

# def·i·ni·tion

/ defə|niʃ(ə)n /

*noun*: a statement of the exact meaning of a word.

## Definition

What does that *mean*?

# Different kinds of Definition

## 1. Stipulative

- A stipulative definition assigns a meaning to a brand new term.

## 2. Reportive.

- A reportive definition says what meaning a term *already* has, in common usage.

# Stipulative Definitions

- With stipulative definitions, especially the arbitrary kind, is there no such thing as right or wrong?

“I define *poor* as applying to persons in the bottom quartile of income”

- The question with such a definition is whether it's *useful*, or *suitable*. Definitions divide objects into classes. A good classification scheme will “carve nature at the joints”.

“I define *poor* as applying to persons in the bottom quartile of income”

“Using our definition, we found that in 2002 exactly 25% of Canadians were living in poverty. Also, even after 10 years of policies aimed at reducing poverty, in 2012 we found that the poverty rate was still 25%.”

- Stipulative definitions may do violence to the term, making it psychologically too hard to accept the meaning specified. (E.g. if one were to define “poor” as requiring unemployment or homelessness.)

# Natural Kind

- A *natural kind* is a category of thing that isn't just made up, it somehow "really exists" in the world, and is merely recognised by us.
- E.g. *gold, tiger, electron* are thought to be natural kinds.
- Not everyone believes that there are natural kinds. Some claim that all classifications are invented, i.e. that humans thus *impose* structure on the world, rather than discover it.

# Natural Kinds

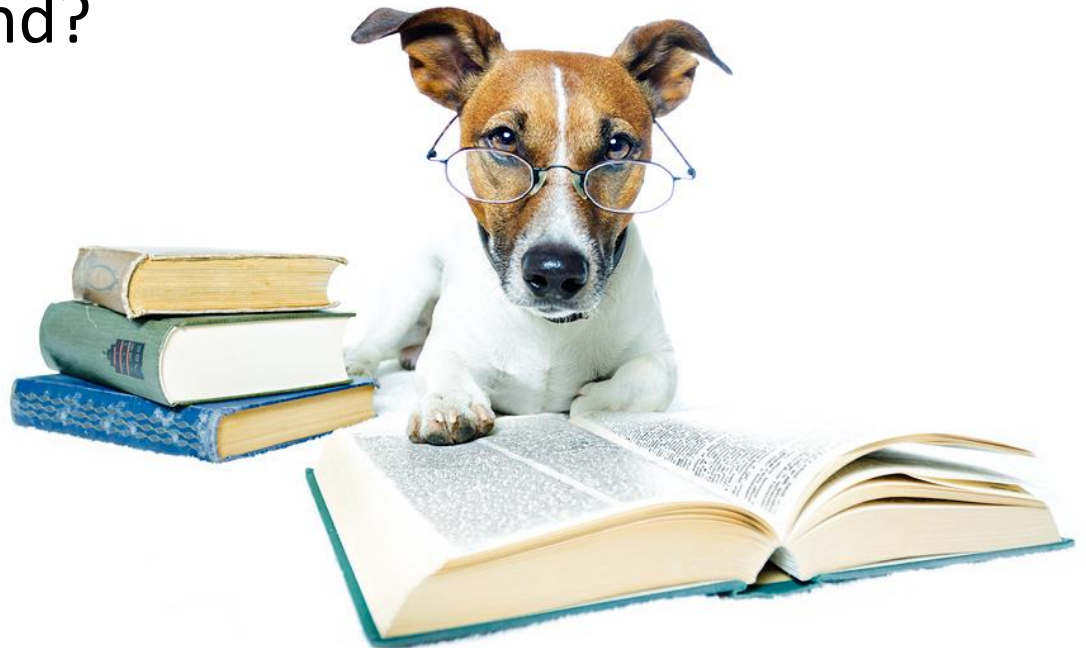
Should we define a *fish* as an aquatic creature with torpedo shape, fins + broad tail?

- Then a dolphin is a fish. Are classifications arbitrary? (Perhaps, on a *restaurant menu*, dolphins and whales are simply “seafood”, and classified with fish?)
- The classification of dolphins as mammals is (now) based on their evolutionary history.

