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Ontology of Gender: The Trans Community in the Gender Realism and Gender Nominalism Discourse

Jerika Limin and Dr. Mark Anthony Dacela^{1,*}

¹ Undergraduate Thesis Coordinator, Philosophy Department

*Corresponding Author: mark.anthony.dacela@dlsu.edu.ph

Abstract: The distinction between sex and gender that started with De Beauvoir led to associating gender to cultural and sex to biological. However, queer theorists, such as Butler, pointed out that the sex/gender dichotomy is too simplistic, problematic even, in that it marginalizes other gender, sex and sexuality identities through its hegemonic framework of heteronormativity. The ambiguity now led to asking the fundamental question: What is gender? In return, there are two stances that attempt to answer the ontological aspect. Gender realism states that gender is real in that gender is essential and universal in all human beings. On the other hand, gender nominalism states that gender is not real in that sense but in that it is and ought to be promoted by external factors such as social construction and the foundations for a rigid identity politics. This paper aims to explain the narrative through the defences and drawbacks behind both stances of the debate in order to see the various ways of how feminists account for gender despite having the same objective to abolish oppression that the patriarchy promotes. Furthermore, in order to see the significance of it all further in the present day society, I will bring the debate into the light of the Trans community. That is, if feminism aims for individuality and inclusivity, what stance in the debate should feminists adhere to that would account for their place in the identity politics towards gender equality? To answer, despite how both stances have their problematic consequences, I will claim that both ontological stances have its benefits and drawbacks. Paritcularly, this paper is to claim that gender nominalism is insufficient to define the ontological status of gender because it is insufficient to account for the Trans community.

Key Words: Gender, Ontology; Gender Realism; Gender Nominalism; Trans Community; Identity Politics

INTRODUCTION

Gender is defined as “the attitudes, feelings, and behaviours that a given culture associates with a person’s biological sex (APA, 2012, p. 2).”¹ This

suggests that, in present times, gender is considered as a social and cultural factor that is embedded in and by the society, further suggesting that its application could differ from one society or another, depending on the culture or society one is in. This does not come off as new information though, at least to feminists, that gender has not always been viewed in this manner. Back in the times until the 19th century, gender was regarded as to having a necessary association to sex, this being

¹ American Psychological Association, "Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients," in *American Psychologist*, 67(1) (2012), 10.



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conventionally regarded as the reproductive, physical and biological aspects of a being that was simply brought naturally. Due to this conceptualized linkage between the two concepts, it must follow that gender is natural as well. With people during the early time period thinking that the cultural gender and the biological sex must have a necessary and direct correlation led to problematic effects, and this is known as to how women were treated in the society. The early socio-cultural norm led to the dominance and oppression in accordance to the majority of the male population, resulting to 'the patriarchal system' that was and is still apparent as argued by present-day feminists, but this also led to the sort of inequality women fought strongly against as manifested and marked by the three historical waves of feminism. The awakening through demolishing the conventional thought between sex and gender of having a necessary correlation brought women to fight for their suffrage in the 19th century. This also brought women to fight for a radical equality through activism during the 1960s, and this also brought social awareness for the rights of the marginalized as a whole even until today. This clear-cut distinction between sex and gender was explicitly pointed out by Simone De Beauvoir in her well known book, *The Second Sex*:

"The future woman naturally feels indignant about the limitations her sex imposes on her. The question is not why she rejects them: the real problem is rather to understand why she accepts them."²

To put it straightforward, a person born with male reproductive parts is expected to act, feel and think in a "manly" way, while a person born with female reproductive parts is expected act, feel and think in a "womanly" way. These actions, feelings and thoughts are in necessarily correlation to the sex they were born with. Despite this is how things are, at least during the time of De Beauvoir, she significantly claims that this should not be the case. This norm as imposed by the society is merely limiting because there are cases where females do not act, feel and think in a "womanly" way, and vice versa. This gives the new paradigmatic idea that

