



A public education and mobilization campaign

What does Project 2025 say about sex and gender?

What are sex and gender? Are they different?

The world we live in takes the concept of *biological sex* very seriously: we divide it into two strict categories, with no overlap, and treat the people in each category differently. *Males and females* are considered to be completely distinct from each other, and our whole society supports this concept. They are presented as being polar opposites, and often people use the word *binary* to describe these distant poles, a word that means *composed of two things*. We talk jokingly about men being from Mars and women from Venus – two different planets – or we claim that boys are better at math than girls and that girls are better at emotional communication, while men are clueless in relationships – old stereotypes that reinforce opposing gender roles. We also assume that it's very easy to definitively determine sex by matching up hormones, chromosomes, and reproductive organs.

But in reality, *sex* isn't such a simple category, and it's not a binary. Current research shows that in terms of biological sex, humans fall along a spectrum, or *continuum*, not into two totally separate containers. There's actually a huge variety in what we think of as the determining factors: a range of chromosome combinations, hormone levels, and reproductive organs. Our insistence on calling sex a binary category is more a product of our culture than it is of empirical reality, or hard provable scientific fact. In other words, it suits our culture to have two categories of people who are tasked to take on different functions and social roles: females are caretakers, and look after babies and do housework, while men are put in control, as politicians and leaders. Of course, the world has changed. We know women can be presidents and surgeons; we know men can be nurses and even 'mannies.' But the stereotypes about the opposing binary remain.

Bodies are indeed different, but the *meaning* we currently attach to biology and sex is problematic. This is similar to the belief that the category of *race* is based in biology because of differences of skin color and features. In fact, race as a concept was invented in the 17th century, and used as a justification for the enslavement of Africans in colonial America.¹ Racism is the expression of discrimination and inequity based on perceived racial difference.

It's very hard for most of us to accept that sex isn't the simple binary we've always been told it is. That's partly because it's a foundational structure that our society has historically rested upon. From birth, and depending on which society or culture we are living in, we're socially trained to treat males and females differently. But these are *gender roles*, not biologically based. So, yes, there are physical differences in people called male and female, but there are also lots of people in between. The fixed male-female binary does not reflect full scientific fact.² People in the

¹ Roediger, David R. "Historical Foundations of Race," Smithsonian National Museum of African-American History & Culture.

² See works by Anne Fausto-Sterling, <https://www.annefaustosterling.com/>



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middle of the sex spectrum include *intersex* individuals with a mix of primary and secondary sex organs and characteristics.

So, what is gender?

Understanding sex as a continuum is hard, but then we also have to add *gender* into the mix. Sex and gender are not interchangeable terms, although we often use them that way.

Sex refers to the body, but *gender* refers to the mix of attributes and behaviors we associate with each sex. *Gender presentation* is about how we present ourselves to the world – through our clothes, makeup, mannerisms, etc. In our culture, most people assume that *gender* is inherently connected to *sex* – for example that males must have a hard masculine gender presentation and females must appear feminine. But in fact, gender is not necessarily connected to biology.

Gender behavior, *gender rules*, and *gender roles* are then associated with what we consider masculine and feminine, and are socially enforced. To this day, newborn infants are swaddled in blue or pink, while doctors perform surgery on intersex infants who are born with external sexual organs deemed abnormal. Our societies work to assign us hard gender roles at birth.

People who identify as *nonbinary* or *genderqueer* challenge the simplistic notion of gender. So do people who self-identify as *transgender*. They are distinguished from people who identify as *cisgender*; a term that applies to someone whose gender identity matches the sex registered for them at birth. Trans individuals feel a mismatch of gender identity and sex assigned at birth, or may. Non-*cis* individuals may adopt alternative pronouns like *they* and *their* versus *he* and *she*.

Dismantling the sex/gender binary

For centuries, women fought against restrictive gender roles that demanded they play inferior social roles to men. For centuries, men argued that biology was a reason to do that: women were weaker, smaller, and less logical than men. These stereotypes have fallen away, but not everywhere, and not in traditional societies or communities where male leaders point to biology as evidence of why they are more physically capable of being in charge.

