The Endless Knot Podcast

Episode 79: Sex & Gender

[00:01:00] [00:00:00]

**Mark:** Welcome to the Endless Knot Podcast, where the more we know

**Aven:** the more we want to find out.

**Mark:** tracing serendipitous connections through our lives

**Aven:** and across disciplines.

**Aven:** Hi, I'm Aven,

**Mark:** And I'm Mark.

**Aven:**  And welcome to a new year at the Endless Knot Podcast

**Mark:** Happy new year!

**Aven:** I know it's barely still January and it's only still January if I managed to edit this faster than I fear, I might. But anyway, this is our first episode of 2020 and we thought we'd start off with a bang.

By turning to a topic that was suggested by a listener, in fact, requested by Gabi Sobral So thank you Gabi for suggesting it we'll come to what the topic [00:02:00] is in a moment. Before we get to that though, we have a new patron to thank Hasan

**Mark:** Thank you.

**Aven:** And we very much appreciate the support and remind everyone else that if you want to, you can check out Patreon.com and search for the Endless Knot Podcast.

And if you feel like supporting us, you're welcome to do so and we would really welcome the help.

Woohoo!

Now the topic that we're going to turn to then is .

**Mark:** sex?

**Aven:** Oh dear Yes, Gabi asked us, and I don't think we're actually going to answer her question to be honest, because she asked us about the definitions of sex and gender and their scientific or current contemporary distinctions as well as their history. And I think we should start off by saying that we, we really aren't going to answer that first question very well.

**Mark:** I may sort of answer it a little bit,

**Aven:** but I think the long answer is. It's a [00:03:00] really long answer and it depends what discipline you're talking about and it depends the context. I mean, there is no hard and fast definition of both. I will also talk about it a bit,

**Mark:** Well and I'll talk about at least in terms of what we mean by those words and when we meant those things.

By those words,

**Aven:** I think you're already, there's no, well, who's the we in that sentence right now? Today in the world? What do we mean by sex and gender? I don't think there's a consensus. So

**Mark:** when someone first used the word to mean

**Aven:** but that's in the past I'm talking about right now, and she did ask about now too.

That's what I mean. I don't think we're going to get to that anyway. Nonetheless, it is a fascinating topic and they're really interesting words and the whole suite of words to do with sex, mostly not to do with. Sex, the act though we will talk about that too. But in particular to talk about, the divisions of people into sexes and genders and what , all those words that have to do with those things, some of the history of some of those words.

**Mark:** Yeah. [00:04:00]

**Aven:**  It's a huge topic. And on that note, we should draw your attention to the podcast that you heard introduced at the beginning of this episode, the History of Sex.

**Mark:** Indeed. and you know, this topic is so complex and has so many different directions it can go. It's the sort of thing that you can't do in a single episode.

It's the sort of thing you need a whole podcast to really explore,

**Aven:** especially if you're going to explore it outside of the very narrow confines of the classical Greek and Roman world and medieval English and modern English world, which is such a small slice of humanity and humanity's perspectives on sex and gender,

**Mark:** or even language as a whole.

**Aven:** So we really, I've been listening to BT Newberg's podcast since it began. I've been really finding it fascinating, and I would very strongly recommend that you check it out. there's longer episodes and then he does these little short shorts, on little topics to do with the main [00:05:00] episodes that, you know, didn't fit into the main episode or that are just interesting on their own.

Reminded me of our end notes from the videos and they're all really interesting and very well produced and put together. So thank you for the promo BT and we definitely recommend people go over and check that out.

**Mark:** Indeed.

**Aven:** All right, so since we're going to be talking about sex and gender and gender divisions and sex divisions, we thought the only sensible thing to do was to reflect that with our cocktails.

So Mark, what are you drinking tonight?

**Mark:** Well, it's pink

**Aven:** and it's called

**Mark:** pink lady.

**Aven:** Absolutely.

And I am drinking something I made up to match since there was no exact equivalent, I think we're calling it a. Are we calling it a blue gentleman or a blue Lord? I like blue gentleman personally.

**Mark:** All right.

Ladies and gentlemen

**Aven:** is exactly, exactly the same, but blue.

So a pink lady is gin, Apple Jack, lemon juice, and a few drops of Grenadines for the pink and an egg white. And what I've done for my blue [00:06:00] gentleman is gin, Apple, Jack, lemon juice, and a few drops of blue Curacao. Which is a blue, citrus flavored. Yeah. liqueur, and an egg white. So they really should taste very similar

**Mark:** And both garnished with a cherry,

**Aven:** both garnished with a cherry, of course.

and so yes, so cheers

**Mark:** Cheers!

**Aven:** It's a nice drink.

**Mark:** Yeah. The, the grenadine really doesn't contribute much to the flavor. It's just there for the pink.

No, there's very small amount.

**Aven:**  Yeah. . And it's not, therefore very sweet. The real sweetness comes from the Apple Jack, which in our case was not actually Apple Jack, but was our homemade, crab apple Brandy from several years ago. We just traded it to try the others.

**Mark:** I guess this is a little, a little more sweet because of the,

**Aven:** I had to put a little more of the blue curacao in that one because it isn't as strong a color. And the Applejack was kind of dark, so it was looking just kind of gray. but this one's a bit fruitier and that one's a bit orangier So yeah, tasty cocktails though, and not even though they look [00:07:00] frothy and sweet they really, with the lemon juice and everything, they're not too sweet at all. So anyway, those are our drinks, blue and pink for, one set of traditional gender divisions.

**Mark:** We won't get into the whole color thing cause we've already done that in our color episode.

The whole blue and red, pink. In particular kind of colors. We did that in

**Aven:** red. I think we might've talked about it, and I suspect that if we went, if you went back to the red episode, you would hear

us talking about episodes. So it might be,

Oh, it might be in that pink/brown.

**Mark:** There's the last episode we did was a bunch of colors, so it might be in that one.

**Aven:** Go listen through all of the color episodes if you'd like to hear the history of why Europeans started to or North Americans in particular started to associate pink and blue with female and male, respectively. All right, well, let's launch right in then and talk about what the words sex and gender mean. so I will start by giving a definition of [00:08:00] these things in the modern world. So I'm going to just read from Wikipedia here, which obviously is not the final word on any discipline's view of sex or gender but I think it could be said to represent a reasonably mainstream but slightly academic view of what those two words mean Almost everything in this following definition of sex however can be and has been disputed and is more complicated than it says. So " sex is the biological distinction of an organism between male or female defined by the gametes it produces or the reproductive organs it has in anisogamous species." So then I'll just read gender. "Gender is the range of characteristics pertaining to and differentiating between masculinity and femininity. Depending on the context, these characteristics may include biological sex, I. E. the state of being male, female, or an intersex variation, sex-based, social [00:09:00] structures, I. E. gender roles, or gender identity."

Now, as I said, all of those things can be disputed, not the least of which both definitions rely on male and female as the two sexes and the two genders and yet both of them kind of gesture towards the fact that that is already too restrictive So the basic distinction that is being made is that somehow sex is a physical thing, and gender is a social thing

**Mark:** right

**Aven:** And I think that is broadly speaking, a consensus among several disciplines now in academia. And. Some, but not all areas of medicine. that, that there is a distinction. I think it is the general way it has been used.

**Mark:** Probably we could say the most common way of discriminating between

those,

**Aven:** between those two words.

Yes. So Wikipedia points out that this distinction between biological sex and gender, comes from a particular sexologist John Money in [00:10:00] 1955 and you'll probably talk about that. And before that, there really wasn't that kind of a, a strong distinction between those two terms used that way.

**Mark:** Right.

**Aven:**  So that's just to give us a baseline. And as I said, that simple question of what, and this is really what Gabi was asking, and that's why I say I don't think we're going to answer it because that question of like, what does it mean to say it's a species divided by their ability to produce gametes?

I mean, if you can't produce a gamete, are you not a sexual, you don't have a sex. Like is a prepubescent child. does not have a sex. Does a postmenopausal woman not have a sex? does a sterile man not have a sex? it doesn't even mention the, it doesn't use chromosomes to distinguish it, but some people would like to use chromosomes to talk about who.

And that of course does relate to what gametes you produce. But science has been pointing out recently. There's not actually just two States of chromosomal, organization in humans. There's more than two. So it is a really complicated question and I will leave that to [00:11:00] others. the History of Sex podcast, but also science and, scientists and, and other, specialists to get into the details of that.

So let's, just leave it for the moment of saying that that is the, those are the sort of word clouds of distinction that sex tends to be used more often to speak about physical and measurable distinctions and gender to be related to appearance, presentation roles, emotional feelings, societal constraints, that range of stuff broadly speaking now.