gender is socially constructed, specifically by the patriarchy, and that of which is imposed to be necessarily associated to sex. In the collective level, women felt the restrictions after being exposed to De Beauvoir of being barred to their gender, realizing that this was even being imposed to them. However, it is agreed upon that it is too simplistic to presume that sex is biological and gender is cultural as had been pointed out by feminists, and it is, in their perspective, problematic as well. The dichotomy between sex and gender was in order to eradicate the hierarchical gender binary between the man and the woman. In return, this indeed resulted to a great progression towards gender equality, but this is merely in the context of the mentioned gender binary. Judith Butler is a queer theorist who explicitly raised the concern towards the problematic dichotomy because it subsumed under the framework of heteronormativity.³ Furthermore, she stresses that this is the problem with formulating such dichotomies in the first place, if one were to look at it on a bigger picture. This is to claim that a lesbian is to be understood as a female who acts, feels and thinks like a man. So she is no longer a woman, but of course, feminists have previously refuted this for so many times. In other words, understanding the relation of sex and gender in this sense is to assume heterosexual acts because gender subsumes sexuality as its category.⁴ A male individual desiring another male individual would be perceived as deviant because it does not fit the heterosexual framework as motivated by the gender binary. To recover from this laden assumption, Butler significantly distinguishes sex, gender, and sexuality, and from this is where she the queer theory emerges.

This leaves an open-ended question for feminists and queer theorists up to date: What is gender? These amendments throughout the centuries specifically led to questioning on its ontological status. The view on gender being necessarily correlated to sex is to argue for gender realism, while the view introduced by De Beauvoir on gender being socially constructed is argue for gender nominalism. The focus of my paper will be on the narrative behind the running debate between these two stances, but in

² Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. by Constance Borde & Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York City, NY: Random House, Inc, 2010), 484.

³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 1986), 33-44.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 33-44.



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order to see the whole picture in one aspect, I will introduce an issue that the debate still needs to address as of today. Despite how this paper will show that both stances have their problematic consequences, it will claim that gender nominalism is insufficient to define the ontological status of gender because it is insufficient to account for the Trans community.

1.1 ONTOLOGY OF GENDER

The history of gender tells us that the debate on the ontology of gender was initially not a matter being settled in an explicit manner. De Beauvoir and Butler never proclaimed themselves to be gender nominalists, but their arguments show that they lean onto such stance. It was not until Elizabeth Spelman who forthrightly pointed out that gender realism is a problematic standpoint, so it should not serve as a foundation to understanding feminist movements.⁵ To understand what it means to be a woman with this view is to continuously exclude women, consciously or unconsciously, by realizing that not every woman could fit in the set criteria given by women in order to answer this question. This criterion would be inevitably limited regardless the alterations because it was made by a group of women who is limited by their own experiences. For instance, Spelman noticed that the definition of being a woman during the start of the Second Wave is merely the definition of being a White middle-class woman, leaving out the experiences of women from other races and classes⁶. Women do not share the same experience because there are other factors to consider when evaluating the experiences of a woman, such as their culture. As a result, feminists leaned towards gender nominalism in order to account for intersectionality, which had first been initiated by Spelman. However, it seems counter-intuitive to assert that women do not have any commonalities at all because of their different experiences. This was a criticism brought up by Mari Mikkola through her example of being a wife. In this example, she explains that despite there are different conditions as due to cultural difference

⁵ Natalie Stoljar, "Different Women. Gender and the Realism-Nominalism Debate", in *Feminist Metaphysics*, C. Witt (ed.), (Dordrecht, ZH: Springer, 2011), 28.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

for being a wife in result to a same-sex marriage or being a wife in result to a monogamous heterosexual Christian marriage, it shows that it is still possible to have a universal notion of a wife. More importantly, as suggested by this criticism, gender nominalism also has a more complex problem to face on a bigger picture:

"The problem is not an absence of content for the category "women" but an overabundance and inconsistency of content, given the multiple situations in which women find themselves in various cultures."⁷

In the next few sections, I will be tackling on how feminists shifted and divided themselves as time went on by discussing on the defences and criticisms given to both stances. This is also to take note of two things. First, this narrative is for the sake of a better comprehension for my claim against gender nominalism because, as mentioned earlier, examining on the difficulties it currently faces. Second, in connection to the first, even if the structure of my paper relies on how Natalie Stoljar has written hers, it is to be guaranteed that this paper would be more extensive in regards to the debate as I will be tackling on the debate in a different light. That is to say it is under the scope of the issue that is currently faced both by gender realism and gender nominalism, which is not entertained in her paper. Namely, this involves the difficulty for accounting the Trans community for gender nominalists and the revival of neo-gender realism by a contemporary feminist. However, the paper will centralize on the former issue because of its impactful implications and aftermaths in feminist movements today.