# Natural Kinds

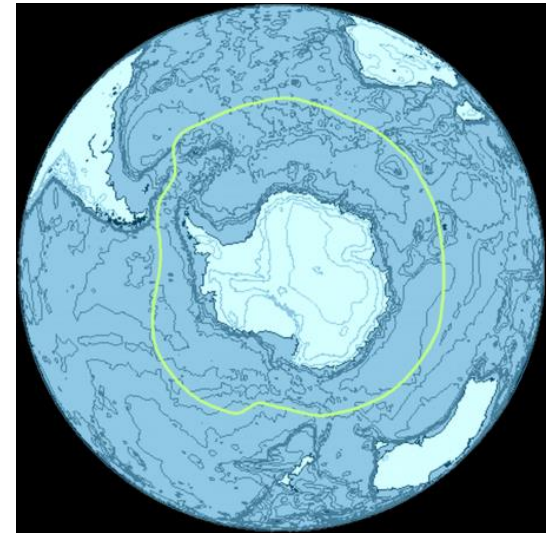
A *bookanine* is something that is either a book or a dog.

- Is this a natural kind?





# The “Southern Ocean”



The Antarctic Convergence

- Does it really exist? Or did geographers invent it?
- N.B. Natural kinds don't always have *exact* boundaries.

4. Comment on the suitability of B's definition of "cyclist", in this context. (What about in other contexts?)

A: You say that I should drive to work, not cycle, since cyclists have more accidents hour of cycling than motorists have per hour of driving. But your definition of a "cyclist", as simply *any* person who is operating a bicycle, is unacceptable. It includes children, for example, as well as bums who ignore all traffic laws.

B: Well technically they *are* cyclists, aren't they?

## Example

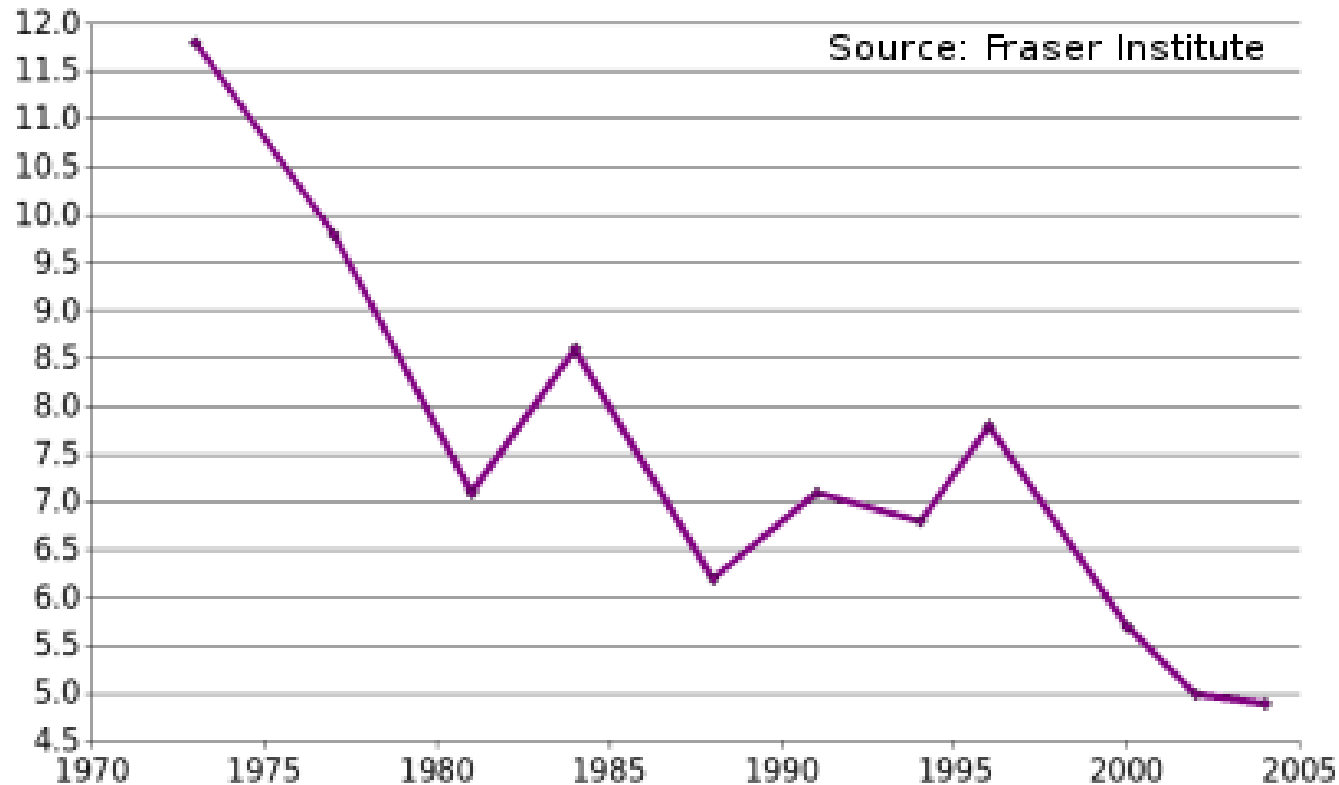
Comment on the suitability of the study's definition of "spanking". How suitable is it, for its purpose?

