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Woman: Concept, Prototype and Stereotype

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on previous work, I argue that a family resemblance account of the concept *WOMAN* has several beneficial consequences. Namely, it promotes hermeneutical justice, and, in time, it may serve to change the prototypes and stereotypes people tend unreflectively to associate with *WOMAN*. I claim that only at that point will *full* hermeneutical justice be achieved. To this end, I propose a reconceptualization of the notion of hermeneutical injustice, first presented by Fricker (2007). First, I present the family resemblance account of *WOMAN*. Accordingly, that concept isn't identified by a set of necessary and (jointly) sufficient conditions, but, roughly, by different criteria. Second, I show how concepts, prototypes and stereotypes relate to one another and how they may contribute to hermeneutical injustice. Finally, I show how the proposed account of *WOMAN* may in time foster a change in the associated prototype and stereotypes, which will ameliorate societies by doing more justice to the lived experience of trans women – that is, by promoting *full* hermeneutical justice.

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In previous work (Coliva 2024b), I recommended taking a family resemblance approach to the concept *WOMAN*,¹ to do justice, among other things, to trans women.²

Here I revisit the proposal to argue that this approach has several beneficial consequences. It promotes hermeneutical justice, and, in time, it may serve to change the prototypes and stereotypes people tend unreflectively to associate with *WOMAN*. I claim that only at that point will *full* hermeneutical justice be achieved. To this end, I propose a reconceptualization of the notion of hermeneutical injustice, first presented by Fricker (2007).

In Section 1, I present the family resemblance account of *WOMAN*. Accordingly, that concept isn't identified by a set of necessary and (jointly) sufficient conditions, but, roughly, by different criteria. I then show how concepts, prototypes and stereotypes relate to one another and how they may contribute to hermeneutical injustice (Section 2). Finally, I show how the proposed account of *WOMAN* may in time foster a change in the associated prototype and stereotypes, which will ameliorate societies by doing more justice to the lived experience of trans women (Section 3) – that is, by promoting *full* hermeneutical justice.

1. Woman as a Family Resemblance Concept

As is well-known, according to Wittgenstein, in many cases concepts (or meanings)³ are not determined by explicit definitions. Sometimes, of course, they are – like in the mathematical, the scientific or in the legal context, etc. Yet, when we are interested in the terms and concepts that people in our societies use in their everyday interactions, then that approach

is often unavailable. The way in which people typically use these terms, rather, is through *family resemblance*. That is, we utilize different, only partially overlapping criteria for inclusion within a given class. Hence, the proposal I want to examine is to consider *WOMAN* as a family-resemblance concept.

Accordingly, the concept *WOMAN* wouldn't be identified through a set of necessary and jointly sufficient conditions. Rather, there would be certain individuals that are already taken to be instances of the concept in question and then other individuals would be taken to fall under the concept if they share *one or the other* of the features of the ones who already comprised within it but not necessarily either all or a (weighted) majority of them. Family resemblance, therefore, is neither a definitional nor a cluster or a prototype theory of concepts. In particular, however useful the latter might be to explain typicality effects (see [Section 2](#)) and no matter whether their proponents were inspired by the notion of family resemblance (Rosch and Mervis 1975), these remain different ways of conceiving meanings and concepts.

This has escaped notice in the growing literature on the concept *WOMAN*. For instance, Bettcher (2012, 237, 241) fails to see this point and takes family resemblance to entail that being considered as an element within the extension of a given concept is a matter of sharing the features of paradigmatic (or focal) cases. Stoljar (1995, 282–286) too, who proposes a cluster account of *WOMAN* inspired by Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance, fails to see this point, by insisting that to be subsumed under that concept, subjects should share 'enough' or a 'proportion' of features individuals already falling under it have in common (cf. also Stoljar 2011, 42). And so does Hay (2020, 112–115), who is equally sympathetic to a family resemblance account of *WOMAN*.

Yet, as Friedrich Waismann explained the notion of family resemblance, borrowing Wittgenstein's example of *GAME*: '[I]t may be merely that *every two games are connected by intermediate links*' (Waismann 1997, 82). That is, like tennis is a game which cannot be played alone and where there is winning and losing, so is *solitaire*, where there is winning and losing but can be played alone, and so is playing with dolls, which can be played alone and where there is no winning or losing. *Solitaire* is therefore the intermediate link that connects tennis and playing with dolls, even though these latter games have nothing in common between them.

