chapter One, the prehension of gravity was described as compulsory because the failure to prehend gravity had potentially disastrous and physically harmful consequences. Similarly, since society enforces sex/gender through social conventions and sanctions, the prehension of social conventions of sex/gender is necessary to preserve one's social, psychological, and physical safety. One does not simply prehend *that* sex/gender systems exist, but one must prehend them in a way that takes into account and responds to the requirements of acceptance. Parents and doctors prehend the societal demand that infants must, at any cost, be assigned a sex. Individuals prehend that their sex/gender presentation is expected to be at all times in accordance with social norms and that their performance is at any time subject to societal evaluation.

In each becoming actual occasion of sex/gender, from the assignment of sex at birth to each moment of sex/gendered activity, prehension of societal expectations of the physical pole is mandated by society and enforced by social sanctions. Prehension of the expectations and social enforcement of sex/gender are therefore strongly weighed in the selection of becoming occasions. Although each occasion is presented with unlimited and infinite possibilities from the mental pole, selection of these occasions has a strong tendency to occur in accordance with the social demands of sex/gender that come from the physical pole. For this reason, actual occasions of sex/gender are overwhelmingly in accordance with the mandates of society even though the possibilities for said occasion had been limitless.

### Internal Constitution

The prehension of the physical pole of sex/gender not only provides a context for the actualization of sex/gender possibilities, but it also internally constitutes becoming actualities. Social mandates and past individual actualizations of sex/gender are not simply acknowledged for the purposes of selecting possibilities, but they are taken into account in a way that makes them part of individual actualities. After a person is assigned a sex at birth, hir subsequent prehension of that assignment is an element of hir internal constitution. This doesn't mean that sie will necessarily embody that assignment in the way that society expects. A person who had a male sex-assignment at birth may live hir life as a female, and may be female according to many different criteria,<sup>1</sup> but hir prehension--hir internal taking-of-account--of that original pronouncement always plays a part in hir perpetual becoming.

Indeed, it is this internal constitution, created through prehension of the past, that provides each of us with a sense of "that which I have been." We understand the things that we have done, the body that we have had (and the changes it has been through), and the society in which we have lived, to constitute ourselves. In popular aphorism, we are "products of our culture," and we sense the perpetual and cumulative ways in which we are both formed and informed by our personal and collective past. However, perception of identity is not indicative of an intractable essence, as is so often believed, but rather a series of past actualities that, out of the pull of repetition, cohere into a history of continuously shifting occasions.

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter Two demonstrated how criteria for determining maleness and femaleness, as well as *who* is allowed to make this determination, varies greatly. However, this person may be female because sie has had sex reassignment surgery and hormone therapy, sie may live and dress as a female, or sie may be female simply because sie says that sie is one.

### Repetition

Each actual occasion of sex/gender also pushes for its own repetition. Not only do sex/gender systems themselves mandate conformity, but every past actuality is itself also a call for conformity. Each instance in the process of doing sex/gender is a contribution to the maintenance of individual and societal sex/gender. The sex assignment given to an infant at birth (or now even prenatally) is an activity that calls for repetitious embodiment and continuous creation of that assigned sex/gender throughout the infant's life.<sup>2</sup> In the course of socialization, the child is taught to reinforce his sex assignment through activities that socially represent the embodiment of that assignment. Boys play with trucks, girls play with dolls. Each subsequent doing of sex/gender then becomes a call for its own repetition. For this reason, individuals' prehensions of sex/gender from the physical pole are not simply feelings of social mandates, but they also include feelings of that individual's own past. This includes both social reinforcement and also a push to repeat the activities themselves. A boy may initially begin playing with trucks rather than dolls in response to social pressure, but as that activity becomes a habit, it becomes an activity with prehensive power of its own--its social mandate seems corresponding rather than causal.

The process model explains that although actualities call for their own repetition, they can never be repeated exactly. Even the most repetitious doing of sex/gender changes with each doing; each instance is necessarily different because it must eitherprehend or negatively prehend each previous instance. Take, for example, the boy who insists on playing with trucks. He prehends that he has always been called a boy and always does boy things and always insists on doing boy things and believes that above all else, he is a boy. Still, each instance of playing with trucks is necessarily different from each previous instance in that it takes into account each previous occasion. Additionally,

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<sup>2</sup> Recall that "sex assignment" is a pronouncement of sex—placing a person in a sex/gender category.

the doing of sex/gender that takes place with the playing of trucks is only static in the history of each particular instance; it will not forever be a central tenet of his masculinity. As years go by, the boy's occasions of sex/gender will change in content and meaning. He will, if he continues to be dedicated to social norms of sex/gender, stop playing with toys and begin doing new activities that identify him as a man.