“Groups that support a parent’s right to spank their children are scrambling to respond to a recent study that shows the damage that spanking causes to the child. The study found that adults who were previously spanked, as children, have significantly higher rates of depression and suicide, and also commit more violent crimes. “Spanking” is defined as the act of a parent striking the child, either using a hand or some implement.”

# Definition of “poor”, “poverty”.

- In Canada usually a *relative* measure, e.g. you are poor if you earn less than 50% of the median income.
- For such relative measures, if (say) the top 60% get richer, and the rest stay the same, then the median income goes up and more people fall below the poverty line. But are they really worse off than before?
- Some think that poverty should be defined *absolutely*, in terms of housing, access to clean water, adequate food, etc. Poor = basic needs not being met. (Then very few Canadians are poor. Hooray!)

**Basic needs poverty rate, 1973-2004**



- E.g. Chris Sarlo, of the Fraser Institute, developed a “basic needs” absolute poverty measure.

# Definition of “poor”, “poverty”.

The idea behind making poor a relative measure is that poor = *excluded* from normal activities in society.

A person who has much less money than average, in that society, is often not able to participate.

E.g. in a society where driving a car is normal, not owning a car is a mark of poverty.

(But Henry VIII wasn't poor, despite lacking a Range Rover, internet access, MRI scans, etc.)