This explains the relevance of intermediate links for Wittgenstein (1953, 122)⁴:

a main source of our failure to understand is that we do not command a clear view of the use of our words. – Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity [surveyability]. A perspicuous [surveyable] representation produces just that understanding which consists in 'seeing connexions'. Hence the importance of finding and inventing intermediate cases.

Like the intermediate links in a chain connect separate links that do not touch each other at any point, intermediate instances of a concept *C* serve to unite instances that may have nothing in common between them, and they do so by means of having (at least) one feature in common with each of these separate instances, though not the same one.

This is important for several reasons. First, it avoids the idea that one should count as a woman only if certain (clusters of) traits are shared and connectedly that there would be individuals who would be more of a woman than others if they shared more of these traits or more of the 'heavy-weight' (or focal) ones. Thus, contrary to prototype theories of concepts, just like a penguin or a dolphin is no less of a bird or a mammal, even if they do not share 'heavy-weight' traits shared by more focal cases of birds and mammals, like flying and inhabiting the mainland, so trans women, for example, would be no less women even if they cannot bear children, say.

Secondly, family resemblance clarifies in what sense concepts are *open-ended* (Waismann 1945 would have said 'open-textured'). Since inclusion within a concept does not depend on sharing a set of predetermined features, new cases which share a feature with one old member of the class that they do not share with any other member of this class can be included within it. Thus, one important aspect of family resemblance is that it allows for the *extension* of the concept to *new cases* in potentially *unpredictable* ways.

That could invite the objection that the account would make it too easy to be included within the extension of the concept or, alternatively, that the concept would not pick out any ‘real’ or ‘objective’ kind. As to the first objection, it can be countered by noticing that our purposes and needs will *de facto* drive the process, and it is extremely unlikely that they will bring about the inclusion into the class of women of *any* possible entity as long as it has something in common, albeit not the same feature, with some individual already included within that class. That is, while open-endedness might, in principle, bring about a trivialization of the concept, as it makes it extremely easy for new elements to be subsumed under a concept, it must be borne in mind that this is non-ideal philosophy of language and mind and that, *in practice*, the extension to new cases will be dictated and guided by emerging practical needs. Thus, it is only if needed, and with respect to what is needed in practice, that a given concept will be extended to new cases. As Wittgenstein writes, ‘[t]he application of a word is not everywhere bounded by rules’ (Wittgenstein 1953, 84). Thus, it can be extended to new cases and even be instituted ‘as we go along’ based on our needs and practices. Writes Wittgenstein (1953, 83):

Doesn’t the analogy between language and games throw light here? We can easily imagine people amusing themselves in a field by playing with a ball so as to start various existing games, but playing many without finishing them and in between throwing the ball aimlessly into the air, chasing one another with the ball and bombarding one another for a joke and so on. And now someone says: The whole time they are playing a ball-game and following definite rules at every throw. And is there not also the case where we play and– make up the rules as we go along? And there is even one where we alter them – as we go along.

As to the second objection – that is, that the concept would not pick out any ‘real’ or ‘objective’ kind – it is really no objection because the whole point of adopting the proposed account of the concept *WOMAN* is to dismantle the idea that there is a real kind – be it biologically or socially functionally determined – that our ‘real’ or ‘true’ concept *WOMAN* should pick out (see also Section 3).

Thirdly, family resemblance should not be conflated with vagueness. That is, the proposed account of *WOMAN* does not depend on the fact that biologically there may be human beings that fall in between male and female, or have some biological features of both, such that the concept *WOMAN* would not be a clear-cut one.⁵ The point, rather, is that if *WOMAN* works by family resemblance, the criteria – however subject to vagueness they might be – for inclusion within the class of women may expand over time to become more inclusive.

Finally, with an analogy: in this proposal, the concept *WOMAN* is more like a space-time worm than like a tridimensional individual. Hence, while evolving in time, it *remains one*. That is, no replacement of meaning/concept is affected simply by adding new criteria for membership within the concept.