Forcing everyone into fixed binary categories of sex and gender isn't just scientifically flawed; it has serious social implications. It restricts us to rigid presentations of self, and marks as "other" anyone who may appear different and doesn't fit neatly into the binary system. That includes women who appear less stereotypically feminine and men who appear less stereotypically masculine. It refuses to recognize the variety of healthy bodies or accept the wide variety of ways that sex and gender connect in the same bodies, and may be expressed differently.



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Dismantling the binary, then, is an act of liberation for *everyone*. That’s also why those who cling to rigid gender roles are so opposed to any challenge to the binary theory of sex. That’s why the right wing in the US has unleashed a legislative war on trans and nonbinary people, whom it sees as the most visible representation of a refusal to accept the binary of sex. Some view their religion as supporting traditional gender roles and feel threatened by the idea that the differences between individuals are more complex. But that opposition is really about gender roles and gender presentation – how people dress and act – or *gender expression*. It’s not really about biology, but about how they want to enforce traditional gender roles for males and females.

That’s also where biology and stereotypes come back in: some conservatives feel it’s a woman’s biological duty to bear children and be caretakers for them, as well as be subservient to their husbands; men are tasked with caring for their wives and families as the primary breadwinners. Arch-conservatives go further: they don’t want women in the workforce, but at home. It’s a 1950s outdated view of gender roles, one that uses biology and religion as reasons why men should be socially in charge and wives should submit to husbands. The term for a system where men seek to control is called *patriarchy*. That thinking permeates Project 2025.

What does Project 2025 say?

Project 2025 repeatedly asserts that sex is binary, and claims this as a “biological reality” (*pg. 19, pg. 283*). They call any evidence to the contrary “junk gender science” (*pg. 283*).

The authors also don’t distinguish between *sex* and *gender*, and so their next step is to assert that transgender people – an in-between or more fluid gender identity – are unacceptable. It is an “unscientific notion,” they claim, that “men can become women (and vice versa)” (*pg. 456*). This claim nullifies the complex combinations of sex and gender individuals experience.

Not only is sex binary for Project 2025, but it must be defined “under Title IX to mean only biological sex recognized *at birth*” (*pg. 333*). Here, the patriarchs of Project 2025 want to lock in rigid gender roles at birth, to prevent individuals from later claiming a different internal gender identity. They want to prevent transgender individuals from getting identity documents that may reflect a different sex than was listed on their birth certificates. These actions are about social control – a legal and policy effort – to negate the continuums of sex and gender.

The deeper goal: protect the traditional family

Project 2025 recognizes that the dismantling of the sex/gender binary is a step toward liberation and away from outmoded or “traditional” assumptions about men and women: “The Left has commandeered the term ‘gender,’ which used to mean either ‘male’ or ‘female,’ to include a spectrum of others who are seeking to alter biological and *societal sexual norms*” (*pg. 259*).

That’s why Project 2025 repeatedly asserts the prioritization of the “traditional family,” and suggests that “the Secretary [of Health and Human Services] should proudly state that men



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and women are biological realities that are crucial to the advancement of life sciences and medical care and that married men and women are the ideal, natural family structure” (pg. 489).

Here, Project 2025 also makes clear another big ideological goal: to attack homosexuality, and eliminate federal protections and gains in civil rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and intersex and asexual + (LGBTQIA+) individuals. By prioritizing the traditional family, they are asking the government to newly declare LGBTQIA+ people – including married gay people and LGBTQIA+ families – less than ideal and “unnatural” – a familiar homophobic prejudice.

Project 2025 argues that the legal definition of “sex discrimination” should be restricted, and it goes even further by taking away legal protections for LGBTQIA+ and trans people: a new conservative president should “rescind regulations prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, transgender status, and sex characteristics” (pg. 584). That could also impact any girl or woman who challenged policies on the basis of gender discrimination.

While Project 2025’s authors are intent on erasing homosexuality, and any identity that isn’t hard female or male, they are also opposed to feminism. They want to restrict *female agency*, not only biology. That’s the patriarchal undercurrent, again. The issue is power, not sex.

