

Gender triangularity versus gender neo-imperialism and neutral versus nonbinary

V0.6, comments are appreciated

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Abstract

We formulate the accusation that the gender-noncritical position, one of the three gender singular positions, is in fact neo-colonial. For that reason a larger flexibility than that given by the gender-noncritical position is needed, so that no disrespecting of other cultures and normative export of our norms and values arise. A triangular position on gender, as discussed in [5] may satisfy such requirements. Next we argue that the term nonbinary can be felt as offensive by cis-males and by cis-females. For that reason we suggest that the alternative neutral (gender) is preferable.

1 Introduction

We will discuss two themes. First we will describe how a mono-angular approach may give rise to the accusation of attempted imperialism. Subsequently we will outline our preference for the use of ‘neutral’ over ‘nonbinary’. We will need a technical definition first.

With the uncompromising gender non-critical position (U-GNC-P) we will denote the gender non-critical position based on the strong hypothesis that gender self-identification must determine (takes primacy for) gender categorization for the genders male, female, and neutral. Thus:

Definition 1.1. *U-GNC-P is the position that without exception in all circumstances gender self-identification of a person P must determine gender categorization of P .*

For details regarding this hypothesis we refer to [3] and [5]. In the terminology of [5], U-GNC-P is a mono-angular gender position, taking inputs for gender categorization from a single source only (viz. the person to be categorized).

For a discussion of gender self-identification versus gender categorization in the style of [1] we refer to [3].

We will assume that U-GNC-P is tuned to take care of self-identification competence following Barnes [1]. The position U-GNC-P is qualified as pseudo-scientific in [6]. Extensive comments in support of that qualification are discussed in [5]. Some context of the debate is given in [7].

2 Demanding U-GNC-P compliance is neo-imperialist

We are under the impression that U-GNC-P is propagated with full force by a very strong lobby operating without any externally visible doubts about the justification of their own actions. The suggestion is made as were U-GNC-P an unavoidable outcome for each and every debate on gender in all cultures, states, and communities on our globe. Opposing U-GNC-P comes with the price of being accused of being gender critical, and worse, of being transphobic. In addition, when formulating doubts on U-GNC-P one may be targeted with (self-proclaimed) leftwing novelties such as deplatforming and social isolation. We cast our viewpoint as an accusation (in the sense of accusation theory of [4]):

Accusation 2.1. *U-GNC-P is an instrument of neo-imperialism.*

Internationally formulated demands for universal (or at least unconstrained) adoption of U-GNC-P amount to an attempt of neo-imperialism, and in that case we even see justification for speaking of (attempted) neo-imperialism with a white background.

Supporters of U-GNC-P may suggest that said policy is an outcome of scientific research in the area of gender studies, or they may claim that U-GNC-P has come about from convincing philosophical analysis, or from work in applied ethics. In any case, so it seems proponents of U-GNC-P seem to see not much need for additional reflection or debate. We see no basis for that suggestion (see [5]). And from our own perspective we see a promise (in the sense of promise theory of [2]):

Promise 2.1. *As long as its proponents systematically obstruct an orderly academic debate about it, we will oppose U-GNC-P as a matter of principle (and without feeling obliged to pay attention to the arguments of its proponents).*

We made the claim that an unlimited insistence on the adoption of U-GNC-P amounts to no less than neo-imperialism. Said neo-imperialism has its origins in the Northern hemisphere, has a white background, and remarkably has its roots in political feminism, arguably the source of today's gender theory. We are aware that speaking of a feminist background of universal claims for U-GNC-P will not go well with the many feminists who oppose U-GNC-P.

Indeed the claimed feminist background of U-GNC-P must not be misunderstood as the presence of full backing from the feminist side for U-GNC-P. In fact many feminists seem not to support U-GNC-P in which case they may be targeted by even more drastic political feminists with the transphobia accusation or with the TERF (trans exclusionary radical feminism) accusation (we refer to [3] for a survey of gender theory/policy related accusations).