All right, so where do these words come from?

**Mark:** So, in a sense, these two words are coming from two different directions. semantically speaking. So sex comes from Probably, and I'll get into this in a minute, probably comes from the idea of dividing up into categories. whereas gender, I mean, it also has to do with categories in the sense of kinds, [00:12:00] different kinds, different groups. but it comes from a root that means, it's a generative root right That's where the word

**Aven:** pun fully intended?

**Mark:** So Sex is a bit of a disputed etymology. we can trace it back as far as Latin sexus, which has , that range of meaning, it means a sex in however we want to think. And presumably you'll want to talk about this, whatever the Roman, conceptualization of that is.

**Aven:** Of what those categories mean. If they do, yep. I will.

**Mark:** The presumed etymology the most commonly presumed etymology certainly used to be that it came from the Latin verb Seco secare, which means to divide or cut. in which case it would go back to, the Proto Indo European root \*sec-, which means to cut, and it shows up in a whole bunch of different words in English and well, in Latin and [00:13:00] Greek and Indo European languages in general. Yeah. So like scythe, the agricultural implement, cutting down crops,

or

**Aven:** bisect and

**Mark:** bisect insect. So the, the bug, the insect, is called so because its body is divided into. Sections. Yeah. Also from that root segment sector,

**Aven:** yes.

**Mark:** However, etymologists more recently have expressed doubt about this, etymology. And this is, I think, if I'm understanding correctly, largely on the basis of phonological issues that. If sexus comes from Seco Secare, you would expect to see a spelling at some point far back enough anyways, like sectus from the past stem, the past participle of Seco secare ,secavi sectum. Yep.

**Aven:** Yeah. but then they don't have,

**Mark:** they don't have a better suggestion. They don't have a better suggestion.

There's no [00:14:00] other suggestion that has, received. Any kind of consensus. So that's the most common one. They're just sort of doubters who have no better suggestion now.

**Aven:** Yeah. so the, the word sexus, just to pick up on that, quickly, in Latin is a classical word for sure, but it's not a terribly common one, like it's used, but it's kind of a technical term and it means a sex male or female of men or beasts.

So in that sense, it hasn't changed that much since its origins.

**Mark:** Now its earliest appearance in English is in this idea of the two categories. . Male and female. the first citation that the, OED has is 1382, the, Wycliffe Bible. in that sense, talking about the male sex and the female

**Aven:** Is it in Genesis?

**Mark:** It is. In fact, in Genesis,

Genesis [00:15:00] six 19 So of all things having soul of any flesh two thou shalt bring into the ark, that male sex and female

**Aven:** yeah. So when does it start to mean copulation.

**Mark:** Surprisingly late,

**Aven:** I actually knew that I was, I was feeding you the line.

yeah, it's like 19th century,

**Mark:**  1900. And HG Wells

**Aven:** Interesting! That citation that I did not know.

**Mark:** So, in the book *Love and Mr Lewisham* I don't know that book No so he writes, " we marry in fear and trembling: sex for a home is the woman's traffic and the man comes to his heart's desire when his heart's desire is dead "

**Aven:** Well,

that's grim!

all right.

But yeah, so, so

**Mark:** sexual intercourse, sex doesn't mean intercourse,

**Aven:** but that's what, but that's how it

**Mark:** comes to mean that, right.

**Aven:** It starts as sexual intercourse

**Mark:** sexual,

and then modify it,

**Aven:**  [00:16:00] and then it shortens to sex as a standalone. Yeah. Yeah. So it does, sexual as an adjective is much older.

Yeah.

**Mark:** Yeah. yeah. So sexual, just as a, you know, characteristic of. Well, in fact, particular to the female, is, from 1622, now obsolete. but the sort of more general, of or relating to the fact or condition of being either male or female. so in that

**Aven:** sexual characteristics,

**Mark:** sexual characteristics, sense, that's from 1650, biological sense.

Of plant or animal or other organism characterized by sex, 1830, designating the organs.

intercourse,

relating to tending towards or involving sexual intercourse or other forms of intimate physical contact from 1753, in the phrase sexual commerce

**Aven:** right

Sexual commerce, Congress, intercourse.

Those are all words that get used.

**Mark:** Sexual appetite. [00:17:00] William Wordsworth

**Aven:** seems very technical for one of his poems. Yeah. So you can see, I mean, the progression makes sense.

**Mark:** it's still later. It's not the original sense. No.

**Aven:** All right, so that's sex and it really hasn't in many ways changed that much The introduction of gender as a separate category is a distinguishing of biological from social, and that distinction would not have been particularly. Like, that's, that distinction is not recognized by these earlier uses.

**Mark:** Right.

**Aven:**  Sex was considered natural. Right. And that's, that we can talk about, I will talk about constructed versus natural, right.

**Mark:** Now the word gender goes back to a Proto Indo European root, \*gena-. which again is, so this is hugely productive, and in all kinds of words that have to do with either biological sex or reproduction or What have you.

so we get words like gender, but also, [00:18:00] generate, engender, miscegenation, gene genotype, all these kinds of words,

**Aven:** generation,

**Mark:** generation, germinate. and so. Specifically, it comes into Latin in the word genus. which means, well, I don't know how we would define it.

Race, stock, family, birth,

**Aven:** type, classification, grammatical gender are the, is how my dictionary defined it.

**Mark:** Okay. so this one, comes into English, first in the grammatical sense. so it's, first attested, by the OED in that grammatical sense, around 1390

**Aven:** and we will come back to talking about grammatical gender

**Mark:** in more detail.

**Aven:** we'll come back to that. Yeah.

**Mark:** Specifically in that sense, that grammatical sense, it's referring to, the sort of European languages. so Latin and then French and German and English and other European languages. it becomes used in, an [00:19:00] extended use to refer to non Indo European languages even when there is no connection in terms of these grammatical categories to biological sex?

So that happens from 1819. now the sense of, gender in terms of referring to human beings, that, is first attested in 1474.

**Aven:** Okay.

**Mark:** so, about a hundred years, between its use as a grammatical term to referring to natural gender, human gender or whatever.

**Aven:** But when it's being used, then in the 15th century, it's not being used in contradistinction to sex. It's being used as another way of saying sex, right? Yeah. There are two genders. There are two sexes, Yeah.

**Mark:**  so the interesting comparison that we can make here also is to see what other terms were available at various times So. Both gender and sex. As I said, they come in in [00:20:00] middle English, right. And late middle English at that Right

**Aven:** So there were obviously earlier words in English Yeah

**Mark:** and so the sort of native Germanic, terms for these things are basically well, basically they all come from the same root as gender.

but through the Germanic line. So that would include words like, kin K, I. N which in old English is cynn, which can be used to mean, , you know, anything from like a race a people, a nation, a family line or whatever. but it can also be used to refer to sex or gender in the sort of natural gender,

but also in the grammatical sense.

so, we do see that in that usage. and then the other related term to that, In old English from this, again, from the same root is kind. So, and we think of that now in, in very much the, categorization, right? You know, what kinds [00:21:00] are there, right

**Aven:** Right

**Mark:** but so in old English, it could be used, it can actually have a more general sense of nature.

**Aven:** Yeah.

**Mark:** kind or species of animal. A plant. natural state or condition. and it can be used to mean family. offspring, progeny It can gloss Latin. generatio Or natio, nation people. but it can also be used in, especially when it's used in the, with the prefix, gecynd.

as opposed to just the plain form. it can be used in more technical senses, I guess. in fact, there's a more range of senses, so it can be used to refer to, Sex or gender in that sense, in that natural, in terms of, that natural gender categories of male and female. And there's a, there's quite a few other little, subtle shades of meaning that this word could be used in, in old English.

**Aven:** Okay.

**Mark:** so those are the, if you're talking about what words they would have used, to refer to either grammatical, gender [00:22:00] or biological gender, those are the two words you would go to, kin or gecynd.

**Aven:** Right.

And, I mean, I know that we've sort of already made this point, but I just want to make it really clear We're talking about cultures that divided the world, and we'll come back to this, but basically into two genders and two sexes, what we're doing with this is not trying to dive into etymology to prove that this is true of the world I just want that to be really clear

**Mark:** That's an etymological fallacy Just because the word used to mean something doesn't mean that that's

**Aven:** a true thing about the

**Mark:** true true meaning of a

**Aven:** word And just because The Romans and the Greeks had X or Y view Yeah Or the English did, doesn't mean it's true or natural or real, or the only way of thinking about things.