### *Transgression, Transition, and Process*

One of the most useful ways to understand the necessarily processual nature of sex/gender is transgender theory's concept of "transition." This term is most commonly applied to transsexuals, and it indicates the process of changing from one sex/gender to the other and marks the period of time during which that change takes place. For example, Male to Female transsexuals (MTFs) transition from male bodies and lives to female bodies and lives through means that may include hormones, therapy, surgery, changes in dress and behavior, and changes in name or legal status. Female to Male transsexuals (FTMs) do the same as they transition from female bodies and lives to male ones. While the notion of transition is often based on a conception of static identities that view transition as a pesky and unfortunate stage that lies between two static and opposite endpoints, male and female, process thought finds transition useful in a new way.

Process thought demonstrates the necessity of transition in and of itself, and additionally it argues that all doings of sex/gender are transitions—processes that are, by definition, constituted by change. When transition is considered under the process model, male and female poles are no longer entities that are static and separate. In a transitional model, "male" and "female" exist as ever-changing descriptors of becoming. They are like Shakespeare's waves: each peak is distinct with unique, describable characteristics, but it is never permanent or static. It rises and falls. The water that constitutes one wave has been a part of other waves before it and will become a part of others after it. Water therefore comes to occupy various waves, or peaks of distinctness,



in its ceaseless travel towards shore and back again, but it can never be said to exist in only one wave, nor can a single wave be said to exist unchanged from its beginning to its end. Similarly, people, over the course of their lives, experience this perpetual transition of being. People experience peaks of distinctness—a sense of being something describable—but this can never be said to compose a singular and unchanging essence of self.

For this reason, a process analysis of sex/gender systems argues that every doing of sex/gender is a transition and that all actual entities engaged in sex/gender occasions are therefore perpetually transitioning. This is most easily demonstrated on a macro level. For example, the social norms of sex/gender actually require that “normal” females experience transitions of sex/gender as they age.<sup>3</sup> According to archetypes of femininity, little girls grow into young ladies. They go through puberty, develop secondary sex characteristics, and begin to menstruate. They marry (a man, of course), get pregnant, have children, and take primary responsibility for raising those children. As they age, they go through menopause and become senior citizens and then old ladies. In each of these stages, both the constitution and the doing of sex/gender are different. These “normal” women constantly live within a situation of bodily and social transition. Body types, hormone levels, and sex characteristics change throughout life. The heterosexual married woman with children perceives and manages her sex/gender differently from the young girl and differently from the old lady.

Transitions of sex/gender occur on micro levels as well. Take, for example, our nicely sex/gender appropriate married heterosexual upper middle class woman (the stay-at-home-soccer-mom) with children in three separate occasions in a given day.<sup>4</sup> First,

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<sup>3</sup> This norm is, of course, predicated on the traditional roles of able-bodied, heterosexual, white, middle class women in the US. Expectations of sex/gender are not separate from institutions of heterosexism, racism, classism, and ableism.

<sup>4</sup> I use the example of a very traditionally-gendered individual to indicate that even those that appear to be the most “correctly” or “normally” gendered do not fit within a paradigm where sex/gender is absolute, given, and unchanging. In other words, even those who are perceived as “normal” cannot

she is in her house caring for children. Her doing of sex/gender primarily takes place within the paradigm of motherhood; she is nurturing and careful to avoid being overbearing towards her sons. Secondly, she is eating in an elegant restaurant with her husband. Her dress is expected to be stylish but reserved; she is gracious when her husband opens doors, helps her with her coat and chair, and orders her drinks. She does her sex/gender within the paradigm of heterosexual feminine attractiveness. Thirdly, she excuses herself to visit the powder room. Here, she is not under the scrutiny of the males that she is expected to please—how many movies have scenes where women retire to the ladies' room, utter a sigh of relief, and immediately switch from constrained social grace to animated social banter?—but she must continue to do sex/gender in order to claim legitimate membership in the ladies' room. She chats with friends, urinates sitting down, and checks her makeup before she exits to her next sex/gender performance.<sup>5</sup>

Thus we see that all doings of sex/gender are transitions of large and small scale. Transitions that involve a social changing of sex/gender, including transexuality and transgender, are not different in type from socially expected sex/gender transitions; it is only in direction and social response that they differ. However, the importance of this change of direction should not be underestimated. That all doings of sex/gender are processual is an understanding that is in conflict with static social understandings of sex/gender, but the processual doings themselves may still support sex/gender systems.

