

# GENDER TROUBLE

BY JUDITH BUTLER

**Paige D.**



## JUDITH BUTLER

- Born February 24, 1956 in Cleveland, Ohio.
- Philosopher & gender theorist.
- Work has influenced political philosophy, ethics, and the fields of third-wave feminist, queer, and literary theory.
- Butler's father was a dentist and her mother was an advocate for fair housing.
- She studied philosophy at Yale University, receiving B.A. (1978), M.A. (1982), and Ph.D. (1984).
- Taught at Wesleyan University, George Washington University, Johns Hopkins University, and the University of California & Berkeley.
- Also an author; Two of her most famous books are *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), and its sequel, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993),

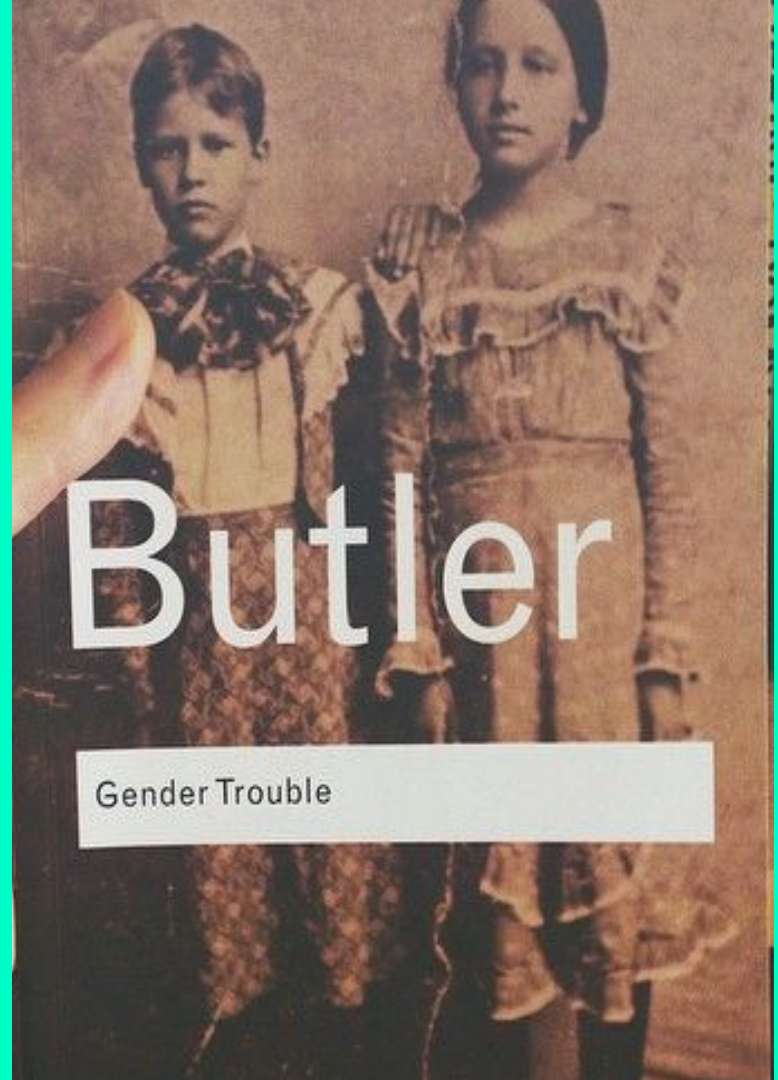


## JUDITH BUTLER (CONT.)

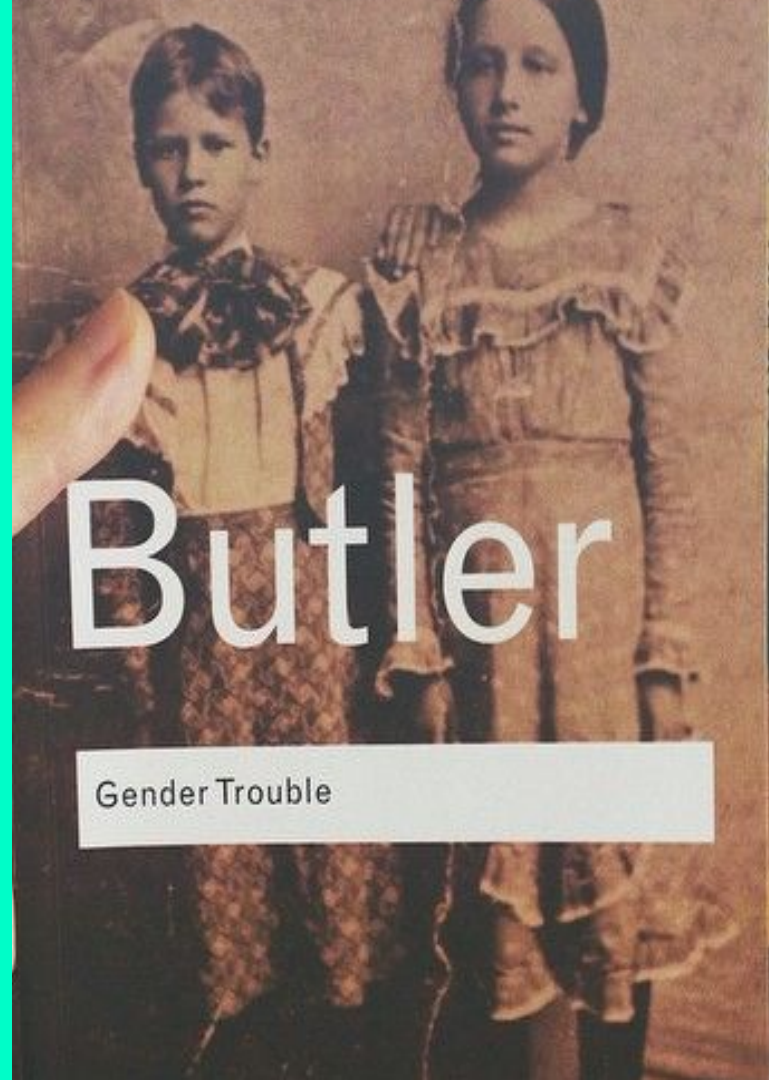
- One of her innovations was to suggest that gender is constituted by action and speech—by behaviour in which gendered traits and dispositions are exhibited or acted out.
- First to explain/use the concept of gender performativity.

GENDER TROUBLE

*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity focuses on issues pertaining to gender identity and feminism. It emphasizes the importance of fluidity in a person's gender and uses the term performativity to describe gender as a performance.*



*In the first chapter, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," Butler calls into question terms and concepts that are generally taken for granted, including the supposed divide between sex and gender, and **women**. She also argues against culturally-constructed binaries that she thinks is a biased way of thinking about the mind and body. The concept **women** is equally tainted because defining it gives rise to the very exclusionary practices feminism claims to reject. The task for feminism is to define and theorize gender and feminist politics without reference to women or the female body.*