So just

**Mark:** it, so it's particular to these particular languages at these particular times. It is by no means universal, in terms of cross culturally in different cultures, they [00:23:00] may have divided things up in all kinds of different ways. Yeah. and of course, language changes over time too though. Just because it meant that then doesn't mean it

**Aven:** has to mean that

**Mark:** now.

**Aven:** and people are, have also been wrong in the past, you know, whatever they thought may have been true or not true within their own culture, but they can also. We can look back and say, no, they thought the world, you know, they thought the sun revolved

**Mark:** Plato thought the womb, wandered around the body.

Yeah.

**Aven:** So like things were wrong. So, just, I just really want to put that right up front here because we're going to talk a lot about this, you know, two genders and sex and men and women and what they are and aren't, and all these things. And what we're doing is talking about what these particular cultures, or at least the remnants that we have to access what the mainstream views in these cultures thought

**Mark:**  well, and as we will see when we get to talking in more detail about grammatical gender, not all cultures divide things up. In terms of that categorization.

**Aven:** Absolutely. So just to be really explicit about that because [00:24:00] you know this is one of the many fields in which our specialties get used to Argue for points of view and ideologies that we don't agree with. So I just want to be really, really clear about that. So we're going to talk a lot about binary genders, because it would be misrepresenting the past, not to talk about some of these normative views, but that doesn't mean either I agree with them or that they represent any real you know any any higher truth than any other truth at any other point in time Okay That's said, the other words that I will just point out I haven't talked about Greek very much So Greek has genos as well as a word for sex, right? Sex or type. So that's there in both Latin and Greek, whereas sexus isn't anywhere in Greek, which is one of the mysteries, right? There's no relative or connected word.

**Mark:** I mean there probably are words, if it comes from that,

**Aven:** yes. It has no word that's used to mean that. In that sense. Yes. No.

and since I don't think we're going to talk about it much [00:25:00] elsewhere, there are of course bunches of words or some words for having sexual intercourse in Greek and Latin, though, there were probably many, many words for it.

That don't survive in our written sources. there's a lot of words. I didn't write down this whole bunch of words that just have to do with things like lying together Yeah Living together sleeping together being together you know you can imagine every possible sort of euphemistic or even a very practical, version of that.

So I didn't write all of those down, but there are a few interesting words. like in Greek, there's 'himero-omai'. Which is passive of a female "have sexual intercourse with", and I'm now going to be reading definitions that

**Mark:** these are going to be terrible,

**Aven:** terrible definitions.

so then 'lagneuo' to have sexual intercourse, commonly of the man and then in the passive of the woman So this is clearly to do something to someone else. And then 'mixoiphia ' is sexual intercourse and 'splekoma' is also sexual intercourse.

And I have no idea where these words come from I just think it's interesting that none of them [00:26:00] seem to be particularly productive in English. so those are some Greek words. In Latin, we have 'coitus', coitus, which is from 'coire'. So 'coire' is just to come together. Okay. Literally, I don't think in the orgasm sense, we probably should have put a warning on the front of this, but I'm assuming that everyone will assume that episode about sex is going to involve some explicit words.

but literally from like walking together so defined as sexual congress or copulation. Then there's 'fututio' from. 'futuo', which is copulation, or to have connection with a female.

but 'futuo' is the word that we find that seems quite vulgar that we do find only in Catullus and Martial. So in our, in our most vulgar, some of our more vulgar poets, and it seems to be definitely a thing that a man does to a woman or to another man right.

But one that I think is [00:27:00] interesting given our discussion of grammatical gender that we will have later is conjugatio which is the word that gives us conjugate or conjugation. It's that word 'conjugatio', cause it just means a combined, you know, connection. But a conjugatio yoked together.

Yeah. 'conjugatio corporum' is a conjunction of bodies and means carnal intercourse, coition. and 'concubitio', which is also

**Mark:** to lie

**Aven:** to lie with, but gives us concubine.

**Mark:** Right? So

**Aven:** someone who you sleep with but is not married to you So the Latin ones are more productive in terms of the. Later English words as far as I can tell.

**Mark:** I've now just pulled up the, cause I didn't specifically look at the verbs So I pulled up the historical thesaurus entries for, sexual intercourse as a verb.

And so in the sort of more general, intransitive sense to have sex, the earliest, English word is to play. [00:28:00]

**Aven:** That seems fair,

**Mark:** to do, also work, one's kind; to bed; to couple; to gender; to go together. These are all later medieval ones now. and so forth. to swive, which is the sort of famous one.

In that intransitive sense doesn't appear till 1440. So I know it occurs before that, but it must be

**Aven:** transitive.

**Mark:** in a transitive sense to swive someone . So there's only one, and I guess this isn't surprising. There's only one, that means to have sex with a man specifically, which is tup.

From 1549

**Aven:** see that's used of animals in particular sheep now

**Mark:** is it

**Aven:** and it's used of rams rams tup ewes, unless I'm completely mistaken.

**Mark:** okay, you're right. So of the, ewe To admit the Ram also transferred.

**Aven:** Oh, okay. So it did start that way. It did start that way. . Cause it was originally of a ewe being

**Mark:** of the ewe to admit the [00:29:00] Ram. Yeah, that's true.

**Aven:** And then it was transferred to the active right by the man, but the Ram, so yes. So you're right, it was originally of a woman to have intercourse with a man Yeah But it has transferred. That's interesting because I have heard that word, but only in an agricultural context.

**Mark:** So to have sex with a woman,

**Aven:** again, for a man to have

**Mark:** man to have sex with a woman. from 1592, we have the wonderful expression to hit the master vein

**Aven:** Oh, yeah.

**Mark:** To make a sexual conquest specifically.

**Aven:** We probably don't need to go deep into words for sex, especially in modern English, because there's a million of them.

But one thing to point out is how many of them involve hitting,

**Mark:** yes. Yeah.

**Aven:** The metaphor of hitting is extremely widespread and is one of the possible origins of the word to fuck.

**Mark:**  Yes.

**Aven:** Though that's highly disputed or just doubtful. but the explanation that I've heard anyway is that one of the possible Derivations would be that it comes from [00:30:00] to hit, right. to strike

**Mark:** the other kind of semantic range is to possess in some way. So to possess was used from 1592. so yeah, so the specific, the gender specific words are all kind of later. so I mean the, I guess the earlier kinds of words are just in this.

Intransitive sense. Right. and yeah, so it's words like to play or to bed or to couple those kinds of words.

**Aven:** Okay. So leaving that then, yet another whole range of things we could talk about at length so though that's sex and gender and how they come into the language to come to mean what they mean now.

Then we can talk about the sexes and the genders that, and again, we're gonna focus on the older, I hesitate to even say the word traditional, but the older ones that we have words for in Latin and Greek and old English. Not to deny that there are more words. This is not going to be about exploring the very many modern words for different [00:31:00] genders.

that would could and would be another discussion, but we don't have, for instance, Latin words for those since that's our specialty that's what we're going to focus on. So man, woman, go for it.

**Mark:**  So man, comes through the Germanic line, it comes from the proto Indo European root man, which meant man. and I think largely comes into English through those Germanic roots. Not that it only appears in, the germanic languages. so there is a Sanskrit word, mena, which means man from Indo Iranian manu. there is also Russian, muzh, I guess, muzhek, which means man or male So it does it, it is a general indo European root. as far as I'm aware, I don't think it makes it into Latin or Greek, though.

**Aven:** Okay. So male in Latin is mas

**Mark:**  it's not that root that comes from a separate root.

**Aven:** beyond [00:32:00] that, no.

**Mark:** Yeah. So there, there are French words that come from that, but presumably they're getting it through Germanic,

which would make sense to not a Latin, from a Latin source. so there are a lot of different words , Indo European words for man. There are very few for women. so this is one of the common Indo-European roots for man We'll see some others

**Aven:** Okay

**Mark:** The word woman is a compound of man, so it's not an original Indo-European root It's formed in fact probably only within old English We don't see this compound in other germanic languages It's it's a purely old English word So it's in that sense it's relatively late I mean you know when I say relatively late

**Aven:** like well before 1000 but yeah

**Mark:** So woman is a compound of the word wif, wife in modern English.

And man, man in [00:33:00] old English came to mean

person.

**Aven:**  So it started as meaning, man

**Mark:** I think it started to mean man specifically male

**Aven:** It started out meaning that and then it became a general word

**Mark:** I think so though I mean

you'd have to look at all the cognates, in other languages, but in Sanskrit and in the Slavic languages, it seems to specifically refer to male, right?

So unless there's some other language that gives evidence of it mean more generally person, I think it probably means specifically male.