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possibly fit within the corresponding perceptions of what "the norm" means. This does not mean that people who are not the "stay-at-home-soccer-moms" are naturally in opposition to sex/gender systems; they, too, are subject to and often propagate these systems.

<sup>5</sup> A note regarding urination: while the "urinates sitting down" may seem to be less than optional—perhaps a biological necessity rather than a cultural phenomenon, there is ample evidence to demonstrate that women are not necessarily confined to the seated peeing position. The website contains a page that is dedicated to teaching women how to pee standing; and is written by a nurse who questions the cleanliness of public toilet seats. Additionally, world travelers have long noted that bodily waste elimination in foreign countries (that is, not the US) can be a culture clash of disastrous proportions. To Americans, most of whom have never considered relieving themselves in other ways, bathroom rituals abroad may range from odd to distressing to downright impossible. Denise Decker, R.N., "A Woman's Guide on How to Pee Standing Up" (n.p.: Caring Hands, 1997) Internet site. Available at [www.restrooms.org](http://www.restrooms.org); accessed 15 March 2001.

Transgressions of sex/gender therefore involve not only a recognition of process and change, but also an incorporation of creative novelty. These transgressions do not reside in or originate from a static sort of identity (although they may become a component of dynamic identity), and their doing is therefore not limited to individuals who identify themselves as transgendered. Thus we *begin* with an understanding of sex/gender as necessarily processual, explicated by the process model and transition of identity, but an understanding of the model's theological implications is necessary for a complete analysis.

### *Theological Implications of Sex/Gender Process and Transition*

#### Possibility and Alienation

While the physical pole and the force of repetition continually produce sex/gender systems, in the process model, God is the source of previously unactualized possibilities--the power for creative transition. What God gives to the world is continually new; it always includes opportunities for novelty, and included in these novel possibilities are opportunities for transgressions of sex/gender systems. When a baby is born, God offers an infinite set of possibilities for that infant. The baby may be called a boy, a girl, intersexed, he, she, sie, it,<sup>6</sup> Dick, Jane, Alex, Javier, and an infinite number of other, unimaginable possibilities. Should the possibility that the infant is called a girl be actualized, God presents another infinite set of possibilities: the nursery<sup>7</sup> could be decorated in pink, blue, green, yellow, chartreuse, plaid, polka-dots, scary clowns, space aliens, princesses and pink ponies, lions and tigers and bears, math equations, maps of stars' homes, or infinite other possibilities. Should the pink princess and pony

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<sup>6</sup> Not recommended. "It" usually only functions as a descriptor through the first two words of the phrase. By the time "boy" or "girl" comes out, "it" is decisively passé.

<sup>7</sup> Once again, our presumptions of proper child-rearing involve certain class expectations.

possibilities for this girl's nursery be actualized, God responds with yet more infinite possibilities.

While there is nothing inherently wrong with girls nor is there anything inherently wrong with nurseries decorated in pink princesses and ponies (aside from the dearth of aesthetic pleasure) the actualization of only those possibilities that are in accordance with the coercive social mandates of sex/gender systems display a failure to receive the vast creativity inspired and provided by the divine. God gives to the world in creative and grace-full abundance, but we do not readily receive these gifts if we live only within the repetition demanded by sex/gender appropriateness. Clearly, no human could possibly fully receive the infinite entirety of these possibilities. However, the continued social failure of people to receive the creative grace of God indicates one way in which sex/gender systems prevent people from a more full relation with the Divine.

