INTRODUCTION

This special issue of Nexus is devoted to an analysis of concepts of sex and gender in selected Oceanic societies. Interest in the variable ways people construct and perceive gender is a relatively new development in anthropology and reflects a growing appreciation of the cross-cultural diversity in gender forms. However, an understanding of the variable criteria upon which gender can be constructed cannot occur unless accompanied by an awareness of the profound effect Western ideas concerning sex and gender have had upon the interpretation and analysis of gender systems world wide. Much current research rests on Western assumptions, often implicit, concerning the nature of sex and gender and the relationship of men to women. In order to underscore this point, I have chosen, in the introduction, to highlight Western culture's perception of sex and gender in order that we may understand the culture specific meanings and assumptions that such concepts carry. This, I suggest, is essential for an understanding of the papers that follow. In the following article Western notions of sex and gender will be outlined in some detail and their effect on anthropological analysis discussed. Finally, our culture's construction of gender will be juxtaposed with those of selected societies in the Middle East, North America and the Pacific in order to demonstrate the very different, but no less 'real', basis on which gender is constructed elsewhere.

> There's only two alternatives in society. You're either a man or a woman. If I don't feel like a woman then it's got to be the other way...(Kessler & McKenna 1978: 112; emphasis added).

This statement, expressed by a female to male transsexual cogently and succinctly sums up Western society's attitudes and assumptions concerning sex and gender. Euroamericans conceptualize sex and gender as dualistic, mutually exclusive categories that lack the dynamic potential for transformation. Gender is presumed to rest ultimately on biological distinctions - predominantly genitals - hence congruence of biological sex and gender is imperative in Western culture (Stoller 1968). The existence of anomalies not easily or immediately slotted into a male/female dichotomy is regarded as evidence of biological or psychosocial abnormality rather than highlighting and rendering problematic Western society's bipolar classification of sex and gender. As a result, the veracity of universally dichotomous, exclusive categories of sex and gender is uncritically accepted and the problem of how people come to be categorized as male or female is seldom addressed (Kessler and McKenna 1978; Martin and Voorhies 1975; Vance 1980; Yudkin 1978).

In this essay I advance the idea that the perception of sex and gender as exclusively dichotomous, immutable categories given in the structure of the world is a social construction. Belief in a world composed of two, and only two, "sexes" is a product of socially shared and unquestioned methods that we, as members of our culture, use in order to construct our everyday reality (Kessler & McKenna 1978: vii).

Through social interaction such beliefs become chrystallized and objectified; we produce and reproduce our own reality with the result that the existence of a dual gender system rooted in biology becomes objective fact.

Traditionally, the term gender[1] has been used to designate the psychological and socio-cultural dimensions of maleness and femaleness, whereas, technically, sex denotes the biological aspects.[2] In a radical departure from the normative viewpoint, Kessler and McKenna (1978: 9-11) have chosen to eschew the concept of sex and thus underscore their belief that it is the element of social construction that is paramount in all aspects of maleness and femaleness. Their gender typology will be adhered to in this essay. Accordingly, 'gender assignment' is used to designate a particular instance of gender attribution that occurs only once, at birth, generally as a result of genital inspection. The everyday process whereby individuals are classified as 'male' or 'female' is the gender attribution process. The concept of gender identity is used to connote an individual's own sense about their maleness with or femaleness and which, in the case of transsexuals, need not be synonymous with biological sex or a gender attribution made by others. Belief in the veracity of two genders gives rise to the concept of gender role and establishes a sense of actual physical opposition between men and women. Gender role refers to social expectations concerning appropriate behaviour for persons designated as male or female. Although theories designed to account for gender role development vary considerably according to the degree of emphasis placed on environmental as opposed to biological factors, all major theorists unquestionably assume that dichotomous roles are a natural and necessary reflection of the bipolar nature of gender (Kessler & McKenna 1978: 12).

In Western culture gender is assumed, regardless of the importance of culture, to be ultimately based on a biological blueprint.[3] Biological factors are seen as the most basic and primary of causes; hence belief in the biological foundation of gender is tenaciously adhered to despite the fact that a growing body of literature clearly demonstrates that where biological factors conflict with social and psychological variables, the latter override biology in determining gender identity and influencing gender role (Kessler & McKenna 1978: viii). In non-ambiguous cases genitals are perceived as the crucial aspect of our construction of gender, such that penis equals male and vagina equals female. Except for the initial assignment at birth, however, genitals, seldom evident, play little role in attributing male or female status to an individual in everyday interaction. Rather we assume that a person labelled male or female will have the necessary and requisite anatomical equipment.