**Aven:** And then in the Germanic branches starts to mean person,

**Mark:** or at least in old English. I'm not, I don't know about the other,

oh, Mensch

**Aven:** yeah.

**Mark:** Mensch can mean person. Yeah That's true Okay

**Aven:** so maybe in the Germanic branches it starts to mean... Yeah, it's broadened.

**Mark:** So, yeah. So it's extended to mean person more generally. which is why the compound wifman is a way of specifically marking it as female

personal person Yeah

So wif on it's [00:34:00] own could mean. Just woman, it didn't necessarily need to mean married woman. it's a general word for women in old English

**Aven:** Right

**Mark:** we don't know for sure where it comes from. so there are a couple of theories. One of which is that it comes from the Indo-European root \*wep-, which means to turn vacillate tremble ecstatically

**Aven:** really

**Mark:** But but probably in the sense of like veiled so turned as in a kind of cloth around the head.

So it's referring to a clothing that women wore.

**Aven:**  I'm looking, I'm staring at you with all of the poems and phrases about women being changeable in my eyes right now

**Mark:** That is certainly a thing That is certainly a thing

in this case, I think it's, it's probably just in the clothing sense. If this comes from that at all, which we don't know,

which we don't know.

**Aven:** Okay. Okay. I will accept that.

**Mark:** So that's, [00:35:00] that's one theory, but again, it's not, it's by no means a consensus that that's where it comes from. so there are probably some other theories, but that's the one that's most often mentioned. Yeah. so, it's turn. Twist, turn, wrap in the sense of a veiled person

wrapped.

**Aven:** All right, fine.

**Mark:** there's another, so this is not any better, to be honest. there's another recent suggestion apparently, that it comes from a proposed root, meaning shame, like pudenda right? The Latin word pudor, which means shame, but yeah. is used to refer to female but again, I don't know that that suggestion has received any. wide consensus or anything right now. So this isn't the proto Indo-European general word for woman.

so. The other old English word, that could be used to refer to women generally And that does come from a proto indo European root that was a general word for woman [00:36:00] is queen.

**Aven:** Right, right. I remember this now.

**Mark:** So queen quen in, or queyn, I guess it's a long E queen in old English could mean queen in, in the sort of modern sense, but it could also just mean generally woman. and it goes back to a proto indo European root gwen, that meant woman So this is probably the sort of standard indo European word that meant woman.

and it comes into a number of different languages, including, I think, most importantly for our purposes, Greek. so that gives us the, you know, the gyne.

**Aven:** Yes, yes.

**Mark:** Meaning woman, and from which we get a whole ton of English words, gynecology, so that gyne route, or, that prefix or the suffix also.

so, -gynous, -gyny, those, those suffixes so misogyny or whatever. so we get it as both a prefix and a suffix. it comes into English in sort of more rare forms, [00:37:00] through a number of other languages. interestingly, I suppose is banshee from Irish, from the old Irish word Ben, which means woman is just a general word for woman So a banshee is a female

**Aven:** fairy.

**Mark:** So, yeah. Old Irish Ben, that comes from this root mean means woman. Okay. So that's the general word for women in Indo European languages.

one last a couple of points sort of previewing what we're going to get to when we get to grammatical gender, but wif is grammatically speaking a neuter word it's not a feminine

word

**Aven:** Right, right.

**Mark:** So it's grammatically neuter. Right. Which just demonstrates that sometimes grammatical gender and natural gender

don't always line up.

**Aven:** Oh no, absolutely not.

**Mark:**  And this is true in other languages.

They often do,

probably more often than not, but they don't always

**Aven:** No.

**Mark:**  And so wif was neuter and in fact, the compound wifman is masculine because Mon is [00:38:00] masculine And so the gender is determined by the last element in the compound So wifman is actually a masculine word even though it refers to a Female person. Right. one last word. I will say that at least in modern English has become a general word for woman is lady.

**Aven:** Yeah.

I mean sort of

**Mark:** sort of

**Aven:** Only in some set phrases like ladies and gentlemen were basically, or ladies room. Yeah. Yeah. It's a euphemism to a certain extent. Yeah.

**Mark:** and we've already talked about this word in a previous episode, but, just to, repeat that, lady comes from hlafdia in old English which means loaf maker

**Aven:**  woman who makes bread.

**Mark:** Yeah. It's the corresponding word to Lord hlafward in old English, which means loaf guardian. Yeah. So she makes the bread, he guards.

**Aven:** Okay. so you already mentioned gyne, well, let me start with men because don't we always, [00:39:00] so that man word is not, as we just discussed in Latin and Greek So in Greek the basic word for man is aner, andros,

**Mark:** yes.

**Aven:** Okay. So it gives us the, as, as usual, it's the full root that gives us our derivatives. So Andra, so androgyny is andros and gynas, men and women. so that's a man as opposed to a woman. it isn't just a person and it also is very commonly means husband. So this is going to be a trend. The common word for a man is also the word for the social role of husband, right?

Showing , that it is not, it is certainly not only the sex, but also the gender. Right. Or maybe even more of the gender than the sex, you know, it is the societal role,that's being referred to the

**Mark:** gender role a term that was coined sometime in the 20s, I forget now,

**Aven:** seventies, I think. Yeah.

**Mark:** Yeah. I came across that [00:40:00] as a specific point when it was coined and who it was coined by in my

readings.

and so. Well that I'll just, sort of insert at this point that, that word andros, comes from proto indo European ner which meant man, or it actually seems to had the basic sense of vigorous, vital, strong,

**Aven:** right. And we're going to see that again in a moment, in Latin

there's also the word arsene or arsen, which can be interestingly enough, masculine, feminine, or neuter , meaning male. So

**Mark:** I don't know this word,

**Aven:** I can't say that I ever saw it. but it seems to have been sort of a technical word, and it can be, it is the word that's used in Greek for the masculine grammatical gender.

**Mark:** Do you know if there are any English derivatives from it

**Aven:** Not To my knowledge there were a number of compounds in Greek with it so like

men loving and things like that, you know, like used that comp part of the compound. [00:41:00] So it does seem to mean male specifically, but no, it's not a word I know

I wonder where that comes from.

And then there's also arrenikos from arren, meaning male. Hmm.

**Mark:** I don't know that one either.

**Aven:** So those are just interesting words. I can send you off to figure these things out, but I mean, you know, Greek, Greek is often weird, and

**Mark:** Greek etymology can be difficult because it seems to be a fair amount of vocabulary that fairly

**Aven:** isolated side of Greek

**Mark:** and possibly outside of Indo-European.

So, yeah.

**Aven:** So I don't, I don't necessarily want to spend a whole bunch of time on it. I just thought it was interesting that were a couple of other words for male. The other word for a husband that's more directly husband rather than man. That means spouse is posis, but I think that has to do with promises I might be wrong but I think that's where it comes from Probably connected to spouse but that's just a guess.

**Mark:** The word husband, by the way, didn't necessarily originally imply marital status, [00:42:00] it literally means house dweller, so it comes into English from old Norse

**Aven:** yeah. So it's like the person in charge of the house.

Yeah. Basically. then for women, the basic word is gyne, as we discussed which also is the basic word for wife And then there's also a word thelus, which is an adjective, meaning female.

**Mark:** Interesting. Do you know where that comes from?

**Aven:** Nope. And again, it seemed to turn up in a bunch of compounds.

So like woman loving girl crazy or something like that. so no, I don't know what thelus is

**Mark:** cause I did a quick search, but it is by no means, a comprehensive search for any other.

Indo European roots that meant man or women as I did not come up with anything else.

Yeah. So just some interesting things. And then of course there is a word for person that is genderless, though it tends to default to male, but it does not mean male, which is anthropos.

Right?

**Aven:** Yes, of course. We know. And that [00:43:00] is the term for both the generic or the individual, and in particular, like that's human as opposed to gods or human as opposed to beasts, right? So the distinction of type between man and woman is sure, an important distinction, but there's also the important distinction in the way that we use in English human, so I don't know if you want to talk about human at some point.

right. You know, a distinct word. interestingly, anthropos can also be masculine or feminine, right? So you can use, hai anthropos you can say of a woman, the person and it can be feminine

**Mark:** That's interesting because it also comes from that same root that I mentioned before ner That means man but also vigorous vital strong But I guess in the sense of someone who's alive Yeah

**Aven:** And it's not impossible Yeah

**Mark:** It might be that sense Vital

**Aven:** So it can mean woman. In other words, if it's referring to a specific anthropos who was female, it would be, hai anthropos, the woman, the person,

**Mark:** Just going to add the, opo part of anthropos

**Aven:** Is the face, right?

[00:44:00] **Mark:** Yeah. Well, specifically the eye or the face? opos, yeah. Ops.

yeah. So eye or face,

**Aven:** okay, so for Latin the basic word for man is of coursevir V. I. R. vir and that is connected, as far as I know, it actually is not just that the Romans thought it was, but is connected to words for strength Right, right. And force.