1.2 GENDER NOMINALISM

The account of Spelman is the conventional understanding of gender nominalism because it denotes the understanding of gender as a social construct. On the other hand, gender realism is associated that of gender essentialism, the claim that gender is essential within the human individual. Since essentialism and social constructivism are typically deemed as conflicting views, and most, if

⁷ Mari Mikkola, "Elizabeth Spelman, Gender Realism, and Women," in *Hypatia*, 21 (2006), 89.



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not all, feminists are against essentialism because of how it undermines personal identity, then most feminists are for the social constructivist approach. That is at least during the years when the book of Spelman first came into the feminist picture⁸. To reiterate, Mikkola has already given a criticism on this notion of nominalism. She argues that essentialism and social constructivism could go hand-in-hand, and it could still be for the stance of gender realism. That is, there could still be a universal woman without claiming that being a female is essentially being a woman. Thus, gender realism could still prevail, but this would leave an open-ended problem once again for the definition of being a woman without excluding others who are under the mentioned gender classification. Perhaps the solution for this inevitable problem is to approach gender nominalism differently. In her article, Stoljar entertains the different approaches to gender nominalisms that were suggested by different feminists, but it boils down to her pointing that all of these approaches have their own drawbacks. For instance, this being a modified version of the account of Spelman because of its reliance over socio-cultural factors, the Argument from Nonseparability claims that gender is not real because it is not a true isolated aspect of identity⁹. It could not be perceived as separate from the other aspects of personal identity such as class or race; in fact, gender is merely dependent on these aspects¹⁰. Mikkola once again criticizes though that this is not a metaphysical problem, but it is an epistemological one¹¹. To simply put, just because one could not perceive gender as an isolated aspect does not mean that it is not an isolated aspect. The lack of imagination should not be a shut down to the possibility to posit an unproblematic account of a universal woman in the future, despite that it seems that it could not be accounted for currently.

Another way to understand gender nominalism is to think about women as a social collective as postulated by Iris Marion Young¹². She proclaimed to be a Bandita because she adapted the existential take of seriality by Jean Paul Sartre for her purposes. A series is defined as “a social collective whose members are unified passively by the objects around which their actions are oriented or by the objectified results of the material effects of the actions of the others.”¹³ This is to differentiate that of a group, which is a social collective wherein the people mutually acknowledge others. This means that people within a group have the same objectives throughout and each members of the group are self-conscious about it, while people within a series have the same objective at one point and they are initially not conscious about it. In a series, once the objectives are met, they could go back to their own lives as different individuals. An example given by Sartre that was adopted by Young is on commuters waiting for the bus on the bus stop¹⁴. These commuters have their own reasons for taking the bus: one could be commuting to work or to school or merely for the sake of travelling from one place to another. These people would be considered as a series if something affects the bus from getting to the bus stop on time one day, probably it being stuck from traffic or its engine broken down in the middle of the road. This would lead to the commuters to take action, say approaching a traffic enforcer, and with their new mutual objective, they form a series. By applying this to gender nominalism, Young gives a remedy on how to become inclusive and an anti-essentialist. Like the bus commuters, women as individuals have their own lives ahead of them, but when an event occurs where their experiences as women bring them together, such as how they would empathize for an sexually harassed woman, that is where being a woman advances into the conscious level. This account by Young strengthens the notion that gender could merely be used for the sake of identity politics

⁸ Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1988).

⁹ Natalie Stoljar, “Different Women. Gender and the Realism-Nominalism Debate”, in *Feminist Metaphysics*, C. Witt (ed.), (Dordrecht, ZH: Springer, 2011), 36.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹² Despite Mari Mikkola’s work focused on women to account for gender nominalism, the women in this segment is merely an instantiation of the different experiences of different genders. If it be possible, I will be as gender inclusive as possible on this paper.