The reality of biologically based sexual dimorphism is taken for granted in Western culture (Lewis & Weintraub 1979: 149), assuming the status of dogma or what Kessler & McKenna refer to as an 'incorrigible proposition' (1978: 4).

> It is self-evident that man seeks to justify (explain metaphysically) or mythologize only those

> natural phenomenon whose irreducible character he refuses to concede. Hence the fact that mankind has always mythologized - most recently in scientific jargon - the existence of two sexes, is prima facie evidence that he refuses to accept this as an irreducible fact, whose understanding can only be impeded by the assumption that it is something to be 'explained'; i.e. to be justified metaphysically in the form of 'Just so Stories' for college graduates [emphasis in original] (Devereux 1967: 178).

Not only is the existence of sexual dimorphism unquestionably accepted in Western culture, but social scientists have tended to assume that this is true cross-culturally. The prevailing assumption that people everywhere assign gender at birth on an either/or basis as a result of genital inspection ignores the fact that many societies, including our own, are aware of the existence of intersexed persons. Cultures vary in the number of physical sexes they recognize, a point graphically illustrated by the Navaho who acknowledge a triadic system of phenotypic sex classification with corresponding number of genders (Martin & Voorhies 1975: 88). Among the Bimin-Kuskusmin of Papua New Guinea children are regarded as neither male or female but as inherently androgenous. Social males are produced through the transformation of children with male genitalia (Poole n.d.: 43). Is exclusive biological dimorphism an established fact of nature, the most given of all givens, or does our perception of sex and gender as bipolar predispose and constrain us to see dimorphism where continuity exists? Even in Western society the dichotomous nature of biological sex is by no means as clear cut as we would like to think.

For a biologist the concept of gender is grounded in the reproductive process, that is, the need for males and females to be able to distinguish one another apart in order to reproduce. Webster's Dictionary (1963) defines males as those who beget young by performing the fertilization function in generation and females as those who bear the young. But male and female are clearly much more encompassing concepts than a strictly biological definition would allow. Humans do not interact in a predominantly biological framework. Not everyone can or wishes to reproduce. Not all females are egg carriers nor all males sperm producers (Kessler & McKenna 1978: 165). In addition what are we to make of the relationship between sexual dimorphism and the need to distinguish males from females reproductively and alleged male/female behavioural traits? Dimorphism may be necessary for sperm and egg carrier to identify one another but this is not synonymous with male and female.

The most fundamental and seemingly dichotomous biological criterion for determining gender is chromosomal pattern, such that an XY karyotype denotes a biological male and an XX karyotype denotes a biological female. This appears straightforward but while most individuals do in fact exhibit either an XY or XX configuration, a number of possible permutations exist. Chromosome composition is not always clearly dichotomous: the existence of individuals who are

genetic mosaics (where for example some cells may have XO chromosomes and others XXY, et cetera) is recognized (Kessler & McKenna 1978: 49-52). To what gender are we to assign these individuals?

Similarly, hormonal dimorphism (the existence of 'male' hormones and 'female' hormones) is no longer maintained. New research suggests that categorization of hormones into male and female is not only a gross over-simplification but predominantly a social construction (Friedman et al 1974). Estrogen, progesterone, and the androgens, the gender hormones, are produced by both genders and often in quite similar quantities. Chemically these hormones are very similar and difficult to measure and it is significant that sex typing of urine specimens on the basis of hormonal assay is not possible (Kessler & McKenna 1978: 73-74).

Anatomical sexual characteristics also reflect a continuum rather than a strict dichotomy between male and female sexual characteristics. In fact, the physical sex differences exhibited by men and women are a result of highly similar developmental processes thus accounting for the existence of persons with intermediate genitalia (Martin & Voorhies 1975: 24-39). Yudkin (1978: 98) suggests that in such cases where anatomical, hormonal or chromosomal abnormalities produce intersexed individuals, doctors must, perforce, posit the existence of a third gender category whether partly male/partly female, both, or neither.