Rather, the concept *WOMAN* would be a potentially open-ended, revisable disjunction of the various features that have entered the concept through time. Therefore, the definitions we may sometimes advance for practical purposes would only be snapshots, as it were, of moments in the life of the concept – corresponding to (sometimes overlapping) temporal stages of one single concept. They may serve very useful purposes, like in the legal or scientific context, but context and purpose are inevitably historically determined.⁶ Thus, we should not mistake the concept in its entirety with any of its temporal stages. Furthermore, the open-endedness of the concept leaves room for its extension to new cases which are not presently considered simply because they may not be salient at this time in history but may become so later. Thus, it is not inconceivable that in a not-too-distant future, the concept *WOMAN* (or *MAN*) will likely have to be extended to non-biological creatures (like replicants in *Blade Runner*). The relevant point is that these new cases will be subsumed under the same concept (*WOMAN* or *MAN*) rather than under a different, partially related one.

Now, conceptual continuity and change are a problem for those approaches, like Haslanger (2012), that go by definitions. As is well-known, she defines ‘woman’ as follows:

S is a woman iff_{df} *S* is systematically subordinated along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.), and *S* is ‘marked’ as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female’s biological role in reproduction.⁷

Yet, as soon as we change the set of necessary and sufficient conditions, we immediately change the meaning of the word and/or the concept. If a woman is not subordinate, or lives in a society in which she is not thought of as having to subordinate to men, she is not a woman in Haslanger's sense. Nor is she one if she lacks all the physical features presumed to be evidence of females' biological role in reproduction. This definition would likely exclude trans women.

On a Wittgensteinian approach, the problem seems to be easier to handle because, to repeat, there won't be a change of concept – in the sense of a replacement of the original one with a new one – by allowing some more individuals to fall under it even though they were not initially considered part of its extension. Rather, that very concept will simply be extended to new cases. In fact, the *criteria* for inclusion within the class determined by the concept will be expanded.⁸ In that sense, the very same concept would be changed, just like an individual, thought of as a spatio-temporal worm, can change its properties while remaining one and the same.

Another helpful analogy would be with clubs. They may expand in two ways. That is, either by including more individuals of the same type, like going from being 'by invitation only' to being 'by invitation or self-nomination, subject to approval', say. Or else, they could expand also by diversifying their activities. For instance, a club may have started its operations by including only tennis players, and then have expanded to include bridge players, then billiard players, etc. Moreover, it may have started as men only and then extended to women. In the latter cases, criteria for inclusion within the club would have expanded and would have been used to select individuals with very diverse properties and functions, but the club would have remained one.

Importantly, these more inclusive criteria would not necessarily entail identity in function – be it 'natural' or 'social'.⁹ This is an interesting aspect of the Wittgensteinian approach, which is worth stressing in this connection because, whereas Haslanger's approach can easily be accused of changing the topic by substituting certain definitions of contested terms with different ones, a family-resemblance approach, once the notion is properly characterized and applied, won't.¹⁰ And then the question would be how changing from a concept *WOMAN* – in fact, *WOMAN*₁ – to a different one – *WOMAN*₂ – could ever be taken as ameliorating the initial concept. At most, it would count as a salutary *replacement* of the initial concept. On the Wittgensteinian approach, in contrast, we could still have the same concept *WOMAN* and yet ameliorate *it*, in the sense that, for instance, we would be expanding it to new cases such as trans women. We would be doing so while keeping the *same* concept: simply, new cases that were not initially considered to fall under that concept are now considered to be included under *it*.

The Wittgensteinian approach not only makes perfect sense of the idea of ameliorating our existing concept, instead of simply replacing it, but may also be *politically* apt. For instance, activists in favor of considering trans women as women are fighting for including the former in that very concept. They are not asking to consider them women in a different sense. As Bettcher (2012, 233) claims, 'a trans woman is not a strange type of woman, but a woman, period'. Although I remain skeptical of Bettcher's multiple-meaning account of *WOMAN*, for if a trans woman is a woman, *sic et simpliciter* only in the context of trans communities, as Bettcher argues, she would still not count as one for society at large, I think she is right that trans women are women, period.¹¹ The main political problem I see with her proposal is that if trans women aren't women *sic et simpliciter* for society at large, this could still foster forms of discrimination in such a larger setting. Let me stress, however, that the present proposal is only meant to carve out a possibility in logical space. It will then be for the relevant stakeholders to decide whether it may serve their political purposes better than other accounts.

Thus, to recap, a family-resemblance approach to *WOMAN* has much to recommend it. For it dispenses with the idea of finding fixed or variable sets of features that all women should have to be considered as such. This approach does justice to the existing practice, as well as to the lived experience of trans women, without replacing the existing concept but by merely extending it to these further cases.