¹³ Iris Marion Young, “Gender as Seriality: Thinking about Women as a Social Collective”, in *Intersecting Voices*, I. M. Young, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 724.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 725.



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without facing the inevitable defining problems that gender realists encounter. However, Young does not seem to dodge the criticism given to Spelman by Mikkola, as had already been pointed out by Stone.¹⁵ Could it not be claimed that there is a universal definition of a woman that is socially constructed? Furthermore, this account seems to beg the question: What is it exactly that unites these women to form an identity politics that Spelman and Young are pushing through?

In order to address the problem as brought up on the accounts of Spelman and Young, Stoljar have successfully avoided them by her argument of complexity. She claims that “womanness is something complex, not something simple, and the ingredients in the complex structure of womanness are not always the same ingredients from one woman to another.”¹⁶ To understand what she meant by womanness¹⁷ is to understand Wittgenstein on his concept of family resemblance. Wittgenstein argues that there is no such thing as an essence, but there are family resemblances¹⁸. A game is the perfect example because there is no clear definition of what a game is. Card games may need skills and luck, while children games may need luck but not skill, and so on.¹⁹ Stoljar adopts the concept for gender and names it resemblance nominalism: Despite that there is no clear definition of what a woman is; there is still a family resemblance of women, a paradigm for it. The family resemblance is what unites women despite all the different roots and experiences they have. In this sense, for instance, a butch would be considered a woman despite not wearing clothing that is in adherence to femininity, and a transgender woman would be considered a woman despite not having the

same reproductive organs as females do. There are certain and given classifications that are present in the woman paradigm, but Stoljar emphasizes that to simply touch one of the classifications is enough to be labelled as a woman. The resemblance nominalism of Stoljar does not show any hint of essentialism because she adapts the anti-essentialism of Wittgenstein, nor does it show universalism because there is no strict definition of a woman that is expected from women in other societies to follow. Thus, this account is most qualified as not only does it oppose the two key elements of realism, but it could also only account for identity politics without asserting the realness of gender.

The significance of detailing on these three distinct accounts of gender nominalism is to grasp its opposition towards gender realism. First, feminists avoid gender realism because of its exclusivity for the people who do not fit the gender and sex dichotomy. As had already been established earlier, the dichotomy is problematic because people that are classified under the LGBTQ community, for instance, would be deemed as going beyond the norm. Second, gender nominalism highlights on gender fluidity because to be perceived in this manner is neither essential within a person nor universal in that there is no strict definition applicable to a particular gender. Third, gender nominalism also suggests intersectionality because not only does it consider gender, it also accounts for the other aspects of the identity of the individual. This not only means accounting for white middle-class women, but it is also to account for women who are not under such classifications. Lastly, the main purpose of gender for gender nominalists is to find a unifying ground for a rigid identity politics, and this has been brought into attention on the account of Young, though this generally applies to the whole gender nominalism enterprise.

1.3 GENDER REALISM

As had been observed throughout the history of gender, gender realism is perceived in a negative manner because this view on gender led to problematic aftermaths, socio-culturally speaking. Regardless, it should still be brought into light what the stance argues for. The conventional understanding of gender realism is that of which entails gender essentialism. Gender essentialism could be defined in different ways, as classified by

¹⁵ Alison Stone, “Essentialism and Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Philosophy”, in *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 1 (2004), 146-149.

¹⁶ Natalie Stoljar, “Different Women. Gender and the Realism-Nominalism Debate”, in *Feminist Metaphysics*, C. Witt (ed.), (Dordrecht, ZH: Springer, 2011), 40.

¹⁷ Womanness is typically to be understood with this question: What makes a woman, a woman?

¹⁸ Natalie Stoljar, “Different Women. Gender and the Realism-Nominalism Debate”, in *Feminist Metaphysics*, C. Witt (ed.), (Dordrecht, ZH: Springer, 2011), 41.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.