But are intersexed persons actually perceived and categorized as a third gender? In terms of physical attributes they would certainly seem to constitute a group apart from either male or female, but in truth they are not interacted with on such a basis. Rather than exemplify a third gender category, such individuals are regarded as special cases of male or female. Kessler & McKenna (1978: 58) point out that in biologically ambiguous cases the medical profession has tended to assign a male gender whenever an infant is capable of functioning as a male in a reproductive sense (i.e. has functioning testes) regardless of the adequacy of penis or presence of female sexual characteristics.

Even in ambiguous cases it is imperative in Western culture that a male or female gender assignment be made. This serves to underscore the point that it is not biology that gives rise to a dual system of gender classification; rather it is our construction of, and belief in, such a system and our subsequent filtering of reality through such lenses, that allows us to posit the biological dimorphism of men and women. All available evidence indicates that sex differences are better represented as points on a continuum rather than polar opposites (Kessler & McKenna 1978, Martin & Voorhies 1975). Yet scientists, no less than ourselves, are constrained to see male and female as dichotomous and ignore other biological possibilities as a result of living in a two gender world. Into such dichotomous categories have been slotted chromosomes, hormones, behavioural traits, physical characteristics et cetera. The idea that men and women constitute two mutually exclusive categories is a negation of natural similarities; a product of our culture, not a reflection of a "natural opposition" (Vance 1980: 129), or a "neutral description of nature" (Yudkin 1978:

93). Biological criteria are neither a necessary or sufficient basis for defining gender in everyday life; they are merely markers. The use of such physical signs does, however, demonstrate how strongly Western culture's construction of gender is rooted in the belief that biological criteria represent ultimate criteria (Kessler & McKenna 1978: 76).

At the social level there is a corresponding strong demand for a dichotomy of male and female that is presumed to parallel and correspond to a biological dichotomy, although gender attribution is not predicated on the basis of genitalia, chromosomes or reproductive organs. Instead, on the basis of initial interaction, we attribute a male or female gender to an individual, consequently we expect the requisite biological criteria to be congruent with our attribution. On conferring a male gender status we assume that said person will have XY chromosome pattern, male genitalia, display a masculine gender identity and so on.

Social and personal intolerance of incongruence between physical form and gender identity is made salient in the case of transsexuals who allow the surgical "correction" of their bodies in order to ensure consistency of physical form and gender. This is surely the ultimate sign of both the subjective and objective power of gender assumptions held in Western culture (Vance 1980: 34). Although the phenomenon of transsexualism would suggest that a person's social identity as a male or female need not, necessarily, be dependent on one's phenotypic sex, the existence of such 'anomalies', where identity and physical form are not in accord still poses something of a dilemma in our society. Is a post-operative male to female transsexual a man or a woman? Chromosome patterning reveals such a person to be male. According to primary sex characteristics such persons are neither male or female for they lack both testes and ovaries. On the basis of secondary sex characteristics a post-operative male to female transsexual is predominantly female: although lacking the capacity to menstruate, they have breasts, vagina and female fat distribution (Yudkin 1978: 97). In order to reduce the anxiety and dissonance that such situations may create, so called anomalies are either hidden away or surgically 'corrected' to ensure congruence of social identity and biology. The phenomenon known as transsexualism only makes sense where there exists a social identity of boy/man that is viewed as quite distinct from girl/woman, and where the latter is deemed incompatible with physical form (Yudkin 1978: 101). Where lack of correspondence is tolerated between genitals and gender, transsexuals no longer exist, - just males with vaginas and females with penises. As a result, gender membership would no longer rest on a physiological imperative but on gender identity instead. This in turn would obviate the need for a surgical solution now offered by modern medicine to transsexuals.

Transsexualism is important to an understanding of Western society's construction of gender not because, as a phenomenon, it calls into question the dual nature of our gender system, but because it actually re-inforces it. In order to obtain sexual reassignment surgery in North America, a transsexual must demonstrate invariant gender identity; that is to say they must show that they have always

felt themselves to be of opposite gender identity (Kessler & McKenna 1978: 117). Genital reconstruction or transformation, is seen as not really changing the "true" gender of a person thereby avoiding the dilemma of negating gender constancy.[4] Studies of transsexualism have much to offer to our understanding of the social construction of gender for they make obvious what non-transsexuals do naturally and without thinking: construct their own gender on a daily basis. Unfortunately, most research on transsexualism has focused on the presumed abnormality of such individuals.[5] Social learning theory, psychoanalytic theory and cognitive development theory all rest on the assumption that congruence of biology and social identity is mandatory for mental health[6] (however, see Garfinkel (1967) for an exception).