It should be stressed that a family resemblance account of *WOMAN* also promotes hermeneutical justice (Fricker 2007). For, as I claimed in previous work (Coliva 2024a), hermeneutical injustice does not arise only when there is a *lack* of conceptual resources in a community due to identity prejudice and power structures that do not allow for new concepts to gain currency thus precluding from personal and collective understanding the experience of some of its members. Rather, it arises also when preclusion from personal and collective understanding of one's experience is brought about by the presence of *faulty* concepts. This is arguably the case with a traditional understanding of *WOMAN* defined as, roughly, *FEMALE HUMAN BEING*. Accordingly, we should re-engineer the concept *HERMENEUTICAL INJUSTICE* thus:

HERMENEUTICAL INJUSTICE =_{df} the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding due to a lack of conceptual resources or to the presence of faulty ones, held in place by structural identity prejudice.

Indeed, it seems to me that on this account of hermeneutical injustice—reconceived as to include not just a lack of conceptual resources but also the presence, in a society, of faulty ones—trans-exclusionary radical feminists are precisely perpetrating a form of hermeneutical injustice against trans women, which I consider antithetical to the principles that have traditionally animated, and should animate, feminism.

Still, one may wonder if extending the concept *WOMAN* to cover these further cases would be enough to promote hermeneutical justice. Surely it would do some good, but there remains a sense in which this extension of the concept should only be seen as a first step towards hermeneutical justice. One might notice that if the inclusion within the class of women of trans women is not accompanied by a change in prototypes and stereotypes associated with that concept, ample avenues for exclusion will remain open. Let me explain.

2. Concepts, Prototypes, Stereotypes and Full Hermeneutical Justice

In very general terms, concepts are abstract entities which subjects need to possess to entertain propositions (whether they are thought of as consisting of concepts, in a Fregean vein, or of objects, in a Russellian one). Concepts determine what falls under them and what doesn't. Thus, they determine when it is correct to predicate a given entity that is an instance of a given concept or not.

Prototypes, in contrast, are focal elements of a given class. For instance, eagles are prototypical elements of the class of birds, whereas penguins aren't. Prototypes are contextually dependent. For if, in a region, there are no eagles, but only crows, say, then the prototypical bird will be a crow rather than an eagle. Still, prototypes aren't concepts, and in fact, penguins are categorized as birds even though they aren't prototypical ones. Similarly, whales are categorized as mammals, even though they are far removed from prototypical ones, such as cows.

Stereotypes are more difficult to characterize. We may say that they are widely held, even though often over simplified, ideas or images associated with members of a class, often due to possibly unwarranted generalizations. For instance, stereotypical birds fly, stereotypical mammals live on the mainland, only fish live in the water, etc. While often useful for quick and dirty categorization purposes, stereotypes may lead to incorrect judgements, such as excluding penguins from the class of birds or whales from the one of mammals to include them within the one of fish. Or, conversely, stereotypes may lead to considering bats as birds, and whales and dolphins as fish, for the former fly and the latter live in the water and swim.

From a theoretical point of view, this teaches us that prototypes and stereotypes, while certainly cognitively relevant, are not identical to concepts. The latter are normative entities that determine when it is correct or incorrect to consider an individual as an element of a class, irrespective of whether it fits the stereotype associated with it or whether it is a prototypical element of the class; whereas the former are mental representations that explain how we operate, *de facto*, from a cognitive point of view, when engaged in certain specific tasks, like quickly recognizing elements

belonging to a certain class or when we must make quick and unreflective choices or inferences. Conversely, when allowed more time, or while being more reflective, subjects who possess the relevant concepts ought to deviate from at least some of their quick and unreflective attributions, inferences and choices. After all, even though we are quicker to recognize a cow as a mammal, we can still reflectively apply that concept to dolphins or whales.

Applied to the case presently under consideration, we may distinguish between the concept *WOMAN*, the prototypical woman and the stereotypes associated with *WOMAN*. Like in the previous cases, we may notice how a woman who deviates from how prototypical women look may not be judged to be one even though she is. Similarly, if it is part of the stereotypes associated with *WOMAN* that one should be able to have children, then not having them may lead to the incorrect judgement that one isn't a woman (or, perhaps, not a 'real' one). Or, conversely, that if one has had them, then one is a woman, even if one does not self-identify as such and may even have transitioned to another sex.

