

**Contextualizing Gender**  
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**Lecture - 27**  
**Gender Trouble I**

Good morning and welcome dear friends to this module. In the previous modules, we had discussed two important essays of Judith Butler which had led to 'Gender Trouble.' Primary among the contribution of 'Gender Trouble' is Butler's description of gender as performative.

This ground breaking work in gender studies will undergo an extensive study in the next two lectures. We shall look at Butler's revolutionary ideas regarding gender identity and how she developed the concept of gender performativity. In this week, we shall analyse Butler's avantgarde ideas regarding gender identity and the relations between sex and gender.

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*Gender Trouble : Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990)*

- Disrupts the binary view of sex, gender, and sexuality, arguing that gender, rather than being an essential quality following from biological sex, or an inherent identity, is an *act* -- a kind of improvised performance -- which grows out of, reinforces, and is reinforced by, societal norms and creates the illusion of binary sex. Foundational to queer theory.
- The book is divided into three parts:
  1. Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire
  2. Prohibition, Psychoanalysis, and the Production of the Heterosexual Matrix
  3. Subversive Bodily Acts

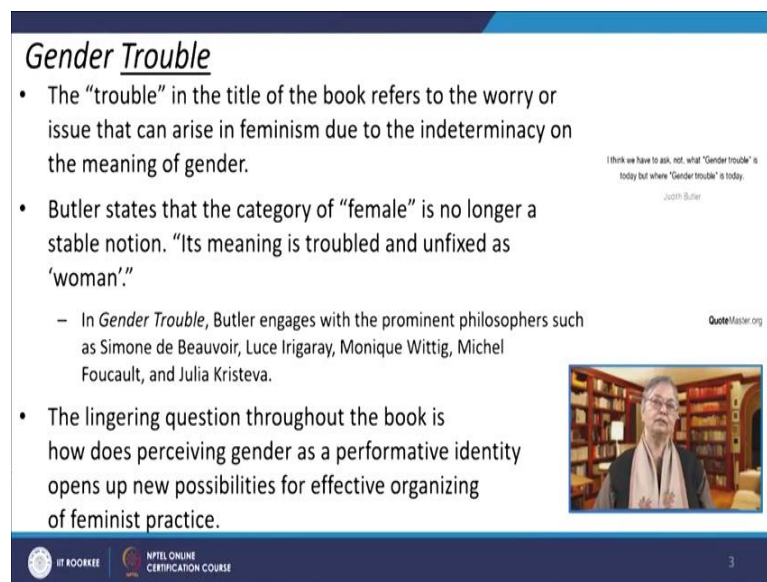
Source: Routledge

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This famous book has disputed the binary view of sex gender and sexuality arguing that gender, rather than being an essential quality following from biological sex or an inherent identity, is an act a kind of improvised performance which grows out of reinforces and is also reinforced by societal norms and creates the illusion of binary sex.

This work is considered to be foundational to queer theory. The book is divided into three parts; first, 'Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire', second, 'Prohibition, Psychoanalysis and the Production of the Heterosexual Matrix' and the third, is 'Subversive Bodily Acts.' This critical work has challenged the feminist movement to introspect the myths and beliefs regarding sexual identity and questions the stability of the category of women.

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Gender Trouble

- The “trouble” in the title of the book refers to the worry or issue that can arise in feminism due to the indeterminacy on the meaning of gender.
- Butler states that the category of “female” is no longer a stable notion. “Its meaning is troubled and unfixed as ‘woman’.”
  - In *Gender Trouble*, Butler engages with the prominent philosophers such as Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Monique Wittig, Michel Foucault, and Julia Kristeva.
- The lingering question throughout the book is how does perceiving gender as a performative identity opens up new possibilities for effective organizing of feminist practice.

I think we have to ask, not, what “Gender trouble” is today but where “Gender trouble” is today.  
- Judith Butler

QuoteMaster.org



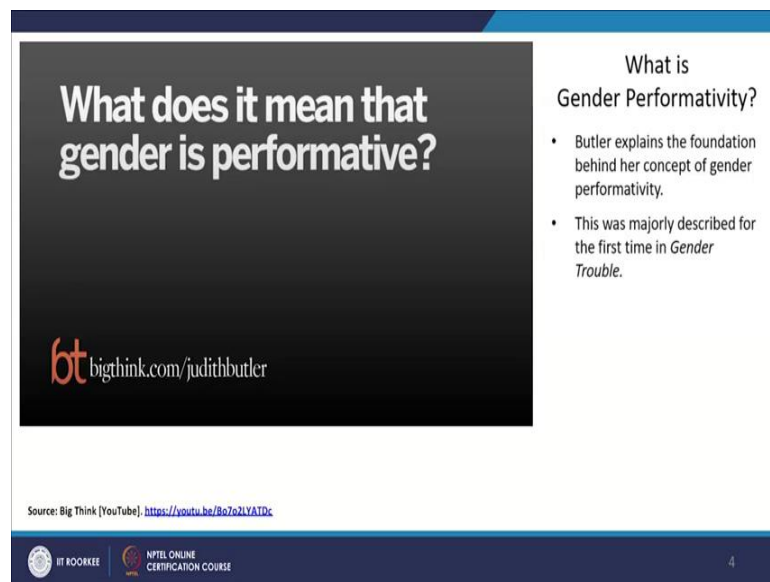
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The ‘trouble’ in the title of this book refers to the worry or issues that can arise in feminism due to the indeterminacy on the meaning of gender. Butler she states that the category of female is no longer a stable notion its meaning is troubled and unfixed as ‘woman’.