'Male' and 'female' are not absolute categories. Individuals vary and overlap both within genders and between genders on every social and biological variable (Kessler and McKenna 1978: 146). Much can be learned about Western assumptions concerning the nature of gender by studying those societies that construct their reality in very different ways from our own. The assignment of people at birth to categories based on some concept of gender appears to be universal. This does not imply however that all cultures assign or attribute gender according to a male/female dichotomy, although it is apparent that many ethnographers have (Kessler and McKenna 1978: 38). Even when researchers are aware of the cross-cultural variability in gender construction, the powerful ways our own gender system and ideology influences and informs such work is rarely acknowledged (Vance 1980: 130).

Many ethnographers have carried Western assumptions into the field thus creating confusion in the analysis of gender systems based on different criterion from our own. Ethnographers have tended to assume that gender equals genitals: where genitals are male, the gender must be male (Meigs 1976: 405).

Yet theoretically gender classification can be made on the basis of any number of criteria. Gender role appears to be a common method for defining gender cross-culturally, such that a genitally male person can, in certain contexts, be categorized as female on the basis of behaviour. Intuitively this should come as no great surprise; female anthropologists often report being treated "as men" due to dress and behaviour.

In Oman, it is the sexual act, not the sexual organs, that is definitive of gender. A man who takes the female role in sexual activity (that is, is passive) is regarded socially as a woman (Wikan 1977). In Mt. Hagen, maleness and femaleness are conceptualized apart from genital sex and believed to rest on behavioural traits which, in turn, are considered reflective of certain mental structures. Physiological aspects are not totally irrelevant but at best they are considered of secondary importance. Physiology confers only a potential that must be actualized through behaviour, thus allowing individuals to move back and forth and across the lines (Strathern 1978). Another mode of classification is evidenced by the Hua of Papua New Guinea who define gender according to

> "...the fluids associated with sexuality, namely menstrual blood, vaginal secretions, parturitional fluids, and sperm. As these fluids are transferable between the two genitally different classes, this classification permits cross-overs: where a genitally male person is classified as female through his contamination by female fluids, and a genitally female person as male by means of transfer of pollution out of her body (Meigs 1976: 405).

Hence, for the Hua,

> A person's gender does not lie locked in his or her genitals but can flow and change with contact as substances seep into and out of his or her body. Gender is not an immutable state but a dynamic flow. Such a view permits most persons to experience both genders before they die (Meigs 1976: 406).

Such methods of constructing and defining gender are no less 'real' than Westerners belief in the biological foundation of gender. What to one culture appears to be a defining feature of gender (that is, genitalia) may be viewed by others as only a correlate or even irrelevant.

Cross-cultural differences in the construction of gender permit variability in the number of recognized gender identities, roles and their constancy. Some of the earliest evidence available to anthropologists that is suggestive both of the fluidity of gender and the existence of supernummerary genders is the berdache.[7] Characterized by Angelino and Shedd (1955) as individuals of a definite physiological sex who assume the role and status of the opposite sex, berdache have been recorded among the Crow (Denig 1961), Zuni (Stevenson 1901; Parsons 1916), Mohave (Devereux 1937), Choctow (Karlen 1971), Sioux (Hassrich 1964), Cheyenne (Hoebel 1960) and Winnebago (Lurie 1953) to name a few. Early reports on the berdache assumed such individuals merely adopted the role of the opposite gender. The idea that individuals might actually become the other gender or constitute a third, quite distinct gender was not considered. Martin and Voorhies (1975) provide substantial evidence of the existence of a gender role peculiar to berdache and separate from traditional male and female roles in the berdache cultures. Berdache often engaged in behaviour that was neither clearly or exclusively male or female, but had elements of both. Dress was sometimes intermediate between male/female attire and pronouns used to address such persons reflected adopted gender not assigned gender (1975: 99-105).

Belief in dichotomized gender roles however often prevented anthropologists from making sense out of a berdache role that was neither male or female. Significantly Devereux (1961) interpreted the berdache among the Mohave Indians as an instance of collective ethnic neuroses. The possible existence of a third distinct gender role in

the berdache cultures makes a third gender category, neither female or male, a definite possibility. In some cases, Indian mythology appears to support this. For example, the Mohave believe that in the early mythical era men and women were undifferentiated (Devereux 1961: 12). Unfortunately, the berdache was all but extinct when anthropologists first began studying it: the last berdache had been dead for over 50 years when Lurie (1953) first wrote of the Winnebago berdache. Thus it is not possible to make any definitive statements concerning the possibility of supernummerary genders and gender transformation.