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Witt²⁰, but to stick to how it was previously understood, it is that of related to the biological sex. The sex is essential because it has been defined as natural or innate, so as due to deduction, it follows that gender is essential as well in the aspects of it being natural or innate. One could also grasp the thesis of gender realism by restating its claim in a manner that is easier to comprehend: Gender is real in a sense that its metaphysical existence in the world is independent from the interference of human convention. In other words, gender was not formulated by human convention because it is naturally situated in an individual, meaning that it is beyond the social construction. It is not merely for the purpose of unifying feminist and gender equality movements because gender here is part of personal identity. The well known implications of leaning onto the claim that gender is essential is to bring into effect the necessary urge to fit into the gender spectrum that is recognized from power relations, and this is the point of Butler on how gender subverts authentic identity²¹. For example, if there would come a time where the gender binary of being a man or a woman may have already been fully eradicated, then this would still inevitably result to a new hierarchical binary. This is a personal understanding of it but in order to demonstrate a point, the hierarchical power relations battle would simply persist through the cis-gender and the transgender binary. It proves from here that it is impossible to capture one's authentic identity through gender because of the constant power struggle it attaches into if one attempts to identify him or herself in accordance to these gender identities²². This could be compared to the issue with labels. There are people who would rather not put labels on their relationships because it would only lead to having a set of expectations for their partner. Gender sets that set of expectations, and this is how it becomes a subversion of identity.

In spite of gender realism being thought of as having problematic outcomes, as had been

elaborated in history, there are feminists who still revive such a view by looking at it in a different paradigm. The account of gender realism by Charlotte Witt is a modified version of gender essentialism. The conventional concept of gender essentialism should not be mistaken with the contemporary definition made by Charlotte Witt, who thoroughly discussed her concept of it in her work, *The Metaphysics of Gender*. She claims that gender is the "gender is the mega social role or the principle of normative unity for social individuals."²³ She uses the concept of essentialism by Aristotle as a framework by adapting it to her claim for gender, particularly through the concept of unification essentialism or uniessentialism. This is different with natural essentialism in such that uniessentialism is concerned with how the individual came into existence from the parts he or she consisted²⁴. She motivates her claim by starting off with the intuition of gender giving a huge impact to the identity of an individual because if a person were to have a different gender, then that person would be having a changed identity as well. In attempts to making sense of this, though it must be taken note of that addressing this intuition is not the whole purpose of her book, she differentiates three roles of a human subject, and those are the human subject as a human organism, a person and a social individual. To put it simply, the human organism is the human subject is its physiological or biological aspect, the person is the human subject as a self-conscious being, and the social individual is the human subject who lives in the social sphere with roles to fill in.²⁵ These three aspects are what consists of a human subject, but she clarifies that gender only applies to the social individual. She argues that an individual always experiences a dilemma in terms of what course of action to take, and this is because of the conflicting social roles that person has. From this, Witt claims that gender as the unifying source is responsible for the existence and the situation where the social individual is in. For instance, a woman might be having trouble on whether to attend the ballet

²⁰ Charlotte Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, (Oxford Scholarship Online, doi 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199740413.001.0001, 2011).

²¹ Sara Salih, "On Judith Butler and Performativity," in *Sexualities and Communication*, 1 (2007), 58-59.

²² *Ibid.*, 66-67.

²³ Charlotte Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, (Oxford Scholarship Online, doi 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199740413.001.0001, 2011), 103.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 13-20.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 51-58.



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competition of her son, or to assist her boss as this was already planned out months ago. Witt would claim that it is gender that is responsible for this dilemma due to the social roles that gives conflict to the woman, and it is gender that is the cause for the social individual to choose either one of the paths. Witt's distinct account of gender essentialism suggests that instead of looking at essentialism and social constructivism as two opposing theories, the social sphere has its own ontology where gender serves to be essential in the social individual.

To reiterate, Witt argues that gender is essential in the social sphere, because it serves as the unifying element of the conflicting roles within social individuals. The take of Witt is a whole new ball game that nominalists should take note of. First, her definition of gender is not the typical essentialism of gender in such that gender here is not given relation to the biological sex, this being emphasized on her distinction between a human organism, a person and a social individual. Second, this does not hinder the true identity of an individual because her definition merely explains the metaphysics of gender; it being present in all social individuals is not a means to support any inkling that would result to hierarchical power relations. She explains this through her ascriptive theory of social normativity.²⁶ Third, a social individual could constantly change because of the ever conflicting social roles one is in even without affecting the human organism, the biological aspect, and the person, the self-conscious aspect.²⁷ The same barred system applies to the human organism and the person as these three do not necessarily affect one another.