# Economist James Heckman on “the right definition of child poverty”

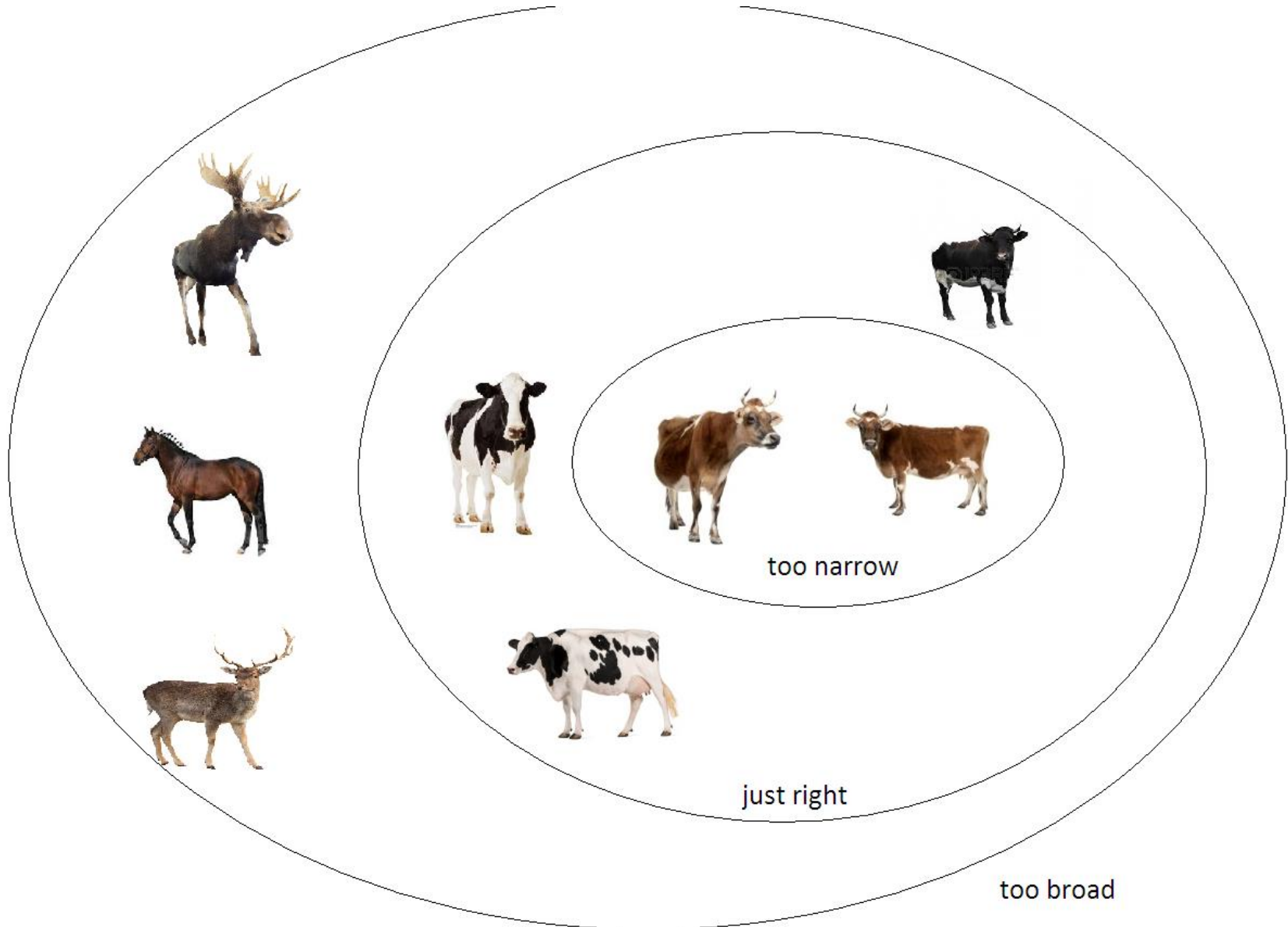


# Mistakes in Reportive Definitions

- 1. Circular** -- Define a term using the term itself!  
E.g. *physical* = “pertaining to matter”  
*matter* = “physical substance”
- 2. Too narrow** – The definition only fits a *subset* of cases that the term usually applies to. (It is too exclusive.)  
E.g. Clintonian “sex”? “I did not have sexual relations with that woman as I interpret the term.”
- 3. Too broad** -- The definition includes cases that the term *does* not apply to. (It is too inclusive.)  
E.g. a *car* is defined as a machine with wheels.



# E.g. Defining 'cow'



# Definition Mistakes

4. **Loaded** – the definition includes an *evaluative judgement*.

E.g. “an *intellectual* is someone who thinks they know everything, but still needs my tax dollars to survive”.

*Oats*: “A grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland appears to support the people.”

(*Samuel Johnson: A Dictionary Of The English Language.*)

5. **Just wrong** – Too narrow and too broad at the same time.

(You might get away with it by appeal to the “root meaning” of the word.)

“*gymnastics* comes from the Greek *gymnazo*, meaning ‘to exercise naked’. So, technically, gymnastics is any form of strenuous physical activity done without clothing.”

just wrong!



too narrow



just right

7. Each of the following definitions is flawed in some way (each in just one way, I think, or at least one main one). Diagnose each definition as “circular”, “too narrow”, “too broad”, or “loaded”.

(i) I define a *cow* as an animal that is able to produce milk.

-- **too broad** (cats also produce milk)

(ii) *Beer* is a golden-coloured, frothy alcoholic beverage brewed from barley, hops and yeast.

-- **too narrow** (some beers are dark)

(iii) A *lawyer* is someone who feeds off the misery of others, and frequently adds to that misery.

-- **loaded** (*bad* lawyers!)

(iv) In chemistry, an *oxidising agent* is something that oxidises other substances.

-- circular (what is “oxidising” anyway?)

(v) A *philosopher* is someone who can say an awful lot about something without saying anything at all.

-- loaded (*silly* philosophers!)

(vi) A *living* being is defined as something that is alive.