What is interesting and has been notoriously used in psychology by Eleanor Rosch and Mervis (1975) and her lab is the idea that, while there may be prototypical cases of mammal, bird and, as we may add, woman, etc., we can and do extend the corresponding terms also to other cases that may be further removed from the prototypical ones. When tested, subjects would typically show longer reaction times in categorizing these elements that are removed from prototypical instances of the relevant concepts. Thus, there is a perfectly acceptable and testable explanation of why we *cognitively* operate as we do – that is, for instance, by being more hesitant to categorize a trans woman as a woman, if, for instance, some of her perceived bodily characteristics differ from those of prototypical women. Such an explanation clearly shows the relevance to our cognitive performance of prototypical cases, with the attendant difficulty of recognizing new and somewhat different elements as falling under a given concept.

However, as we just saw, concepts, prototypes and stereotypes do not coincide and work at a different level of human cognition. Concepts, which determine the correctness conditions for inclusion within a class, are more reflectively applied, whereas prototypes and stereotypes are unreflectively operative and may lead to incorrect predications that diverge from the correctness conditions determined by the corresponding concepts in the ways we just saw. Thus, simply operating on the concept *WOMAN*, even by making it more inclusive, is not necessarily going to change the prototype and stereotypes associated with it.

Moreover, in everyday interactions, all these aspects are operative, it may still be the case that while one has the right, granted by the more inclusive concept, to be considered a woman, one may still not be perceived as such, and be misgendered, or considered to be less of a woman because one does not fit the prototype and the stereotypes associated with it. Thus, simply operating on the concept *WOMAN*, even by making it more inclusive may still lead to forms of what we might call 'full hermeneutical injustice', which may be defined thus:

FULL HERMENEUTICAL INJUSTICE =_{df} the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding due to a lack of conceptual resources or to the presence of faulty ones, as well as to the presence of prototypes and stereotypes, held in place by structural identity prejudice.

3. Ameliorating Prototypes and Stereotypes in the Service of Full Hermeneutical Justice

Now, while it is true that simply extending the concept *WOMAN* in the way proposed (Section 1) is not enough, by itself, to change the prototype and stereotypes associated with it, it is also important to note that it affords elements for improvement also along those dimensions. Let's see why.

As previously noted, the Wittgensteinian approach is clearly anti-essentialist, if by 'essence' we mean a natural or social essence. For it does not take *WOMAN* to pick out a natural – biological or social – essence that all and only individuals falling under that concept should allegedly share.

There is, however, another aspect that is worth thinking about. For a Wittgensteinian, the meaning of a term and the way in which a concept is identified depend on use. We have seen that for a Wittgensteinian a concept or a predicate can be used to cover new cases that do not share all and only the properties of the elements initially falling under it, or a varying subset of properties presumed to be common to individuals falling under it, without necessarily bringing about a replacement of the relevant concept. Since use 'ain't in the head', let alone in the head of individual speakers, and since, for Wittgenstein, the very idea of a private language is not just false, but altogether incoherent (1953, 244–270), the proposed account of *WOMAN* would count as externalist. What would be quite alien to this kind of externalism is the 'mysterian' aspect of some externalist positions, whereby even the whole community may not know the real meaning of 'woman' or what *WOMAN* refers to. If such a consequence of some externalist positions is acceptable when we are dealing with natural kind terms and concepts, it becomes less and less palatable when social terms and concepts are concerned.

In an interesting passage, Haslanger (2012, 374) writes:

Externalism is an option whenever there are relatively objective types, the notion of objective type needed is not too mysterious. A set of objects is more an objective type by virtue of the degree of unity among its members beyond a random or gerrymandered set. We might account for unity in various ways, but a familiar way, I'll assume for current purposes is in terms of degrees of similarity; the similarity in question need not be a measure of intrinsic similarity, that is, things can be similar by virtue of the relations (perhaps to us) they stand in.

Objective type externalism: terms or concepts pick out an objective type, whether or not we can state conditions for membership in this type, by virtue of the fact that their meaning is determined by ostension of paradigms (or other means of reference fixing) together with an implicit extension to things of the same type as the paradigms.

And then she adds: '[W]e should not assume that objectivity is only found in the natural world. There are objective types in every realm: social, psychological, political, mathematical, artistic, and so on' (Haslanger 2012, 375).