The discrepancy between God-given possibilities for sex/gender actualization and the way society demands that sex/gender be actualized is not simply a problem of a failure to realize novelty because novelty, in and of itself, is of limited value. It is also not simply a problem that a wealth of possibilities goes unactualized, since this is always necessarily the case--we select certain possibilities out of the infinite ones given. Even the failure to receive the creative grace of God through actualization of novel possibilities cannot be a sin greater than failing to stop and appreciate a beautiful day. The greater problem lies in the fact that when societal expectations preclude individuals from actualizing the vast majority of possibilities for being, individuals sense that they might be something other than what society tells them that they must be—they experience alienation. People become alienated from the grace of God, from creative transformation of self, and from healthy relation with others.

Society enforces this alienation not only through the oppression of transgendered folks, but through rigorous policing of people those who identify as and strive to be truly male or truly female. Men who are perceived as less than manly may be harassed or

assaulted; the little boy on the playground who eschews sports or plays with (gasp!) the girls is called a fag or sissy, humiliated, bullied, and potentially beaten up. Women who are assertive are “nags” and “bitches;” female athletes are viewed with suspicion if they appear to be too aggressive—they may be labeled “butches” or “dykes.” Men and women both must exercise caution not to have same-sex friendships that are “too close,” and the expression of affection within the friendship must be carefully managed to avoid giving the “wrong impression.” Sex/gender systems act as a limit on the humanity not only of those who are perceived as being outside of the system, but they also govern the behavior of those within the system. This governance systematically limits individuals’ possibilities for becoming, thus producing alienation and distorting God’s lure towards creative transformation.

#### Internal Constitution and Human Participation in the Divine

Not only does the world receive from God, but God also receives from the world. God takes the entirety of the world into Hir being and is internally constituted by the world. This means that the world continually gives to God just as God continually gives to the world. All people, all things that people do, and everything that happens creatively participate in the constitution of God. However, like the way that we receive God within the confines of sex/gender systems, we also give back to God the actualities that are created by those systems. We give to God, we participate in the creation of God, we “God”(verb) in ways that are deeply flawed by these sex/gender systems.<sup>8</sup> Sex/gender systems produce alienation, discrimination, oppression, hatred, and violence, and it is within the confines of this system that humans participate in God.

The distressing actualities that are produced by sex/gender systems are most

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<sup>8</sup> “Godding” is used as a term to describe creative participation in the being of God. It is used by Carter Heyward, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1989), 189.

clearly demonstrated in the oppression that they engender.<sup>9</sup> Evidence of the oppression of transgendered individuals is ample. Intersexed individuals are subject to unethical medical procedures, and doctors withhold information about their condition and “treatments” that are often disfiguring and debilitating; medical communities, parents, and society enforce silence about intersexuality through shame and humiliation. Transexual and transgender people are often targets of harassment and violence, even at the hands of police and government officials who are responsible for protecting them. Brandon Teena, a FTM transexual whose murder was widely publicized in the movie *Boys Don’t Cry*, is only one example of the hundreds of individuals who have been murdered for sex/gender transgressions.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, discrimination on the basis of sex/gender ambiguity, perceived or actual, is legal in 49 of 50 states.<sup>11</sup> This allows employment and housing discrimination as well as the right of medical professionals to refuse to provide either routine or emergency medical care.

This is what we give to God. This is how we creatively participate in God. This is how we “God” when we do it from within coercive systems of sex/gender. We respond to graceful possibilities with systems of alienation and oppression, and the actualities that we give to God are limited by these systems. They are necessarily partial, and they restrict, rather than affirm, life and creative perpetual becoming. We fail to wholly receive, and we fail to wholly give. Still, God remains in relation with the world, always giving and receiving. God feels the oppression and alienation that people experience, and Sie responds with gracious new possibilities for becoming. Although the past of the world, and our own individual pasts are rooted in the mandates of sex/gender,

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<sup>9</sup> Ha-ha.

<sup>10</sup> Gwendolyn Anne Smith, “Remembering Our Dead” Gender Education and Advocacy (n.p.: Above and Beyond, 10 April 2001) [Internet site] Accessed 17 April 2001; available at: [www.gender.org/remember/about/index2.html](http://www.gender.org/remember/about/index2.html).

<sup>11</sup> Only in Minnesota does the letter of the law (if not the enforcement) protect transgender individuals from discrimination.

we are never absolutely required to repeat these in the future because God always provides opportunities for new ways of being. Our becoming, individually and collectively need not be dominated by repetitions of the past. Perpetual becoming always contains the possibility of liberating transition.