-- circular

(vii) If you look at the meaning of the Arabic, you'll see that a follower of *Islam* is literally a person who voluntarily submits to God.

-- **too broad** (other religions submit to God as well)

(viii) *Science* is the attempt to reduce everything good and noble in the world to the trivial operations of matter.

-- **loaded** (science is *evil!*)

# Abortion debate

- Part of the debate is focused on the definition of *'human'*, *'person'*, etc.
  - If a foetus is a *person*, then abortion is killing an innocent person, and hence murder.
- So, how is “person” defined? Does this include the foetus?
- A foetus has functioning heart, nervous system, etc. Definitely a human organism, with its own DNA. But not viable (can't live independently), not much cognitive function, can't speak, etc. What's *important?*

# Does biological sex exist?





# What is sex? Some issues

- Are ‘male’ and ‘female’ natural kinds, determined by anatomy and/or genetics?
  - Or are these invented (socially constructed)?
- Is sex *binary*, or a “spectrum”?
- To what extent are gender norms constrained by innate biological sex differences?
- Is there such a thing as ‘gender identity’?
  - If so, what is it?
  - If so, what moral, practical, legal significance does it have?

# Sex vs. Gender

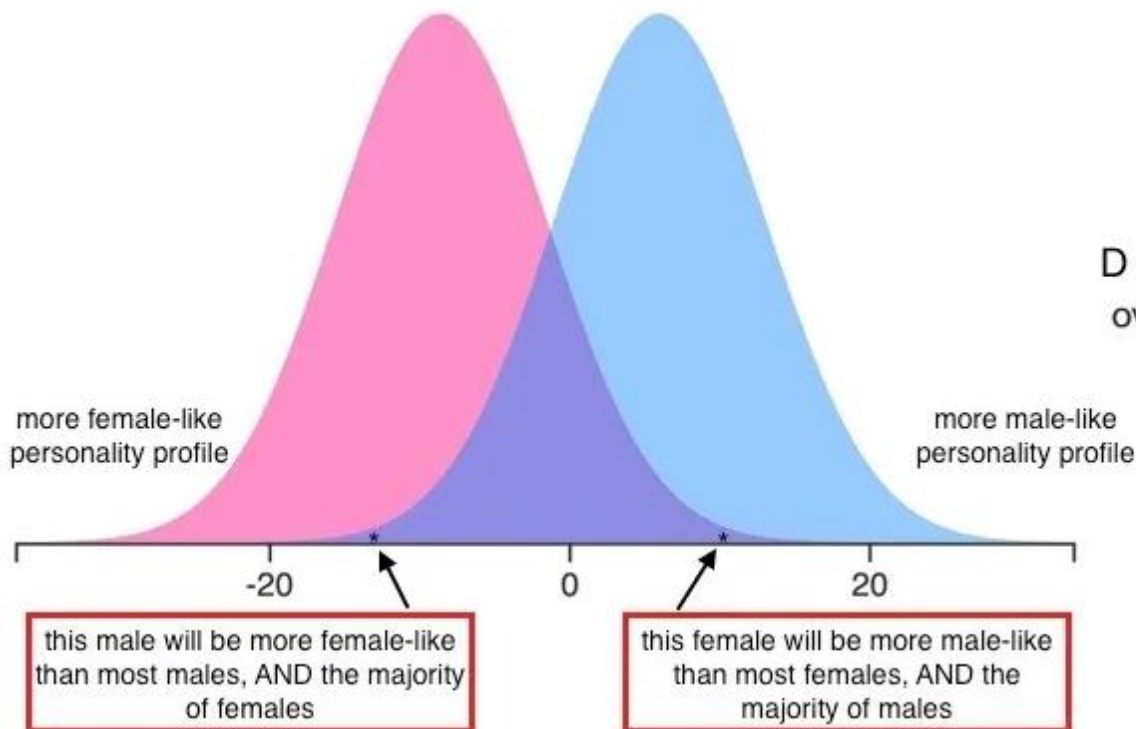
- Being a woman (e.g.) is associated with:
  - having a certain anatomy (ovaries and womb)
  - Having feminine psychological characteristics (personality/ temperament)
  - Presenting a feminine appearance
- The first is often defined as *sex*, the second two as aspects of *gender*.

