
Judith Butler

— Julia Shapiro —

Who is Judith Butler?



- American academic with theories of the performative nature of sex and gender
- Theories were influential within Francocentric philosophy, cultural theory, queer theory, and some schools of philosophical feminism from the late 20th century

Butler's books

- Butler's first book, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (1987), was a discussion of the concept of desire
- Her best-known work, *Gender trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), and its sequel, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993), Butler built upon the familiar cultural-theoretic assumption that gender is a social construct
- Butler's *Gender Trouble* was one of the founding texts of queer theory

Butler's main arguments and concerns

- Butler's work continued to inform much debate within the cultural theory, in the United States, in the early 21st century.
- In *Gender Trouble*, Butler questioned the validity of much feminist political theorizing by suggesting that the subject whose oppression those theories attempted to explain- "women" is an exclusionary construct.
- She doubted the wisdom of conventional political activism aimed at protecting women's rights and interests.
- Butler emphasized the subversive destabilization of "women" and other categories through consciously deviant gendered behaviour

Discussion questions

Why is it important to Butler that the personal is political?

What is the relationship between sex and gender? Can there be more than two genders?

What does it mean to "do" gender, that gender is performativity? (And, why is gender not a role?)