**Mark:** So this does go back to one of the common proto indo European words for man \*wiro-.

**Aven:** that's wer, in Old English

**Mark:** wer in old English and werewolf werewolf, it comes into Celtic languages, fyr I don't know if I'm pronouncing that correctly, but

**Aven:** yeah. The one that's written on

bathroom,

**Mark:** bathroom doors

in Irish pubs.

**Aven:** where women is mna.

Just to confuse people who don't speak Gaelic.

**Mark:** and of course, you know, coming through Latin, it gives us all kinds of words like virile and virtue, because apparently only men were virtuous.

Yeah.

**Aven:** Well, [00:45:00] virtus was originally strength. Strength becomes virtue later because it's the virtue of a man like the thing that is proper to a man, which is

strength

**Mark:** Curia, by the way, is a compound from, vir Latin vir so it's

**Aven:** sorry what

**Mark:** Curia as in court

**Aven:** Oh, interesting. Okay.

**Mark:** Latin Curia. Basically, literally men together.

**Aven:** so vir then is, is the man, and it also means husband it, right Just like aner means man and husband, vir to means man and husband

**Mark:** and man. I mean in English you know a woman will talk about my man She means her husband So that's a general

linguistic trend

**Aven:** I mean it's

not at all surprising What is the main role of a man in society It's to be a husband And same with

Woman and wife, in these societies anyway. the other thing is a vir can often be used to mean essentially like hero or man of courage. So it's a positive word. Like, wouldn't you wouldn't use vir to talk about someone you didn't like, or to be disparaging, like, there's no way of sort of using it in a disparaging tone.

**Mark:** It's [00:46:00] not just some guy.

**Aven:** No, it's a man you know So with all of what that means, right? whereas the word for male. Like just of the male sex, biologically is mas maris Yeah And you said that's not from the same root as man.

**Mark:**  It is not from the same root as man. so mas maris, which produces, in English, words like male or masculine, is not related to man.

So the fact that they both begin with M is a pure coincidence, and A, no less yet that's a pure coincidence. so, masculine specifically comes from Latin masculis

which is a diminutive form.

**Aven:** I was, but it's also just an adjectival form. Yes. Yeah. It's an extension here.

**Mark:** And so male comes through French male, old French male or masle, from Latin masculus so it's shortened from that. macho also comes [00:47:00] from that. so mas , Which means, as you say, male or, you know male sex

**Aven:** and is the word that's used when you're talking about mass-- with one of the words to mean grammatical gender

**Mark:** This comes from a root, a proto-indo-European root, mari, So I'm a little unclear about this. Some sources say that the the proto indo European root means specifically young woman but I think it can mean a young person of either gender, either sex, a young man or young man, or a young woman.

I'm pretty sure that's right. That's what, Pokorny has, so I think Pokorny is right about this, it can mean young man or young woman, and it also comes into Latin, , in the form maritus, husbands,

**Aven:** husband. Yeah. I was going to come to that.

**Mark:** Yeah. so thus giving us words like marriage, marry, marital

**Aven:**  Yeah.

**Mark:** mariachi

**Aven:** right. So yes, I was going to say there's a bunch of words that come from mare, so masculatus, masculina. So all of these words, like they give us that and then maritus which is husband, which is just husband you can't use maritus to mean just a man it [00:48:00] has to be a husband .

**Mark:**  And it's, I find this interesting that it specifically seems to refer to a young person, it's not a general word for male or female, or a person more generally. In It's in original proto indo European context.

**Aven:** and then for women in Latin, of course, we have the basic word. Well, it's hard to know which one of these is basic, to be honest.

So we've got femina , which means a female and the word is also used for grammatical gender and it is a standard word for woman. Yeah. It doesn't tell you anything about her status Just woman

**Mark:** Yeah and this of course comes into English as feminine as well as female, which again is

**Aven:** it was femella, which was a diminutive of femina, feminella, femella, which then just got re spelled to look like male

**Mark:**  yes. There's no etymological relationship between male and female,

**Aven:** except that they both have the diminutive ending, so that's where the L comes from in both.

**Mark:** Ah, right, right. Okay.

But the vowel [00:49:00] in female. Is the way it is, because by analogy to male it would have probably been

it was femelle in terms of English Yeah probably

**Aven:** okay, so that's femina

**Mark:** Shall I tell you where it comes from? So this, this does go back, probably, to a proto indo European root de- or dei-, which means to suck. So it's a reference to breastfeeding, suckling and it is also the source, therefore, of fetus Latin foetus, okay. Fawn, fetal, fecund fecundus in Latin. fennel, and I don't know why fennel. Oh, from the idea of producing. So faenum meant just sort of, Hay,

it is just, fodder basically fodder, plants that you can use that are productive.

And that must explain fenugreek.

Right

as well. so also interesting, filial, so from Filia and filius in [00:50:00] Latin, which means son and daughter,

**Aven:** reversed,

**Mark:** daughter and son.

so it's also the source of that. Again, I guess it must be from the idea of a suckling child, probably the idea. Fellatio.

**Aven:** Right.

**Mark:** Felicity, the sort of luck word, félix in Latin. so it comes from that cause I think Felix originally meant sort of fruitful or fertile and therefore lucky, happy.

and it does make it into Greek as well. thele meaning nipple. Again, which makes sense from the, the original sense of the word, right. As well as thelus you mentioned that, right?

**Aven:** Thelus, yeah, there, yeah, there you go.

**Mark:** There you go That's where it comes from

**Aven:** The Greek word for

a word for woman.

**Mark:** Right. I didn't notice that before.

So yeah. Thelus, female that comes from this, this root that sends to suckle.

**Aven:** Okay, cool. All right. Well, another standard word for woman is mulier, mulieris. Well, the address, which again can just mean woman. It [00:51:00] however can mean. And is quite often used to mean wife right? But it doesn't have to. It can just mean woman.

So close to parallel to vir that way can just mean woman but often can mean wife

**Mark:** And I've just discovered that there's in fact an English derivative from this. That I did not know of before. Now, do you know what?

**Aven:** I Feel... I feel like ?

**Mark:** I don't think this comes up often.

**Aven:** No but I feel like this is one of these words that, you know, you learn about it because it's a derivative of, ah, no, other than like, muliebril or something, but

**Mark:** well you're close. Muliebrity.

**Aven:** Okay. Loving one's wife or

**Mark:** womanhood

State of puberty in a woman.

**Aven:** Oh, okay. So

**Mark:** coming to one's womanliness.

Yeah.

**Aven:** Yeah. All right.

**Mark:** Corresponding to virility.

**Aven:** Oh,

**Mark:** it was probably, I bet it was coined rather late to

**Aven:** have them be parallel

**Mark:** parallel to that.

**Aven:** Ah, okay, so that's mulier. Do you have anything about where that comes from or

[00:52:00] **Mark:** traditionally said to to be a comparative to the stem of mollis, soft

**Aven:** yes. I've saw that in that dictionary. That's right.

**Mark:** More soft, soft, kind of soft or weak. weaker, mollis weak. I don't know.

Maybe it's that.

**Aven:** Yeah, it's possible. It's somewhat unsatisfying to be honest, to be, to come to be such an important word for women. It seems kind of.

**Mark:** Well, and apparently there were also phonetic objections to this, to the derivation.

so, but there are no better suggestions so what are you going to do .

**Aven:** And then of course, there's matrona. Which means specifically a married woman. Yes. But it's like an important word. Now, that one's pretty easy.

**Mark:** Comes from mater, mother, mater, which is, that goes

back to a,

**Aven:** that goes all the way back

**Mark:** to a proto-indo-European root that means mother.

Yeah, no, that was straight forward So matrona but it is a very common and important word for a married woman right Of some status. Right? Like it's a respectable word. And then the word that means, like maritus for husband, the word that means only wife [00:53:00] and doesn't really just mean woman is uxor

uxor Right I forgot about that one

**Aven:** which means wife, spouse, consort doesn't have to be married, but it's your partner. But it really basically means wife, which of course gives us the very common word uxorious.

**Mark:** Yes.

**Aven:** Loving one's

**Mark:** Excessively fond or submissive to one's wife

**Aven:** Exactly a state of great felicity

**Mark:** So the etymology of this, according to Calvert Watkins and I usually trust him, is that it comes from the proto indo European root \*uk-sor, she, who gets accustomed to a new household after patrilocal marriage.