Recent evidence from other cultures, however, demonstrates that gender categories are not constituted in universal ways. Rather than being conceived in exclusively dualistic and static terms, many societies acknowledge the mutability and transmutability of gender.

Levy (1971) documents the existence of an institutionalized form of male homosexuality in Tahiti. Mahu, characterized as feminine role playing males, are still evident today in rural areas of Tahiti. Mahu live and dress as women, and are generally considered competent in all aspects of women's work. Adoption of such a role is not necessarily permanent and conversion back to original gender role is possible. Levy regards mahu and the institutionalization of role reversal as a necessary device for clearly differentiating males from females in a culture that plays down such differences. Tahitian culture exhibits little sex role differentiation; there is much similarity of male/female gender roles and to the extent that differences do exist, a good deal of crossing over is common. No grammatical index of gender exists, nor are the majority of first names differentiated according to sex (1971: 17). The painter Gauguin was known to comment that Tahitian males appeared androgenous: "there is something virile in the women and something feminine in the men" (in Levy 1971: 18). Levy attributes the existence of mahu in Tahiti to a lack of differentiation between men and women. Accordingly, mahu aid in stabilizing male identity by the provision of a highly visible and exclusively limited contrast: "I am a man because I am not a mahu." (1971: 18).

Levy's analysis, I suggest, is questionable. It rests on the assumption that it is somehow necessary in social life for males to be clearly delineated from females. (Conversely however, the possible need for females to be distinguishable socially from males is not an issue for Levy.) Nowhere does he question the veracity of a male/female dichotomy which, in this case, appears to be more an artifact of Levy's analysis than a description of Tahitian social facts. Levy typically views mahu as adopting a female role; nowhere does he entertain the idea that mahu might be transformed into females, still less that such individuals represent a third gender. [Details are sketchy but there are indications from Levy's data that mahu partake of both male and female gender roles.] The idea that mahu might illustrate gender transformation is lost on Levy because he restricts himself to viewing the mahu phenomenon as an instance of role reversal.

Wikan (1977) reports upon an institutionalized transsexual role that constitutes a third gender category in Oman. Omani recognize

triadic system of gender comprised of men, women and male transsexuals. Male transsexuals differ from men in their sexually passive role and from women in their role as prostitutes. They maintain an intermediate gender status as evidenced, for example, in their legal status as males and retention of male names; their social classification as women with respect to the strict rules of segregation; and their dress which is intermediate between male and female attire. It is the sexual act that is constitutive of gender in Oman, hence a male transsexual can be transformed into a man by proving his potency through the act of deflowering a virgin bride (1977: 307-8).

The Navaho explicitly recognize the existence of a third gender category for intersexed individuals. Such persons, referred to as nadle and etymologized by Dr. Edward Sapir as "being transformed" (in Hill 1935: 273) occupy a gender category contrastive with both male and female genders.

Hill (1935: 275-6) reports that nadle were accorded a greater range of freedom than either males or females in Navaho society. Their mode of dress was variable depending upon the personal preference of the individual, and, with the exception of hunting and warfare, all tasks, both male and female, were open to nadle. Nadle generally assumed the role of head of the family and possessed special rights over the personal property of other members of their household that were denied to ordinary men and women. For example, nadle were permitted to dispose of a relative's private property without the latter's consent; with the exception of nalde, an individual's rights in personal property and its disposal were strictly observed even when the owner was a child.

In certain contexts, nadle were grouped with women: they assumed the female role at dances, were addressed by appropriate female kin terminology and held the social and legal status of females which was greater than that of males in Navaho society. Blood payment exacted for the murder of a nadle was equal to that of a woman, both of which were higher than payment exacted upon the death of a male.

In other respects the behaviour and status of nadle was quite apart from either males or females. They acted as mediators in male/female disputes, enjoyed unusual sexual licence as evidenced by their exemption from taboos placed on sexual behaviour deemed abnormal, and had the option of marrying either a man or a woman.

The well defined, respected position conferred on nadle was sanctioned by ideological beliefs. Navaho mythology reinforces belief in a third gender: May-des-tizhi, an important figure in Navaho mythology charged with caring for all paired creatures on earth, is both a man and a woman (Martin & Voorhies 1975: 93). Nadle were believed to have been given charge of wealth in the beginning and to continue controlling it in the present. As a result, a family fortunate enough to count a nadle among its members was assured of wealth and success. Genuinely respected, almost revered in the past, the status of nadle has, with the advent of modernization and exposure

to the attitudes of the dominant society, suffered a decline (Hill 1935: 274).