# Secondary sex characteristics

- Males and females differ anatomically in their reproductive organs.
- There are also “secondary” sex differences, not directly related to reproduction.
  - Men are taller, stronger, more body hair, deeper voices
  - Women have breasts, wider hips, more subcutaneous fat, live longer
- These secondary differences apply to *populations* rather than individuals.
  - E.g. a woman can be 6’ tall, have hairy legs, and sing tenor.

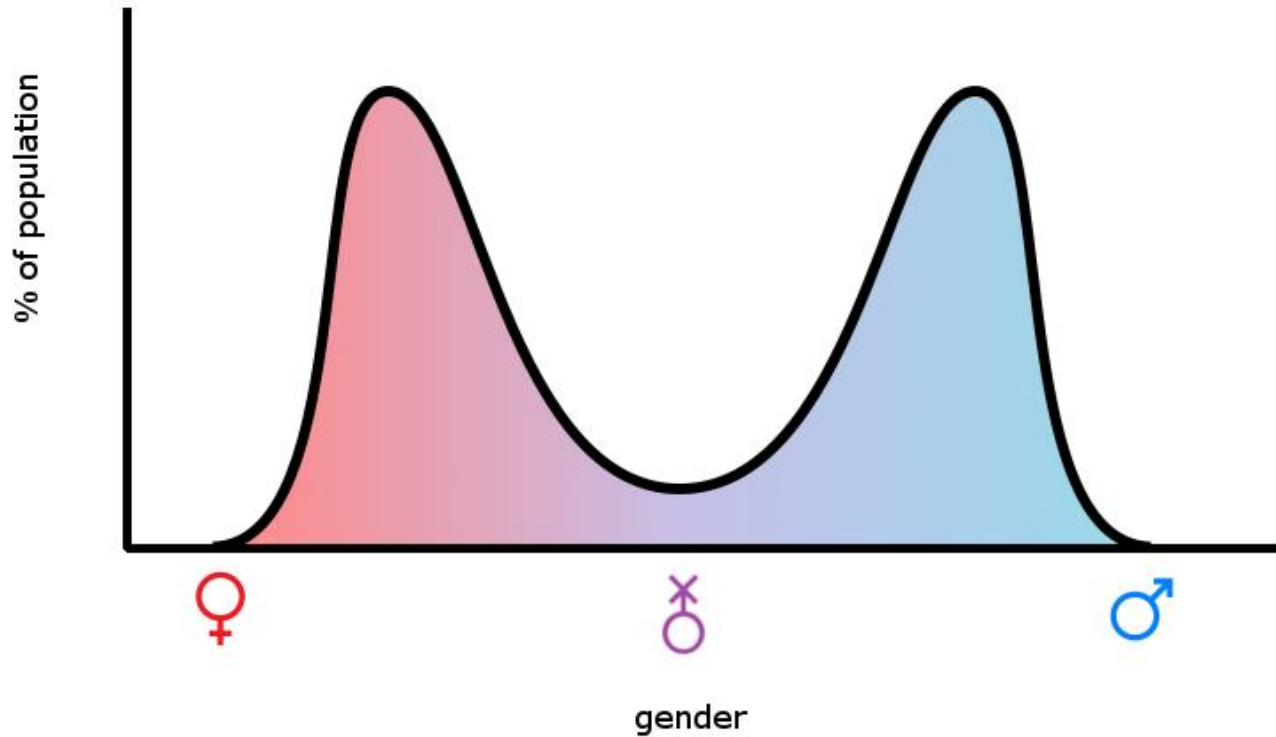
# Sex differences in temperament

**Women:** warmer, more agreeable, more sensitive, less risk tolerant, prefer working with people rather than things (etc.)



Innate or cultural?

## Gender spectrum distribution



- Or is it a *personality* spectrum?

# Temperament $\neq$ gender identity?



- E.g. philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe had a masculine temperament.
  - Aggressive and intimidating in debates, swore a lot
  - Preferred male clothing
  - Cigar smoker
- But if asked, “Are you a man or a woman?” she would have said “woman”.