If sex is binary, then gender affirming care is wrong and must be outlawed: “The President should immediately [...] eliminate central promotion of [...] the new woke gender ideology, which has as a principal tenet ‘gender affirming care’ and ‘sex-change’ surgeries on minors” (pg. 62). Here, Project 2025 refers to the increased availability of psychosocial support and medical care and services for individuals who experience their gender as being at odds with their physical bodies or assigned sex at birth and seek a remedy for that. Some may seek surgery that “affirms” their gender identity.

Project 2025 views gender affirming care as a “social contagion,” stating that “minor children, especially girls, are attempting to make life-altering decisions using puberty blockers and other hormone treatments and even surgeries to remove or alter vital body parts.” This, they claim, “may even increase suicide rates” (pg. 345).

These statements are presented as fact, when statistics show suicide rates are actually high in children and adults who identify as transgender and experience familial and social rejection, threats, and violence. Those who seek surgery generally do so as a positive, life-affirming strategy to address ongoing gender dysphoria, an internal experience or condition of emotional unease in which one’s inner gender identity does not match one’s external physical body or features. People often express this as being born in, or living in, the wrong body. Their gender does not match the biological sex they were assigned at birth. Psychological counseling and medical evaluations must precede any gender affirming surgeries for gender dysphoria.

Medicare shouldn’t cover gender-reassignment surgery, says Project 2025, while Health and Social Services and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services should “acknowledge



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the growing body of evidence that such interventions are dangerous and acknowledge that there is insufficient scientific evidence to support such coverage in state plans” (pg. 474).

If sex is binary, then trans people are a threat to society: Trans people, Project 2025 says, are especially a threat to children: “Look at America under the ruling and cultural elite today: [...] children suffer the toxic normalization of transgenderism with drag queens and pornography invading their school libraries” (pg. 1).

Project 2025 then lumps trans people in with pornographers: “Pornography, manifested today in the omnipresent propagation of transgender ideology and sexualization of children, [...] has no claim to First Amendment protection” (pg. 5). People who purvey such material, they say, should be “classed as registered sex offenders.”

Trans people also have no place in the military: “Those with gender dysphoria should be expelled from military service” (pg. 105). In short, Project 2025 criminalizes the nonbinary.

Children must be protected from trans people and from any materials that normalize them. To counter the supposed threat to school children, “The Secretary of Education should insist that the department serve parents and American ideals, not advocates whose message is that children can choose their own sex,” argues Project 2025 (pg. 286).

Project 2025 supports removal of LGBTQIA+ materials from school classrooms and libraries, and limits young people’s access to the internet to prevent any possible exposure to LGBTQIA+ identity, or to ideas that challenge traditional gender roles. For example, out of 3,362 book bans recorded by PEN in 2022-23, many kept out of school libraries dealt with LGBTQIA+ and gender issues.³ Project 2025 justifies this censorship in order to “protect” children. Critics contend this book banning is a thinly veiled act of anti-gay prejudice.

Further, the authors propose to deny the ability of school-age trans people to change their names without parental consent: “No public education employee or contractor shall use a pronoun in addressing a student that is different from that student’s biological sex without the written permission of a student’s parents or guardians” (pg. 346). Under the banner of “parents’ rights,” conservatives want to use the law to enforce rigid gender roles assigned at birth. This has less to do with sex, or science, or puberty, or children’s safety, and more to do with social control, and again, with patriarchy.

That is what one encounters, under all the ink spilled over biology, gender, and identity: a battle for social power, in which men – heterosexual men – make the rules and seek to police others whose identity or bodies may be or feel different. That’s not an especially new story. Nor should it surprise anyone to find the patriarchs of Project 2025 also want to control women’s bodies, and criminalize reproductive choice. It’s all of a piece. It’s not about the sex differences or biology, but their need to keep the lines and gender boxes drawn hard and sharp, like the battlefield they represent. Any blurring of those lines is considered an affront to male authority. Not biology, not sex, but political power. *That’s what the war over gender is all about.*

³ <https://pen.org/report/book-bans-pressure-to-censor/>