1.4 THE DEBATE: ON THE TRANS COMMUNITY

In this section, I will examine on the debate of the ontology of gender through integrating the issues currently faced by the Trans community. Before tackling on this, however, it is of great importance to clarify what it means to be part of the Trans community. Take note though that this account of the trans people is only limited to this paper as: First, there are many philosophical

accounts in regards to the trans people, but it also does not me that I am disregarding the other philosophical accounts, and second, my definition adapts and bases on specifically the existential and phenomenological accounts on a trans person to breach my point of how insufficient gender nominalism is as the ontological definition of gender. Moreover, this paper then includes transgenders, transsexuals, male-to-female, female-to-male, and other gender identities alike, and even unlike to some degrees, but my whole point here is that the Trans community remains as an umbrella term for this paper and does not have to be regarded as one strictly by the readers of this paper and future writers about these trans people.

A trans person brings with him or her a fundamental identity proclamation that he or she surpasses and is beyond the expected heteronormativity. In the LGBTQ+ context, or jargon if I may, this person is beyond of what is now known to be a cis, and such a cisperson is known as one who was born as a male or female and decided to live in his or her whole life in accordance to the expectations of being a male or female respectively, which is namely that of being a man or a woman. There are different means for a trans person to go beyond the cisgendered norm such as through reproductive surgical processes or even changing one's pattern of clothing significantly that of which is in accordance to the gender that is the binary opposite of the gender typically expected due to one's biological sex. However, this should not be misconstrued as a person merely changing his or her everyday clothing wherein he or she could easily revert to what his or her pattern of clothing was. It is more than the pattern of clothing as this is, in fact, all about identity. Furthermore, as already brought up by Julia Serano in her book, a trans person is more than the usual misconception of a person who is "trapped in the wrong body" as this misleads to thinking that the phenomenology behind a trans person is merely physiological and biological.²⁸ A trans person is not one who craves to change his or her physical appearance just because he or she wanted to know what it felt like having different genitals on his or her body. Gender is not simply to be equated to the

²⁶ Ibid., 42-47.

²⁷ Ibid., 51-58.

²⁸ Julia Serano, *Whipping girl: A transsexual woman on sexism and the scapegoating of femininity* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2007), 78 - 82.



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body as it is that of which reflects the identity, partially or impartially, of the person; it is what makes him or her who he or she is.²⁹ One could say that there is this “self” behind this physical body, with the self and identity overlapping in this sense, and it is this physical body that externally represents the self. The last note could be at least one of the reasons for such changes made in the physical aspects of a trans person. So besides from defining a trans person as that of being beyond of what is expected for him or her to feel, think and act in a cisnormative culture, this paper is more importantly to focus on the conscious being who, in turn, is that trans person. Particularly, this paper is to center on the phenomenology of a trans person as he or she proclaims to be essentially a man or a woman despite living opposite of their expected gender as this is their claims of authenticity in regards to their identity.

This leads to asking: Does gender nominalism account for the gender identity claims of a trans person? As already mentioned earlier, there are drawbacks faced and suspended with the traditional accounts of gender nominalism. This issue to account for the trans people, however, is to question gender nominalism in a different light. This is for the reason that it not only challenges gender nominalism, but such means of challenging brings positive light to gender realism. Particularly, how could gender nominalism account for people who identify themselves as essentially being a particular gender identity that is more or less opposing to their given biological status at birth? A trans woman, for instance, would not agree that her identity is not merely socially constructed. In addition to this, she would proclaim that she is essentially a woman who would not find sense in the notion that her identity is reducible merely for political purposes. Being a trans person is regardless of being an activist or part of a political movement because that is also him or her beyond the political sphere, if such would be the case anyway, and that is also her in her everyday life.

