

# Introduction

The concern of this book is a practical one. »Sex/gender« is a matter that has moved many people throughout history, and still inspires change. Our own stance on sex does not matter. Whether it is an important subject for us because we scandalize through our own position on sex, or whether we do feel secure and unassuming with our sex: the fact that so many people seek a social change in the understanding of »sex« deserves recognition. Their reasons must be understood, their demands must be supported whenever they merit support.

Discussing »sex« – given sensitivity – is particularly necessary as it is an important principle of contemporary social structure. It has also played such a great role in the history of Western societies. Many seem to take for granted the existence of »sex« and the resulting classification. People are treated differently based on their »sex« – day in and day out. It begins with restrooms and department stores, which likely become problematic only for those who cannot be assigned a specific sex, or who are unwilling to be subjected to such assignment. Such classification becomes graver at those individuals' workplaces. Some jobs are deemed »male«, others as »female« – with less pay and reputation often inherent to the latter.

Few women, if any, can be found in the most prestigious and lucrative strata of economy, science, politics, religion, and medicine – while very few men are involved with taking care of children, the sick and/or the old. »Privately« taking care of the »own« children is often in the realm of women. Men who seek to participate in (the German) paternal leave often meet being stigmatized – sometimes in a positive way, most often in

a negative one, though.<sup>4</sup> As of 2010, only man and woman were allowed to get married; the combination of woman-woman or man-man had been subjected to a civil partnership that was legally inferior to marriage and had been in effect in the Federal Republic of Germany from 2001 onward.<sup>5</sup> It is quite clear: when so much depends on personal sex in a society, it seems essential to assign each individual one sex, but also is too complicate changing the society in which it is lived.

Every individual in Germany is assigned to one of two options immediately after birth. The Civil Status Act requires such assignment within a short period after birth, providing the child with undoubtedly female or male first names. Moving from that indisputable assignment after birth, we learn to be girls or boys, but also to recognize the sex in other people whether small or grown. Parents, caregivers, or the person themselves will immediately correct us if we misidentify the sex of a person. Given time, we learn to identify *with certainty* the sex of others in such a way. »With certainty« does refer to our own perception as we just do not know if the perceived sex corresponds to the felt one or those in the person's documents.

To identify *a person's sex distinctly and with certainty* we refer to clothes, bodily features such as body hair and its distribution, how clothes are bulged which may help recognize breasts or genitalia underneath the fabric. We refer to smell, facial traits and expressions, gestures, movements. Whether we keep our legs apart or crossed when sitting, whether preferring our hair long or short (and the way we arrange it in front of the mirror), whether or not we shave which part the remaining body hair, which perfume we choose or whether we may or must do without it in

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- 4 The German system of parental leave, called *Elternzeit*, allows parents of newborn children to take a leave of absence for up to three years. The state provides the salary for the first 14 months (which includes a minimum of 2 months to be taken by either parent). Employees seizing on that opportunity enjoy dismissal protection (as pregnant employees also do throughout their term). Typically, the mother opts for twelve months, and the father either for those additional two or for none. Depending on the German region, the infants may subsequently enter a daycare following their first birthday (or even at a younger age). The translator.
  - 5 In 2017, however, the German government introduced the *Ehe für alle* [Marriage for All], thus eradicating the discriminatory differences of same-sex marriages as civil partnerships. The translator.

our peer group to be accepted, etc. It is obvious that we create and train ourselves. We apply characteristics that younger children learn to read *distinctly and with certainty* as »female« or »male.«

We expect a solid core of sex at the same time as children at birth are hardly clean-shaven, wear perfume or are dressed appropriate to their gender. For this reason, medical personnel and parents read »genitalia.« They are recognized as penis or clitoris. The size of the mound allows recognizing testicles or labia. Such recognition is not too easy as clitoris and penis develop from the same origin and are differentiated according to their size at birth. A longer clitoris might be mistaken for a penis, a small penis as a clitoris. The fact that these parts – genitalia – are often swollen after birth complicates such differentiation. It is therefore quite convenient that the appearance of genitalia is merely observed fleetingly. Pre-natal examinations of the embryo and the amniotic fluid already revealed the sex *with certainty*.

We know sex as apparent, necessary, and unavoidable – regardless of the definitive classification of a particular individual. Penis and testicles, as well as labia, clitoris (and vagina) are the first connotations for the classification according to sex – as they are »externally visible.« Penis and vagina are described as fitting one another perfectly in their shape. Along with testicles and ovaries (and the sperm cells and eggs they produce) they form the necessary features which ensure the continued existence of humans as a species. These features, together with the concept of fecundity, are thus not only the first connotations of sex, but also the last arguments proving the certainty of a binary understanding of sex.

This monograph is dedicated to this alleged certainty, to biology, and the »naturalness« of sex, with a clear focus on the perspective of »naturalness« in all chapters. I will discuss three aspects specifically:

1. The »naturalness« of sex – and especially where it differed – has been an important point of application for criticism against the exclusion of women from education, science, politics, and the economy. The main argument there has been the understanding that the social differences of the sexes are a product of society, upbringing and socialization themselves. Following this notion, the first part of the book is particularly devoted to the situation of women and the call for their emancipation.

2. When theories discussing social conditions and how people are embedded in society, as Karl Marx and – referring to »sex« – Judith Butler devised them, they necessarily must be brought to their conclusion. Then, »sex« – including the biological concept of it – must be seen as society-made and thus not as »natural.«
3. When considering historic and especially current biological theories of sex-classification and development it is apparent that the organic structures which are commonly believed to be specifically female or male are not so specific at all. They rather take shape in individual and varied forms. This is one leitmotif of historical as well as current biological-medical theories of sex. They have often doubted the binary nature of sex, but rather emphasized the variety of »sexes« through a female-male- or male-female-existence of every person – or, alternatively, their unique manifestation of sex.