# Innate or cultural?

- Psychological differences between the sexes are very consistent across cultures and history.
- The wealthier and more egalitarian countries (e.g. Sweden) have greater sex differences in career choice and temperament.
- Psychological sex differences exist in other primates, similar to those observed in humans.
- CAH women have a masculine temperament

# Nature vs. nurture

- In our closest relatives, the great apes, there are 'gender' differences.
  - Young male and female apes play separately,
  - the males play rougher,
  - only the males fight for dominance, attack other groups, etc.)



Various great apes



# Male chimps go on a raid



# CAH (a type of intersex in females)

- People who have CAH (congenital adrenal hyperplasia) have a damaged gene for producing the hormone cortisone, and this leads to producing extra androgens (male hormones).
  - So, a CAH person with XX chromosomes will *sometimes* develop masculine anatomical features, such as a clitoris that looks rather like a penis.
- Even if the genitals appear normal, CAH women tend to have masculine interests and temperament.
  - This is evidence that exposure to androgens *causes* male-typical interests and temperament.

# What is a woman?

- “A woman is someone who identifies as a woman”
  - The definition is circular. Can it be fixed up?

# “Gender identity”

- Dr. Deanna Adkins: “gender identity is innate or fixed at a young age, and has a strong biological basis.”
  - (Adkins is a professor at Duke University School of Medicine and the director of the Duke Center for Child and Adolescent Gender Care.)
- Adkins: “From a medical perspective, the appropriate determinant of sex is gender identity.”

# What *is* gender identity?

“A person’s intrinsic sense of being male (a boy or a man), female (a girl or woman), or an alternative gender”

- World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH)
  - “Intrinsic sense”, “internal sense”, etc. seem to refer to **introspection** here, i.e. direct awareness of one’s mental state, and not based on vision, etc.
- Miley Cyrus: “I’m always like, ‘It’s weird that I’m a girl, because I just don’t feel like a girl’. ”
  - Does everyone *have* a gender identity in the sense above?

# What *is* gender identity?

“Gender identity is the sense of knowing to which sex one belongs, that is, the awareness ‘I am a male’ or ‘I am a female.’ ”

- Robert Stoller “A contribution to the study of gender identity”, *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 1964.
- N.B. Stoller says that a *female* baby raised and socially treated as a boy sometimes has a *male* core gender identity. So, as Alex Byrne points out, “sense of knowing” here means *believing*.
  - In that case, can we say that a woman is someone with a female gender identity, i.e. someone who believes that they’re female?

# *Origins* of sex and gender

- We saw before that biological categories such as species, genus, family, order, etc. get their meaning from their *origin*.
  - They are reproductively-isolated historical populations (Darwin) or ideas in the mind of the creator (Linnaeus).
- So, what is the *origin* of male and female? *Why* are there two sexes anyway? (What is sex *for*?)
  - Throughout intellectual history there have been (roughly speaking) creationists and evolutionists, who have very different starting points. But they end up with similar views of sex and gender.

# Creationists on sex

- In the Bible, for example, it says,
  - “God created mankind in his own image ... male and female he created them”
  - “God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.”
- Creationists typically think that gender differences result (at least in part) from the different roles that men and women are designed to have, with respect to raising children.
  - (Men are protectors and providers, women are nurturers.)



# Evolutionists on sex

- Some species reproduce sexually, others asexually, but among multicellular organisms it's mostly done with sex. There are only two sexes, defined by two types of gametes (ovum and sperm).
  - The origins of sex are mysterious, but it has certain evolutionary advantages that cause it to persist.
- Sexual dimorphism (differences between sexes in addition to sex organs) arises from natural selection and sexual selection.
  - E.g. males can increase their offspring by mating with multiple females, but there's little or no point in a female mating with multiple males.

# “Wombs are expensive, sperm is cheap”

- **Evolutionary psychologists** claim to be able to explain a lot of observed gender differences in terms of natural selection.
  - Females are psychologically (as well as physically) geared toward nurturing young children, 0-5 years.
  - Females prefer high-status males.
  - Males are primed to take risks, as historically most men didn't reproduce.
  - Men don't care much about a woman's social status, but prefer women with indicators of fertility (youth, beauty, small waist-to-hip ratio, etc.)

# What's the *theory*?

- If, as some claim, gender is innate (not a cultural construct) and also varies independently of sex, then what's the *theory*?
  - Where does gender come from, and what's it for?
- I'm not aware of a new third theory, to compete with creation and evolution.