For the most part, feminist theory has assumed that there is some existing identity, understood through the category of women, who not only initiates feminist interests and goals within discourse, but constitutes the subject for whom political representation is pursued. But *politics* and *representation* are controversial terms. On the one hand, *representation* serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects; on the other hand, representation is the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women. For feminist theory, the development of a language that fully or adequately represents women has seemed necessary to foster the political visibility of women. This has seemed obviously important considering the pervasive cultural condition in which women's lives were either misrepresented or not represented at all.

*Shows the importance of language and representation of identity. It can be a bad or bad or good thing. It can be revealing or deceiving*

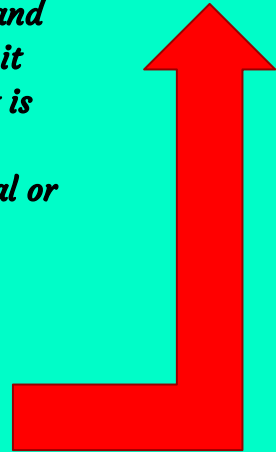


If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of "men" will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that "women" will interpret only female bodies. Further, even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in their mor-

*Here, she breaks the link between gender and sex. This aids to her perception of gender and its construct. "Men" or "Women" do not always necessarily align to the body associated with them.*

Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time. An open coalition, then, will affirm identities that are alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purposes at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure.

*To me, this shows the fluidity and complexity of gender and why it can be seen as performative. It is not definite and can be easily defined, despite whatever social or cultural boundaries are placed.*





After reading this, it reminded of this video. She talks about performativity and what it means for gender to be performative.

She does not think we are born with a specific gender, instead it established through the way we move, talk speak, or even our social roles. Society also has an impact on one's understanding and formation gender.



# QUESTIONS

- *Do you with Judith Butler's claim that gender is a performance?*
- *Why do you think language is very important when it comes to "labeling" or referring to people, especially women?*
- *Who in society sets these standards and understanding of what it is to be a certain gender?*