Now, what is interesting in these passages is not only that a Wittgensteinian conception of meaning could count as externalist, but also that, even though family resemblance is not a prototype theory of concepts, there would be members falling into the category that will share more than one feature between them. Those would be, I take it, what Haslanger calls the 'paradigms'. Thus, we typically point to, say, a cow, dog, or cat, when we want to exhibit a paradigmatic case of a mammal, and not to a dolphin or a whale. For, contrary to the latter, the former not only nurse the newborns but also live on the mainland. Similarly, we point to a robin and not a penguin when we want to ostensibly define a bird, since not only does it lay eggs but also flies. Clearly, there is nothing in the Wittgensteinian conception that forbids us from doing that. Paradigms, moreover, are very similar to prototypes, in the sense that they are among the entities falling under a concept we would pick out to ostensibly define the concept.

Yet, both paradigms and prototypes are context-sensitive and can change over time, precisely in virtue of the open-endedness of our concepts as predicted by the family resemblance approach. For instance, the prototypical woman has changed over centuries at our latitudes, depending on numerous factors, including aesthetical canons, migrations, etc., and at different latitudes it is surely different from what counts as one at ours.

If the concept is open-ended, then activism in favor of the inclusion of trans women could take and in fact has taken the shape of having trans women portrayed in fashion magazines' covers, say.¹² The point of this seemingly superficial campaign is to make the statement that, due to the more inclusive concept, this is (also) what women look like. Accordingly, also trans women may be taken to be paradigms instantiating the concept *WOMAN*. And, as we remarked previously, what women look like is an important guide to our quick and unreflective categorizations.¹³ So using them as paradigms, at least in context, may, in time, help change the ways we unreflectively categorize individuals. In fact, we can now see how doing so may

help 'queer the centre', to use Scheman's (1996) apt phrase. That is, inevitably, admitting new and diverse members within the class of women is going to affect also what is paradigmatically considered one.

As to the stereotype, that changes too over time and may differ at different places. For instance, the stereotype associated with *WOMAN* has been, till not long ago, being a housewife and a mother. Yet, such a stereotype has changed (however slowly and not at all places at the same time).

Once again, political activism should work towards having fewer and fewer women in a position of subordination within society. By so doing, also the stereotype associated with *WOMAN* would change. Indeed, I take battles over the use of a more inclusive language, particularly in those languages that mark the gender not just in personal pronouns and adjectives but also in nouns and non-personal adjectives (e.g. Italian, Spanish, French, etc.), to serve the purpose of changing the stereotypes associated with leadership positions and preminent professional roles, so that it is no longer automatic to form the expectation that such roles are or could be (properly) fulfilled only by men.

Similarly, as more trans women are categorized as women and people are exposed to them, the stereotypes associated with *WOMAN* will change too. For instance, this more inclusive categorization might help dismantle the prejudice that women are born to bear children or that they are naturally remissive and unassertive. This is a further way in which we may 'queer the centre'. To my mind, the more inclusive categorization would potentially also benefit those individuals traditionally already included within the class of women by helping dismantle prejudices that unfortunately still come to pass as natural features of being a woman or that are considered to be part and parcel of women's social role.

Finally, in keeping with constructivist approaches, we should deny that the objectivity of the prototype – that is, its being cognitively operative within multiple individuals' minds – corresponds to an essence. For that would give the game away, if by 'essence' we mean a natural essence. Equally, however, we should not reify essences at the social level. There is no social essence, or role (or kind), I believe, corresponding to being a woman, but rather the roles that women can and should play in a society are continuously renegotiated. Feminists have been vocal in advocating for these kinds of changes.¹⁴ Yet, in a sense, this would be strictly speaking impossible, if women were taken to share a social *essence*. For how could an entity change its own essence, if it really had one (see also Saul 2006)?

Hence, we must be careful about what kind of externalism and objectivity we want to traffic with. Once again, it seems that a Wittgensteinian kind of externalism that sees meanings as depending on use, latches onto paradigmatic cases, but also allows for the possibility of change through time of the characteristics of the paradigm, as well as for the inclusion of new members into a given concept, would serve the purposes of feminists much better than thinking that there are social essences corresponding to being a woman – let alone natural ones.