**Aven:**  It seems an oddly specific word.

**Mark:** Yes. Yeah. So I'm wondering what \*uk- means. So it's \*uk-sor

**Aven:** sor is the, is the agent word? Yeah.

**Mark:** Yeah. Okay. So, \*uk-sor on its own Doesn't seem to be [00:54:00] attested outside of Italic There have been attempts to connect it to a proto Indo-European root \*uk-sen. Which might be from a root that means to become strong or perhaps from a root that means inseminator or from a root that means to moisten, make wet,

alternatively...

**Aven:** Can we stop this entire line of questioning. Now I'm not really comfortable with it. I'm sorry.

**Mark:** Alternatively borrowed from proto Kartvelan uks, usx

sorry.

Sacrificial bull.

**Aven:** Proton Kartvelan what? What's that?

**Mark:** Yeah, sorry. Proto Kartvelian

**Aven:** what's proto Kartvelian? No wait. I don't want to know.

**Mark:** Proto Kartvelian is a linguistic reconstruction of the common ancestor of the Kartvelian languages, which was spoken by the ancestors of the Kartvelian peoples.

[00:55:00] **Aven:** We have not hit something that is meaningful to me yet.

**Mark:** I think it's sort of in the steppes somewhere.

**Aven:** Okay. I mean, I'm sure it's just my ignorance. I'm sure everyone knows . Yeah. So this is something that

**Mark:** Georgian, it's related to Georgian somehow, okay.

**Aven:** Anyway, so, uxor: odd word is what you're saying.

**Mark:** Yeah, so I, I think basically, it's a word that.

We only can trace to proto Italic, so other Italic languages, but we don't know where it comes from.

**Aven:** Okay. So moving on. so then the parallel to anthropos, human is, of course, homo, hominis right Meaning a human being again definitely defaults to man So you can use homo to mean man but it isn't really gendered any more than just the general world of the Romans was gendered.

small point. When I was looking up, so I looked up a [00:56:00] bunch of these words by using a database online, Perseus, where you can look up, words by their dictionary definitions. So you can look for a word in the English definition, in a Greek dictionary,

**Mark:** sort of like a cheap version of a thesaurus Yeah.

**Aven:** But a thesaurus for another language.

**Mark:** Yeah. Right, exactly. Yeah.

**Aven:** Yeah. So a very useful thing but you're restricted by what the words and the definitions are. Right. So like when I was looking up for words, it was hard because it turns out they don't use the word sex. They use the word coition.

**Mark:** Coition. Yeah

**Aven:** Anyway not as useful as it could be but still very useful However boy was that a way of reminding myself that the man is the unmarked category Because if you look up the word female

7,000 entries. I exaggerate slightly, but all of which are a female servant, a female this, a female that a female butcher, a female, Baker, a female.

This whereas if you look up male, you do not find a male servant, a male. You find

**Mark:** Because the [00:57:00] basic words for those things or are male

**Aven:** or, and even if they aren't, I mean in Latin, it may not be that they're like, they may be a masculine and a feminine, that turn up just as equally, but the dictionary is sure as heck going to say one is servant and the other is female servant. So I mean, I know this, you know this, we all know this, but like, nothing like that search to make that clear to me. So anyway, so yeah, so homo hominis, which my dictionary told me was related to the word humus for soil and was therefore parallel to Adam, the Hebrew word for parallel, not.

Derived from, but parallel to that use of the word for dirt to mean man.

**Mark:** So this is probably the best conjecture for it, right? I don't think it's certain, but that root is the difficult to pronounce \*dhghem-, D. H. G. H. E. M. so, if you can aspirate a D before an aspirated G

**Aven:** I'm just trying to find any of those in the word homo.

There was [00:58:00] no D or G or E in this word . Sometimes linguistics does seem a little bit like lying

**Mark:** I think the D sound at the beginning is a sort of optional sound

**Aven:** Yeah I know And all the rest of it is just aspiration and all turns into hhh I know

**Mark:** so in Latin, the G H the proto indo European G H regularly becomes an 'h'. Yeah, that's a regular sound change.

**Aven:** It's the D , the DH in front of that that's problematic.

**Mark:** But it's parenthesized. Right in the stem. So it doesn't always appear

**Aven:** right.

**Mark:** So, yeah. \*dhghe m- means earth.

Yeah.

Okay. and it can be found in,

**Aven:** and there is, so there is a Latin word, humus, humus, which means earth.

Soil, which of course, gives us humous.

**Mark:**  So this word also comes into, ah, and this would explain the DH part it comes into Greek as, what it would be chthonos

**Aven:** yeah. chthonos yeah [00:59:00] chthonic Yes The dictionary did make that parallel too Yeah Which, chthonos just means earth ground. Right.

**Mark:** so that is presumably where it comes from.

**Aven:** Yeah. Is that related to human.

**Mark:** Is homo related to human again, I think that's the, the standard explanation

**Aven:** cause obviously human does come from a Latin word, humanus. But beyond that.

**Mark:** Yeah. I think people feel pretty certain that human comes from that.

**Aven:** Right. So it's just whether human and homo both come from it,

**Mark:** both come from the same \*dhghem- root. Okay. So, homo may or may not come from that , humanus probably does, right? Because where else is it coming? Where's the, well, and as you say, there's the, humus. Yeah, I mean, that, that looks, that looks closer, right? Yeah. so that, that is certainly, I would say from that root whether homo also comes from that \* dhghem root is anyone's guess [01:00:00] It's presumed to though

**Aven:** Cool. Okay. So those are my words for categories of people. Now, this is leaving aside-- again, we're just doing the basics here. Maybe at some point we'll have a whole other episode on non-normative genders and gender roles and sexualities. We aren't even, we have not touched sexuality.

Yeah. And I do not have any intention of doing so because it's far too huge. And this is already too long. Yeah. So,

**Mark:** so I have a last few words, about,

**Aven:** grammatical, gender,

**Mark:** well, I have stuff about grammatical gender, but I have a last few words that I want to talk about, that specifically refer to.

Boys and girls.

**Aven:** Okay,

**Mark:** sure. which will basically me being saying I don't know where it comes from cause these are really for whatever reason I guess because they're kind of slangy a bit Yeah They're very hard to track down.

so boy. We don't know where it comes from. it's so, it's first [01:01:00] attested,

**Aven:** moving on.

**Mark:** It's first attested in mid 13th century, with the sense servant, commoner, knave, generally young and male. and so it kinda gets that sense of a rascal, a ruffian a knave an urchin and later on a male child before puberty that seems to be the most generally accepted suggestion of where it comes from. And this is kind of wild, but, it comes from old French embuie, one fettered from vulgar Latin inboiare from Latin boia leg iron yoke, leather collafr from Greek boai, dorai, ox hides. And so therefore it comes from the word for bull or ox or cow the same this of the proto Indo European root gwu which produces the word Cow in English and the word bo [01:02:00] bovis in Latin. That's a wild etymology!

**Aven:**  Listeners cannot see the intense side-eye I am giving you,

**Mark:** but that's the best guess, honestly!

**Aven:** Wow.

**Mark:** Yeah, so there are other suggestions. There's a germanic suggestion that it's related to a bunch of other germanic words, like Dutch boy, low German boy, that mean sort of something like boy or brother.

And I wonder if therefore they, there's also Icelandic bofi. So there's a bunch of B words. Boobei in German means, boy, knave Jack. so I wonder if this is related very distantly to brater, brother. That rootbrater, which gives us frater in Latin, brother.

**Aven:** that's total speculation,

**Mark:** but that's total speculation.

but it's either that or cow comes from the root that means cow or bull. [01:03:00] So, I don't know. Take your pick.

**Aven:** Alright. So girl,

**Mark:** girl is not going to get you any further any easier. So girl, originally meant , a child or young person of either sex. So it was not a gendered word.

It was just a child Child Yeah And at first appears in 1300. Again, origin, unknown. so one suggestion is that it comes from a proposed old English word, gurellei, which means dress or apparel

**Aven:** Okay.

**Mark:**  However, this suggestion put forward by Fred Robinson, who is a well known old English scholar, has, met with somewhat mixed reception according to the OED.

So it is certainly not.

**Aven:** A consensus,

**Mark:** a consensus on that, that is basically the best guess

**Aven:** Alright.

**Mark:**  It just sort of appears out of nowhere. and he's connecting this [01:04:00] to, an old English word that isn't actually attested. So, which is kind of a problem

**Aven:** So thank you for bringing up boy and girl and giving us so much information on them

**Mark:** but there are there are germanic Cognates that seem like they're probably related So but again we don't know where it comes from Another suggestion though is that it comes from a proto indo European root \*ger- That means short child short

**Aven:** possible. Yeah.

**Mark:**  but yeah, so who knows? Now the common old English word for girl actually is not, obviously, this is not attested in old English, is maid or maiden.

which again, we've talked about before in previous episode. It was the Christmas episode that 12. Yeah, the 12 maids well, however many maids there were. so that comes from, the proto indo European root magu which means a young person of either sex.