### *Conclusion*

Because the process of sex/gender involves all people, creative transgressions of sex/gender and actualizations of novel sex/gender possibilities do not necessitate particular identity, sex/gender transgressors include any person who selects creative and novel possibilities that are in conflict with social sex/gender codes. Examples of these possibilities include, among infinite others: individuals who defy sex/gender entirely and call themselves neither male nor female, individuals who refuse to live within sex/gender conventions, individuals who deliberately mix sex/gender signifiers, individuals with penises who wear dresses, individuals with vulvas and beards, individuals who call themselves men and act as primary homemakers and child caregivers, individuals who call themselves women and choose not to have children, people without penises who pee standing anyway, people who choose bathrooms based on whichever has the shorter line, people who pick outfits based on whatever fits best, men who sing and dance, women who are employed as construction workers or engineers, and so on.

Importantly, each of these transgressions of gender is a processual activity rather than a representation of a static essence. The activities involve may be a part of creating dynamic identities, but these identities are created by actualities, rather than the activities caused by identities. In this sense, both the doing and the transgression of sex/gender are rooted in dynamism and processual change. Transgressiveness, once selected as creative novelty and concretized into actual occasion becomes a part of the physical pole, a static fact of the past that pushes for its own repetition. Process thought therefore not only

offers new explanations about how sex/gender systems work, but it also provides a way that they can be challenged. If all actualities are processes that are in every instance changing, then they not only present opportunities for change, but they actually demand that change. Creative transgressions of systems are presented as possibilities and when actualized, have an effect on all future actualities. Process transgressions of sex/gender systems are realizations of that which is dynamic, creative, and perpetually new; they are an affirmation of that which God is, and they embody a more full giving and receiving within divine/world relations.



## CONCLUSION:

### *How Should We Then Live?*

This book by Francis Schaeffer has occupied a prominent place on my father's bookshelf for as long as I can remember, and still, the question rings in my ears. *How Should We Then Live?* It is a question of ethics, of praxis, of application of theory. In theory, sex/gender is socially constructed in a way that systematically limits possibilities for human becoming, creating alienation and oppression. Additionally, this systematic limitation prevents people from experiencing more full relation with the Divine; both the ways humans give to and receive from God are fundamentally inhibited by sex/gender systems. In light of this knowledge, how should we then live?

First and foremost, the recognition that sex/gender systems are oppressive need not translate into a vilification of individuals who identify happily as male or female, man or woman. To exclude these as options as valid and important ways of being would be to again seriously limit potential for human creativity and relation. It would be similarly preclusive of individuals' actualizations of that which they sense they might become. Rather, the critical analysis and deconstruction of sex/gender systems is precisely that: a critique of a system—not a critique of individual identities. Sex/gender systems do not open up space for the expression of human maleness and femaleness; they demand rigorous obedience to an impossible norm and curtail the expression of people who do identify as male or female as well as those who do not. For this reason, both the

problematic nature and the transgression of sex/gender systems are necessarily a concern of all people, and the deconstruction of the system is a shared responsibility.

Process theology not only offers an explication of sex/gender systems and how they prevent full relation between people and the Divine, but it also provides hope for a different future. Although sex/gender transgressions are difficult and dangerous, the process model points out that we sense opportunities for new and creative ways of being because those opportunities truly are available to us. What God provides in the giving of possibilities is not simply a false hope designed to foster alienation; we really can be that which we sensed we might become. Additionally, the actualizations of novel possibilities are never isolated instances of being. Like all actualizations, transgressions of sex/gender become facts of the past. They establish a new context for the evaluation of future possibilities as they, too, push for their own repetition. Creative transitions of being are both powerful possibilities and powerful actualities, and with each new actualization, they necessarily alter the facts of the past and the doings of the future.

These creative transitions are not only for our individual beings, however. They affect and influence other people, and they alter our individual and collective relation with the Divine. Working to end the oppression of transgendered individuals or the unethical surgical procedures performed on intersexed infants creates a more just world for all people. Exercising personal creativity in sex and gender and demanding that one's own life not be dictated by narrow standards of acceptable sex/gender being gradually opens up space for others to exercise this freedom. Actualizations of possibilities that labor towards sex/gender justice increase fullness of receiving God within the world, and

they give back to God a world that is more whole, just, and creative. In this process, we are at the beginning.

*In the Beginning, there was Flesh.*

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