Our viewpoint is the following:

a) U-GNC-P must not be taken for granted, instead it must be scrutinized and debated. U-GNC-P may well be 'victorious' in the end, but that 'victory' cannot be simply proclaimed by its proponents.

b) We assume that for various jurisdictions U-GNC-P will turn out to be felt problematic so that alternative gender categorization protocols must be contemplated. And we claim that the design of such alternative (i.e. non-U-GNC-P) categorization protocols constitutes a legitimate theme within gender studies. Such protocols may in fact be application specific, for instance for the participation in sports.

c) We feel that a gender triangular approach, as discussed in [5], offers better perspectives. The other two angles from which gender categorization may be approached are:

(i) the cluster: b-sex, androgyny, psychological sex, analytical and humanistic psychology,
(ii) social construction, societal considerations.

d) We expect that on the long run U-GNC-P will not be fully adopted in The Netherlands. Its ardent advocates will eventually feel the need to let others speak out and to

engage in an orderly debate.

e) We feel that no theory of sex and gender should be designed with the (cl)aim to set non-negotiable world-wide standards. World-wide diversity on matters of sex and gender is to be expected and constitutes no harm by itself. Of course if in due time a world-wide agreement is eventually found, the coming about of that state of affairs is to be welcomed.

f) It is possible that on the long run both b-sex (biological sex in the notation of [3]) and gender will disappear as characteristics of persons. However, we consider it to paradoxical if gender theory would have the (hidden) agenda to bring about that very state of affairs. In other words, we assume that gender theory proceeds on the basis of the presumption that b-sex and gender matters. On the long run that presumption may perhaps be refuted.

3 “Nonbinary” may be impolite, better use “neutral”

A 3G gender framework maintains a third gender besides male and female. In [3] we have proposed to use ‘neutral’ rather than ‘nonbinary’ as a third gender label.

On reflection, we feel that by openly self-identifying as nonbinary, a person perhaps without any such intention, creates a situation in which males and females are implicitly labeled as binary. If in a conversation P claims to be nonbinary there is an implicit accusation that male and female persons present are binary. We speak of the “I am nonbinary” accusation, in case this implicit meaning is indeed conveyed by a person presenting themselves as nonbinary. Now the problem with the latter is that binary comes with the connotation of binary only and there is no reason to assume that males and females would be neutral gender exclusionary 2G supporters. Males may self-identify as male and may not self-identify as binary at the same time for that reason. Females may self-identify as female but not as binary either for the same reason. In order to avoid the “I am nonbinary” accusation to hurt anyone’s feelings we suggest that the gender label is deprecated. We also think that for reasons of symmetry it is useful to avoid using a negative term for the third gender. We consider “neutral” not to be negative or to have a negative connotation. For these reasons we suggest that neutral replaces nonbinary as the gender label for a third gender besides male and female.

3.1 Safe spaces

Male or female persons who insist to be confronted with the “I am nonbinary” accusation may wish to ask for safe spaces where they are being protected from the occurrence of such accusations. In such safe spaces ‘neutral’ might be used instead of ‘nonbinary’.

4 Concluding remarks

We have drawn attention to two aspects of the dissemination of gender non-critical theory which we consider to be morally problematic. We take into account that initially our worries will not be taken seriously, but on the long run that may change. In any case, it will take ample time for these arguments to become forceful (if indeed they do).

We cannot imagine that U-GNC-P will soon be adopted world-wide and we expect that some flexibility in positions on matters of gender will sooner or later become part of the progressive canon as well. While gender neutral bathroom facilities are merely a matter of money, and may be solved rather straightforwardly, gender ideology neutrality is quite a different matter.

The safe spaces mentioned above in 3.1 are unlikely to come about in practice. We mention this possible demand in return of the plea for safe spaces by proponents of U-GNC-P who wish to be sure not to be confronted with persons who dare to question the tenets of U-GNC-P.

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