The preceeding examples, briefly sketched, illustrate that the relationship posited between phenotypic sex and gender cross-culturally is neither simple nor direct. Male and female are not absolutes; the values and characteristics we imbue them with are culturally diverse, a point well illustrated by the cases outlined above. However, until researchers understand Western construction of gender and how to hold in abeyance such fundamental Western precepts as the ultimate reduscibility of gender to biology, they will be ill-equipped to understand the various methods of constructing gender in other cultures.[8] In turn, an understanding of the diversity that exists in gender construction might aid immesaurably in our understanding of gender 'anomalies' in our own society.

In the following essays the authors have attempted, in so far as is possible, to bracket their own 'common-sense' notions about gender in an effort to understand and experience the ways in which Oceanic people conceptualize and construct gender in their daily lives. To the extent that we have been successful in accomplishing this, our gratitude is extended to Dr. David Counts who chaired the graduate seminar at McMaster University from which these papers initially developed and without whose aid and encouragement they might never have materialized.

Our dichotomous worldview may be reflected in research on men and women in other cultures. A recurrent and pervasive them in Melanesian ethnographic literature is the sharp opposition postulated between men and women. This seemingly pervasive antagonism has traditionally been viewed as the basis for such structural features as residential segregation, male initiation ceremonies and male secret cults. Reasons have been set forth to account for such opposition between men and women, but the division itself is treated as basic and natural, hence seldom questioned. Paine's article challenges the assumed naturalness of the hostile opposition between the sexes within the particular domain of pollution beliefs, often represented as the epitome of such hostility, by demonstrating that pollution beliefs and behaviour cannot be reduced to a simplistic male/female dichotomy. Paine cautions against glossing male/female relations as generally discordant and divisive; reality is seldom that simple, and men and women interact in a number of different ways, capacities and contexts not all of which are patterned along sex lines.

Naomi Scaletta investigates the relationship between concepts of aging and gender, - processes previously viewed as distinct and unrelated - in Melanesian societies in general and with special reference to the Baria of Northwest New Britain, and places them both within a broader framework of Melanesian views of human nature and the cosmos. Age and gender are presented as fundamental principals underlying the Melanesian world view. By viewing age and gender as dynamically inter-related and transformational, Scaletta demonstrates how the life cycle of an individual represents an experiential living through of their world view.

Rick Goulden addresses himself to a particular aspect of sexuality in Melanesia, that of male homosexual behaviour in initiation ritual. His examination of the context and meaning of homosexual behaviour in Melanesia provides further insights into how these people construct gender, and demonstrates both the inadequacy and inappropriateness of Western conceptions and attitudes towards homosexuality for understanding the practice cross-culturally.

In Susan McLellan's paper, Western concepts of gender are juxtaposed with those held in Bali, Java and Malaysia. Through demonstration of a link between ideology, specifically religious beliefs, and the perpetuation and/or re-interpretation of gender constructs, McLellan raises important questions concerning the relationship between gender and religious ideology in our own society.

Finally, David Black's article departs from the predominantly ideological orientation of the previous papers, and presents a materialistic interpretation of male/female opposition in the Highlands of New Guinea. Building upon a model formulated by Divale and Harris (1976), Black causally links male preoccupation with warfare, female labour contribution to subsistence and the need for birth spacing to the ambivalent attitudes of males to females so frequently cited in the ethnographic literature of the Highlands. Black provides a testable materialistic model for future research, while at the same time stressing the need for a more holistic integration of materialist and idealist explanations for understanding male/female relations in the New Guinea Highlands.

NOTES

1. Specifically, Dr. Robert Stoller, a psychoanalyst, defines gender as "the amount of masculinity or femininity found in a person, and, obviously, while there are mixtures of both in many humans, the normal male has a preponderance of masculinity and the normal female a preponderance of femininity (1968: 9; emphasis added).

   This definition has a number of problems, not least of which is its vagueness. Just how much is 'a preponderance of masculinity or femininity'? By whose criteria are we to judge? Do we set up a checklist and an arbitrary 'pass'; all those who fall below the prescribed mark are not masculine?