This is also to bring about the criticisms raised by Bettcher herself in considering the resemblance nominalism account of gender. She

starts off by defining the concept ethical First Person Authority (FPA)³⁰; It is a concept synonymous to an avowal, only it should be understood as a deeper phenomenological and constant state. This does not include forced or even unconscious influences by others. From this, it seems to be aligned with the Kantian concept of autonomy if it were to be understood in the context of the Trans community because of their proclamations of being essentially a man or a woman. However, despite how promising it is due to its openness to inclusivity, even if it were the case that, let us say, a trans woman recognizes her ethical FPA as a person who is trans, it is part of our harsh reality today that this mutual recognition is not always, in fact usually, the case for others in societies. There are two aspects of ethical FPA, namely: “First, avowal concerns an acknowledgement as one might take responsibility for one’s feelings. Second, it often has the force of confession where concealment is presumed,”³¹ wherein most especially the second one is not recognized by others. She argues that assault and even the absence to recognize the ethical FPA of trans people is still apparent in present day social norms, and these have been manifesting either in subtle or unsubtle societal mindsets and practices.³² This is for the reason that this social norm is of equating gender presentation with genital presentation. So once a person is discovered as “misaligned” in the aspects of this social norm, that person would be considered as deviant, and this is actually the situation of trans people at least according to the assessment of society.³³ Specifically, the assault and absence of ethical FPA lead to different types of transphobic oppressions. These include direct acts of prejudices, such as from disregarding their economic and cultural status in society to acts of murder, to subtle acts of prejudices, such as the claims of authorized professionals who speak for the trans people, which overshadow the ethical FPA of trans people themselves. This is to relevantly bring up the issue in the late 20th century on medical professionals who

²⁹ N.F. Baldino. "Trans Phenomenology: A Merleau-Pontian Reclamation of the Trans Narrative," in *Res Cogitans*: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 21 (2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/2155-4838.1138>.

³⁰ Talia Mae Bettcher, "Trans identities and First-Person Authority," In *You've changed: Sex reassignment and personal identity*, Laurie Shrage (ed.), pp. 98–120 (2009), Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

³² *Ibid.*, 30-32.

³³ *Ibid.*, 14-17.



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claim that trans people are, in reality, mentally ill, specifically being diagnosed as to having Gender Identity Disorder or Gender Dysphoria, with implications that their claims are clinically proven. Bettcher basically points out, through these conditions in reality, that despite how the resemblance nominalism framework is promising, it is a framework that is far from being adapted by our society today. In fact, it may never be a framework that would be adapted or is adaptable at all.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Indeed, regardless what its true ontological status is, it could be unanimously agreed upon that gender does affect us in our everyday lives as it is apparent in our everyday-life discourses. Despite whether it is part of our identity or merely for the purpose of identity politics, it contributes to how we perceive other people and even ourselves. However, how we perceive others and ourselves varies as it is dependent on how we perceive gender as part of our reality. It is a given that gender is a significant topic even up to this date, but the question on how it should significantly affects us is still a topic open to debate.

I have discussed on the two ontological stances of gender for a more categorized understanding of both the implicit and explicit discourse about it throughout the centuries, decades and recent years,. It shows that gender realism was once the prominent stance until the feminist movements had arose, but it was only in the mid-20th century when the paradigm shift towards gender nominalism was very much apparent. However, this inclination towards gender nominalism did not last for long as an emergence of the trans discourse started in the end decades of the 20th century. The current issues on accounting for the Trans community not only shows that gender nominalism is at a disadvantage, but it also shows that, despite it being problematic, gender realism is at an advantage that have been brought into light at least in this respect. At this point, with all these shifting perspectives, it all just boils down to one certain analysis, and it is that the ontological discourse is not over with.

To address the social issues that involve gender equality, such as on the task of inclusivity in

the aspects of feminist and LGBTQ+ communities and movements, is at least one of the most prioritized objectives in our advanced society as of today. The theme of the Research Congress, which is on the 'Limitless Opportunities offered by ASEAN Integration', would be able to help attain this global objective on a greater scale in terms of dissemination and progression. The awareness of the people within the ASEAN countries on the current problems specifically faced by the Trans community would be of great potential step towards the reduction of the marginalization and oppression on a particular group of fellow human beings that is currently being marginalized and oppressed due to irrational judgments and norms of the majority such as their personal identity or, in other words, for being "who they are." If we are to achieve a nation that is truly integrated, if not united, then this is one manner to act upon it.

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