4. Conclusions

I have argued that a family-resemblance approach to *WOMAN*, once correctly understood, is particularly well suited to do justice to the lived experience of trans women. I have claimed that this, by itself, is already an important step forward towards promoting hermeneutical justice. Yet, full hermeneutical justice does not depend only on being correctly included within the class of women. Rather, it also involves being seen and perceived as such, and this is made more difficult by extant prototypes and stereotypes associated with being a woman. After explaining how concepts, prototypes and stereotypes interact, I have pointed at ways in which the inclusivity afforded by a family-resemblance account of *WOMAN* may be put at the service of promoting a change in prototypes and stereotypes and thus be a powerful tool towards achieving *full* hermeneutical justice.

Notes

1. Words in small caps refer to concepts.
2. ‘Trans women’ is used here to include both those people who have transitioned and those who self-identify as such.
3. I will be mostly talking about concepts in this paper, occasionally mentioning meanings. The two terms may, in this context, be taken to be interchangeable.
4. I have added in brackets the alternative translation of ‘übersichtliche Darstellung’ provided in the Schulte-Hacker edition of the *Philosophical Investigations*.
5. See Stoljar (1995, 269) for a discussion of intermediate cases and their bearing on WOMAN.
6. Recall Wittgenstein’s remark (1953, 83) quoted before, ‘and is there not also the case where we play and – make up the rules as we go along? And there is even one where we alter them – as we go along’.
7. Haslanger (2012, 230). The definition is then revised as ‘ought to be subordinated’ (2012, 234).
8. Criteria are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions traditionally understood, but the ‘hooks’ by means of which concepts work, under a family resemblance model, and by means of which concepts can be expanded to cover new and unprecedented cases.
9. A family resemblance approach does not even identify TABLE with the *function* typical tables have. That is, it may well be the case that typical tables have the function of affording surfaces on which we can lay things, but it is not required for every table, or for future ones, to fulfill that function, to count as tables. This is very clear in Wittgenstein’s original example of the concept GAME: some are pastimes and enjoyable, while some others are very serious and not fun – that is, they share no common function.
10. Notoriously, this was Strawson’s (1963) objection to Carnap (1950). A more recent version of this objection, targeting contemporary ameliorative projects, emphasizes how a change of subject produces a discontinuity in inquiry (Cappelen 2018, 101–102; Cappelen and Plunkett 2020, 12–13). For a criticism of this kind of objection, see Belleri (2024).
11. Other examples of political battles to be included within the same category can be gleaned when considering slogans such as ‘adopted children are children’, ‘love is love’, or battles in favor of same-sex marriage, where spouses want to (and should) be considered husband or wife in the same sense as husbands and wives in heterosexual marriages. That is, these properties – being someone’s child, being loved and loving, being married and a husband or a wife – may supervene on different bases, but still count as the same property, at least in most (everyday) contexts.
12. In 2021 *Vogue* U.S. had its first trans cover model: <https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-life-and-style/ariel-nicholson-us-vogues-first-transgender-cover-model-rcna1630>.
13. Similarly, at some point, several women philosophers wore t-shirts with ‘this is what a philosopher looks like’ written on them. The effect of that was to make people sensitive, at once, to the fact that there are indeed also women philosophers and that there is still too much sexism in the discipline.
14. Ritchie (2021) also warns against the perils of re-essentializing women even when the concept would have been re-engineered to pick out a social, rather than a natural kind.

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Annalisa Coliva is Full Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of California, Irvine. She is editor-in-chief of the *Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy*. She is the author (among other books) of *Singular Thoughts: Perceptual-Demonstrative and I-Thoughts* (with E. Sacchi, 2001), *Moore and Wittgenstein: Scepticism, Certainty and Common Sense* (2010), *Extended Rationality: A Hinge Epistemology* (2015), *The Varieties of Self-Knowledge* (2016), *Wittgenstein Rehinged: The Significance of On Certainty for Contemporary Epistemology* (2022), as well as of *Relativism* (with Maria Baghramian, 2020) and *Skepticism* (with Duncan Pritchard, 2022). She has published widely in epistemology, especially on ‘hinge epistemology’ (a term she coined), the history of analytic philosophy (especially G. E. Moore, L. Wittgenstein and S. Stebbing) and in philosophy of mind (first-personal and demonstrative thoughts, concepts, perceptual content, Moore’s paradox and self-knowledge). She is currently working on a monograph on *Social and Applied Hinge Epistemology*, a Cambridge Element on *Wittgenstein and Social Epistemology* and she is editing (with L. Doulas) *Analysis, Common Sense, and Public Philosophy: Themes from the Philosophy of Susan Stebbing*.

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