Also of of interest, I suppose is the word [01:05:00] child, which at various points, it vacillates whether it refers to children generally, or to girl children or to boy children. So this is the word that, throughout its history in English seems to vacillate. So it's interesting for that standpoint.

Okay. And so kind of segueing into our discussion of grammatical gender, the word maegden maiden, in old English was neuter because the E N diminutive is, is a neuter ending. It's like madchen in German, which is also neuter. whereas the, the form maeth, which is the non diminutive form, is feminine.

And so that takes us to grammatical gender. So. We should preface this discussion by saying that not all languages have grammatical gender. Many languages don't; exactly how many do and how many don't is I've got kind of quite varying estimates of this. So according to Wikipedia, one quarter of the [01:06:00] world's languages have grammatical gender.

However, to a specialist on the very topic of grammatical gender, Greville Corbett, And this is specifically drawn from his article in the encyclopedia of language and linguistics. he says in a sample of 256 languages, somewhat over half, 144, were found to have no gender system. So half, half, a gender system with at least two genders-- and two gender systems are common,-- existed in 50, examples of this sample. Three genders was about half as common, only 26 examples. And four genders was about half as common again, only 12 examples. Larger systems with more than four, genders, with five or more genders, represented a substantial minority.

So basically the more genders, the less common it's going to be worldwide.

**Aven:** Are you going to [01:07:00] define what a grammatical gender is?

**Mark:** I will, I will come to some, a very specific definition of this.

**Aven:** Okay.

**Mark:** So of the languages with a gender system, the majority had an assignment system, which I will talk about in more detail in a minute, an assignment system based on sex.

So in other words grammatical gender lining up more or less with. Some idea of natural gender. so that's, 84 examples of that, what did I say? 256.

**Aven:** Okay. But

**Mark:** 28 languages of the sample, notably in the Niger Congo and Algonquian families had systems based on animacy,

**Aven:** whether something is animate or not, mobile or not speaks or not those kinds of things Yeah So

**Mark:** not at all Based on this idea of sexual organs organs Yeah

And as for the type of assignment system, at which I will kind of get into in more detail in a minute, whether it's strictly based on semantics, so in other words, the [01:08:00] meaning of the word is somehow connected to how you divide up the words into genders, or ones that are at least predominantly based on semantics, were found in just under half the languages. 53 examples, while a slight majority, 59 examples had both semantic and formal assignments.

So the shape of the word, the sound of the word,

**Aven:** so formal here means very literally form, the form of the form,

**Mark:** the form of the word, the sound of the word So all of this is to say that there's a lot of complexity, very, a lot of variation across the world in terms of different gender systems and whether or not they even have a gender system many have sex as a component, but some don't. As I say, the Algonquin languages have animate /inanimate.

So here's one definition that we can kind of use as a baseline for a definition of grammatical gender. This comes from the linguist Hocket. he wrote that " genders are classes of nouns [01:09:00] reflected in the behavior of associated words So words like an adjective, most

primarily, or a definite article or

a pronoun.

If you have

**Aven:** pronoun,

**Mark:** or a verb.

**Aven:** Cause sometimes

**Mark:** some verbs in some languages the verb can reflect the gender of the noun

**Aven:** Yeah

**Mark:** So gender must involve agreement between the noun, which is the trigger. And some other word, which is the target,

**Aven:** right. So for those who are used to, Latin and Greek, let's say, this is what differentiates it from a declension, which is of course a random arbitrary term as well, but is something that differentiates a set of words that follow a particular pattern for cases And that don't need to agree They could be the only word in a sentence Yeah There can be no adjectives, no anything, and yet it will have a certain ending and there's a pattern to how those facts fit.

So that's why a noun both has gender and a declension in, [01:10:00] in those. That's not always going to be true in every language, but in those languages that you might know if you know Latin and Greek, that's why those are separate issues. that overlap, but are not the same.

**Mark:** So sometimes in some languages, the declension of a noun can line up with the gender and

**Aven:** maybe be exclusive to it, sometimes

**Mark:** not, or sometimes some of the time, but not all of the time.

So it can

**Aven:** Latin, for instance, first declension, mostly feminine, second declension, mostly masculine

**Mark:** and neuter.

**Aven:** And neuter. Yes. Yes.

**Mark:** In fact always masculine and neuter. Are there any feminine

**Aven:** Yep, trees.

**Mark:** Oh, okay. Trees

**Aven:** There are like seven trees that are feminine.

**Mark:** That's good that they occur in a group like that because that sort of makes sense as to how these things develop And then third declension

**Aven:** every gender, fourth declension, masculine feminine neuter I think all of them and in 5th declension only feminine Right So like That's not a lot of rhyme and reason to it. There are, but there are patterns. But third declension for instance. Totally non, [01:11:00] you know, there are patterns within it but the declension so yeah So

**Mark:** sometimes, depending on the tradition, study of some languages will prefer to use the term gender.

Sometimes they'll prefer to use the term noun classes.

Basically. It's the same.

**Aven:** Especially if they don't line up

**Mark:** Yes. So you will see these terms used sometimes interchangeably so grammatical gender, therefore can affect the noun inflection itself. If the noun is inflected in languages where the noun is inflected, right?

That's the trigger, as I say, and /or the inflection of those associated words, the target words,

**Aven:** the target words. When we say inflection. We mean a change in the form. Yeah. and again, in a Latin or Greek, if you know, that usually means the editings in other languages might be in a prefixing a vowel in the middle of the word might mean a change to a stem consonant. it just means a change in the form

**Mark:** A change in the form of the word. Yep. And so in Latin, the gender affects the, [01:12:00] inflection of the noun. Yeah.

but say in French where nouns aren't inflected at all, but they still effect, the associated articles the article the

**Aven:** adjectives and even verbs in terms of

past participles.

**Mark:** Right. In terms of past participles. so the targets, can include

Anything from adjectives, determiners like articles, pronouns with pronoun agreement, quantifiers like words, like few, many, numbers or numbers. yeah. Numerals, possessives, participles. Verbs. So in some languages, I think this is true of Russian.

the verb marks Gender and all kinds of other categories. It can be apparently even adverbs. And I don't have an example language for this, but it boggles the mind how, how the noun could affect an an adverb But there you go It can in some languages do that.

**Aven:** Yeah.

**Mark:** so grammatical gender is inherent to nouns and pretty much nouns only.

it [01:13:00] is marked on all these various targets Now, the obvious question then is how do these nouns get their gender In other words how does gender assignment work. And there are basically two factors in the assignment of gender to those nouns. The meaning of the noun the semantic.

**Aven:** Yeah. We already talked about this and the form and the form

**Mark:** So many languages are strictly or predominantly semantic, as I said before. In other words, their gender systems and some languages can be quite strict. So the Dravidian languages are apparently quite strict in this regard,

**Aven:** right? So words that fall into certain semantic categories, like

**Mark:** because of what they.

**Aven:** animals or, blue things or like I don't know about Dravidian, but like in a given language, it could be things that move or

**Mark:** in Dravidian I think the sort of highest level is rational, non rational, and there're various subcategories.

**Aven:** Right. But so, but according to some categorization of what things actually [01:14:00] are.

**Mark:** Yeah.

Regardless of what the form of the word looks likes, it's just based on that meaning.

**Aven:** So that would be the one end of the extremes. Yeah.

**Mark:** in predominantly semantically based gender systems. The division may sometimes seem arbitrary, so like, Latin is kind of like this, right? but often things like worldview, including things like

mythology can explain some of these divisions. So why is the moon and sun or trees,

**Aven:** so the trees, why are those second declension nouns that should be by form, masculine. Yeah. the general assumption is it's because trees were thought to have female spirits, yeah. Nymphs.

**Mark:**  And yeah. Why is, why in in different languages, moon and sun can be you know the moon can be masculine or feminine depending on which culture it comes from And usually that's based on some mythological

connection

**Aven:** There's a very chicken and egg problem there Right right If the word has a grammatical [01:15:00] form that makes it feminine so like why is justice female

**Mark:** Yeah

And we'll come to that

**Aven:** Like those ones are

definitely

that

**Mark:** We'll come to that

other way

that can work in a minute

**Aven:** some of

them are definitely form first

personification or gender assignment later for sure.