2. Problems inherent in the study of sex and gender are not only conceptual in nature but methodological as well. As Gould & Kern Daniels (1977) point out, the lack of uniform, consistent terminology in the literature has led to imprecision and confusion. The terms sex and gender are used inconsistently and often interchangeably. While Kessler & McKenna's (1978) schema offers a way out of these difficulties, it is not apt to be acceptable to all concerned. Therefore, if sex is restricted to the biological aspects of maleness and femaleness and gender to the psychological and socio-cultural dimensions much obfuscation can be avoided.

3. It is interesting to note that biological criteria are also an important consideration in legal decisions pertaining to requests for change of gender. Although the legal record reflects both positive and negative decisions with regard to such changes, one of the major criteria, apparently, is the ability of an individual to perform sexual and/or reproductive functions of either gender. Where courts have denied applications for change of name, grounds for refusal were that the petitioners could not function procreatively or sexually as the gender for which they were applying. Yet many non-transsexual men and women cannot impregnate or conceive. In this sense the legal profession is using genitals not just as a clarifying sign of gender, but its essential sign (Kessler & McKenna 1978: 118-19).

4. It is interesting to note that before genital reconstruction was a medical possibility, it was gender identity that was considered to be the more maleable of the two. With the ability medical science now possesses to change genitals, a reversal has taken place and gender identity is now viewed as the less flexible criterion, a situation which Kessler & McKenna (1978: 120) refer to as "the triumph of the surgeons over the psycho-therapists in the race to restore gender to an unambiguous reality".

5. Such a stance is apparently upheld by the legal profession. In 1976 the Superior Court of New York refused to issue a new birth certificate to a surgically reassigned male transsexual. This decision was predicated upon a report made by the Committee on Public Health of the New York Academy of Medicine which concluded,

among other things, that "It is questionable whether laws and records such as the birth certificate should be changed and thereby used as a means to help psychologically ill persons in their social adaptation" (Halloway 1974: 40; emphasis added).

Such a stance raises a number of interesting and thorny issues. For example, in the United States a doctor who performs sex change operations could, technically, be found guilty of the crime of mayhem (defined as depriving an individual of a member of his body or disabling, disfiguring, or rendering it useless, or cutting or disabling the tongue, putting out an eye, or slitting the nose, ear or lips) (Halloway 1974: 34). No such charges, to date, have been brought against doctors who perform sexual reassignments, however, should such a case be made it would be dependent upon the issue of informed consent. In the case of a transsexual this would hinge upon whether or not such a person could give informed consent: i.e. whether or not they are psychologically ill. The question to be decided is whether or not a transsexual is so psychologically ill as to be mentally incompetent and hence unable to give informed consent (Halloway 1974: 40).

6. It is beyond the purview of this essay to outline the position on gender development adhered to by proponents of the three major theories cited above. For a discussion of psychoanalytic theory and gender development see Freud 1925 and more recently Stoller 1968. A complete outline of social learning theory and gender development is provided by Mischel 1966; 1970. And finally Kohlberg, 1966, outlines cognitive development theory and its relation to gender.

7. The word berdache is derived from the French word "bardash", which derived from the Italian "berdascia", which derived from the Arabic "bardaj", which derived from the Persian, "barah". The meaning of "kept boy", "catamite" or "male prostitute" apparently remained unchanged. Early French travellers used the term berdache to designate passive homosexuals. Transvestism and interest in feminine pursuits became associated with the term; so much so in fact that in ethnographic accounts transvestism and effeminancy have become synonymous with berdache (Angelino & Shedd 1955: 121-122).

However as Angelino & Shedd (1955: 125) point out, transvestism and the berdache are not interchangeable for the latter implies far more than mere cross-dressing.

8. As with all research, it is difficult to elicit the "right" information unless we ask the "right" questions. This seems especially true of research on gender, possibly due to the fact that until recently gender was regarded as pretty much of a given and unneedful of explanation. As well, much information that could possibly shed light on the topic of gender has gone unnoticed as a result of our own preconceptions about gender. For example, among the Nuer, "father" was held to be the person in whose name cattle bridewealth was given for the mother. Consequently, a woman could

be married to a woman and be recognized as husband to the wife and father to the children although not the actual inseminator (Evans-Pritchard 1951: 107-109). Anthropologists have recognized that such customs as 'woman marriage' imply a different construction of kinship and relationship in general; they may also reflect a very different way of constructing gender.