**Mark:** but no languages assigned gender by purely formal assignments So there's always some element of semantic gender assignment There are no languages in the world that anyone's found

**Aven:** Where there aren't Some categories where you can find like this group and that group and this group all fit into this gender

**Mark:** Now. the formal rules can be one of two things. It can be phonological or morphological. So for instance, a phonological example would be in French, 99% of nouns ending in 'ain', that nasalised sound, like the word pain, bread, are masculine.

Okay. So that's one sub category of masculine, not the [01:16:00] only, but there, there are various languages where phonological can be a big part of it. Right? and then the other example is morphological. So for instance, in Russian inflectional classes, lineup almost always with grammatical gender, with just a few exceptions.

Okay Which is not true in Latin, of course, cause it's got all these ones that don't. so some of the common gender division systems found in the world's languages, masculine, feminine. Two gender systems. So gender is mostly, in line with sex. and other nouns fit into one of the two, sometimes appearing arbitrary.

so this includes romance languages, Baltic languages, Celtic languages, Hindustani languages like Hindi and Urdu, Afro Asiatic languages, including Semitic languages, Berber languages and so forth. Then you've got the three gender system, masculine, feminine, neuter, in which, this mainly falls in line with human sex.

though with some [01:17:00] exceptions, and then all the remaining nouns. fall into one of the three genders, masculine, feminine, or neutral. many Indo European languages are like this. So Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, Germanic, Slavic, they all have that, right? That three, gender system. Then you have the animate inanimate two gender system.

so in these languages, generally what you see is mainly humans and animals falling into the animate gender and everything else into the inanimate gender And proto indo European may originally have been like this since the earliest branch to split off from proto indo European, the Anatolian branch, which includes Hittite, which is the earliest recorded Indo-European language, works like this.

Now, most Indo European languages today have three genders, masculine, feminine, neuter. But,

**Aven:** well, I mean, most of them have lost neuter.

**Mark:** A lot of them have lost

**Aven:** Well, many, the romance language,

**Mark:** The Romance have [01:18:00] lost, lost neuter.

Yeah.

so the theory is that feminine morphology in, Indo European languages, was a later development and may have begun as an abstract noun class actually

**Aven:** Oh okay

**Mark:** Which

explains why in Latin for instance you think of all the abstract nouns They're all feminine

**Aven:** right Yeah So that doesn't specifically there's a an ending that is a feminine ending The

itia

**Mark:** Yeah But there's also the itudo

**Aven:** Oh yeah

Okay

**Mark:** All of the and they're third

They

could be it could be either masculine There's nothing inherent in the ending that makes it clear but they're all feminine Right so the -a stems, which is like the Latin first declension, they do show up that, so that's, an Indo-European noun class, and that shows up in Anatolian. So that's that branch that broke away really early. but only in abstract nouns. It doesn't Mark feminineness Hmm So it seems that that was the original [01:19:00] purpose of that by the way, just to point out, and I know you know this, but the, genitive ending in that -a stem in the first declension, was the genitive singular was originally A S.

Like paterfamilias.

**Aven:** Yeah.

**Mark:** and that goes back to Indo European endings. the, E E ending probably well was originally AI. So early Latin spellings will be

**Aven:** AI,

**Mark:** and that probably comes from the second declension right. From the masculine one. Okay. It gets borrowed in and stuck after the A, and then the AI becomes A E.

so yeah. So, as I said, you know, this research indicates that the early stages of proto Indo European had this two gender system animate and inanimate as in Hittite. The classification of nouns based on animacy or inanimacy, and the lack of gender, are today characteristic of Armenian.

so according to this theory, animate gender, which unlike inanimate gender had independent vocative and accusative [01:20:00] forms later split into masculine and feminine So the animate category

**Aven:** became

**Mark:** masculine feminine and thus leaving us with the three classification, masculine, feminine, and that neuter, which was the inanimate originally.

So

the general pattern is that a lot of these Indo European languages reduced the number of genders, as you say, in romance languages reduced it to two, and those neuter words then got divided up between masculine, feminine.

there are some cases in which, the they reduced it to two, but more by going backwards. In other words, the, the feminine and masculine get coalesced into a common gender. but the neuter is, is

reained,

so that you see that in Swedish and Danish, for instance, and arguably, Russian has created a fourth gender cause.

Russian does that sort of thing.

[01:21:00] Yeah. and then of course there are some languages that lost gender altogether, like English and Afrikaans is also seems mostly true of that language. Well, like traces and things like, you know, as a, as an English with pronouns and things.

And that's true of a bunch of other languages indo European language like Persian and a whole bunch of other, you know, probably not the most well known, the most populous most spoken languages but it's true of a bunch of languages

**Aven:** right

**Mark:** now, this animate inanimate, division's not only found in, Indo-European, but it's in other languages in the world.

Basque is like, that has the animate inanimate, Ojibwe has animate inanimate. Right.

**Aven:** Okay.

**Mark:** And that's what I said. Algonquian languages are like that. now there is the common neuter category. Again, this is probably what happened. Well, this seems to be what happened in Swedish and Danish where masculine feminine used to be separate but they get coalesced So you see that pattern [01:22:00] in some languages And there are other systems. So, in the Dravidian languages, the division is human, non-human, or rational/non-rational which I mentioned , and then there is the famous, example of the, Dyirbal, language, which has, it's a, an Australian language, which or family of languages, I think that has four genders.

So the first is most animate objects. And men. Second gender is women, water fire violence and exceptional animals Third, gender is edible fruit and vegetables, and the fourth gender is miscellaneous and includes things that are not classifiable in the first three, and this is the language that inspired the title of George Lakoff's, book " women fire and dangerous things".

So there are all kinds of ways of dividing up words semantically . basing it on sex is a very common one, but it is not the only one. Now there are [01:23:00] some reasons why doing this can be useful and a language that has, explicit inflections for gender. It's easy to express the natural gender, of animate beings.

grammatical gender can be a valuable tool for disambiguation if you've got pronouns, right? so it can make things more clear what the antecedent of a word is.

**Aven:**  Yes.

**Mark:** And in sort of more literary writing and poetry and so forth, gender can be used to animate inanimate things it's also potentially useful in distinguishing homophones. So if two words sound the same, but they actually mean completely different things, if there are two different genders that's a way of distinguishing them And as you sort of alluded to before, we can think about the cognitive effects of having grammatical gender. And this is kind of, referring to the work of Lira Boroditsky and others, when assigning voices to inanimate objects grammatical gender tends to influence the selection. So if the word is grammatically male, you would assign a masculine voice.

[01:24:00] That doesn't sound too surprising. but it's also true that when asked to describe nouns, grammatical gender may influence the decision. So for instance, in one test, German speakers describe a bridge, which in German is Brücke, which is feminine, they more often used words like beautiful, elegant, pretty or slender.

So stereotypically female qualities.

yeah.

**Aven:** We're really getting into gender as opposed to sex here. Yes. Very largely. Yes.

**Mark:** So while German speakers would assign these stereotypes with the feminized qualities to an inanimate object that happens to be feminine in gender, Spanish speakers, whose word for bridge is a masculine word.

puente, use words like big, dangerous, strong,

sturdy.

So there can be cognitive effects of having a gender system that is [01:25:00] based semantically on either predominantly or strictly with, sex

**Aven:** though, presumably. it could be if you had other Yeah Alignment so you could have cognitive effects to it These have been studied with these grammatical gender ones but I imagine if it's animate inanimate

**Mark:** you'd have similar

**Aven:** they could have

**Mark:** similar things Yeah

**Aven:** All right. Are we done?

**Mark:** Yes

**Aven:** No. I mean, it's all very interesting. It's just there's so much to talk about. And so, like, we didn't even get into gender roles in the ancient world or sexuality or transgender or anything else.

And we're not going to, because I'm pretty sure we're at two hours. So I think we need to stop, And we

**Mark:** might need an expert to , to get

**Aven:** some of these things we need to get an expert to talk about. I mean, some of these things I have taught on, but, but yeah, I mean, these would be interesting. There's a whole bunch of other topics we can return to at various points and we might do that with guests sometime.

That would be fun. But for now, let's stop there. I'm not even [01:26:00] gonna read the Latin poems I had prepared. so you all get one whole episode without a Latin poem. You know, it's hard to get by, but you're just going to have to do it. and I think we'll stop here. So, Gabi, I have no idea if that answered anything of your questions.

but thank you for the suggestion because it was certainly interesting to me And I learned things indeed. both in my own research and from Mark. and it has reminded us of a very wide and fruitful, productive, generative subject that we can return to and explore more fully.

**Mark:** Yes

**Aven:**  and that's it.

Good night.

**Mark:** Good night.

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Thanks for listening.

**Mark:** Bye.