Butler engages with prominent philosophers such as Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Monique Wittig Michel, Foucault and Julia Kristeva to further clarify her standpoint. The lingering question throughout the book is how does perceiving gender as a performative identity opens up new possibilities for effective organising of feminist practise.

The meaning of the term gender is troubled by Butler she discredits efforts of feminist movement which attempt to locate one single common identity as foundation for feminist politics such attempts limit a radical inquiry into the political construction and regulation of identity itself.

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What does it mean that gender is performative?

bt bigthink.com/judithbutler

Source: Big Think [YouTube]. <https://youtu.be/Bo7o2LYATDc>

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**What is Gender Performativity?**

- Butler explains the foundation behind her concept of gender performativity.
- This was majorly described for the first time in *Gender Trouble*.

In this video, Butler has explained the foundation behind her concept of gender performativity which was majorly described for the first time in ‘Gender Trouble.’

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big think

Judith Butler

Source: Big Think [YouTube]. <https://youtu.be/Bo7o2LYATDc>

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**What is Gender Performativity?**

- Butler explains the foundation behind her concept of gender performativity.
- This was majorly described for the first time in *Gender Trouble*.

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It’s one thing to say that gender is performed and that’s a little different from saying gender is performative. When we say gender is performed, we usually mean that we have taken on a role, we are acting in some way and that are acting or our role playing is crucial to the gender that we are and the gender that we present to the world.

To say the gender is performative is a little different because for something to be performative means that it produces a series of effects. We act and walk and speak and talk in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman. We act as if that being of a man or that being of a woman is actually an internal reality or something that is simply true about us a fact about us.

Actually, it is a phenomenon that is being produced all the time and reproduced all the time. So, to say gender is performative is to say that nobody really is a gender from the start; I know it is controversial, but that is my claim.

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- In her interview with the YouTube channel 'Big Think', Butler explains the foundation behind her concept of gender performativity.
- This was majorly described for the first time in *Gender Trouble*.
- The performative is not synonymous with a person acting with awareness and stage presence.
- For Butler, gender performance produces a series of effects and the acts that we do to become a male or female being is naturalized as internal in the society.



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In this interview with the YouTube channel 'Big Think', Butler has explained the foundation behind her concept of gender performativity. The performative is not synonymous with a person acting with awareness and stage presence. For Butler gender performance produces a series of effects and the acts that we do to become a male or female being is naturalised as internal in the society.

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### A Feminist Constituency called 'Women'?

- In the first chapter, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," Butler calls into question the terms and concepts that are generally taken for granted, especially the supposed divide between sex and gender.
- She starts with a strong critique of a certain type of feminist practice, which insists on categorization of women:  

"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".  
(p. 3)



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In the first chapter Subjects of 'Sex/Gender/Desire', Butler calls into question the terms and concepts that we generally take for granted especially the supposed divide between sex and gender. She starts with a strong critique of a certain type of feminist practice which insist on categorization of women.

I quote, "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." Unquote. Butler here is arguing against culturally constructed binaries that she has perceived as a holdover from a masculinist society's way of thinking about the body and the mind.


The very subject of woman is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms. Butler points out that her remarks are not an isolation, but something which is quote in the scholarship of many prominent thinkers.

This is why she begins the very chapter with quotations from Beauvoir, Irigaray, Kristeva and several others. For example, Butler has borrowed the words of Irigaray when she says woman does not have a sex or Wittig who has said that the category of sex is the political category that founds society as heterosexual.

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### Women as “the Subject” of Feminism

- Butler questions the viability of a particular subjecthood as the ultimate candidate for representation or liberation.
- In her opinion, the first major ‘trouble’ in this approach is that “the qualifications for being a subject must first be met before representation can be extended.”
- Butler finds that there is very little agreement on what constitutes the category of woman.
- To underscore her remark, Butler cites Foucault’s understanding of how societal powers ‘produce’ subjects. By this analysis, the formation of language and politics that represents women as “the subject” of feminism is itself a discursive formation.



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Butler has questioned the viability of a particular subjecthood as the ultimate candidate for representation or liberation. In her opinion the first major ‘trouble’ in this approach is that the qualifications for being a subject must first be met before representation can be extended. And she finds that there is very little agreement on what constitutes the category of woman. To underscore her remark Butler has cited Foucault’s understanding of how societal powers produce subjects.


By this analysis the formation of language and politics that represents women as the subject of feminism is itself a discursive formation. For Foucault, the notions of power are regulated in negative terms that is through limitation and prohibition. So, the feminist subject is a category constituted discursively by the very political system from which it attempts emancipation.

By defining the limits of subjecthood the domains of political and linguistic representation put a limiting criterion by which subjects are formed. Butler argues that the consequences of this act is that representation is extended to only those who can be perfectly acknowledged as a subject.

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### Universal Patriarchy?

- There is no universal basis - founded upon identity - for feminism; nor is there a singular form of oppression against women.
- Butler believes that the notion of a universal patriarchy has been widely criticized in recent years for its failure to account for the workings of gender oppression in cross-cultural contexts.
- It is less accommodating of non-Western cultures and various forms of oppressions.
- This fictive universal status for patriarchy representing a common subjugated experience only results in newer structures of dominance.



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There is no universal basis founded upon identity for feminism as Butler has said nor is there a singular form of oppression against women. Butler believes that the notion of a universal patriarchy has been widely criticized in recent years for its failure to account for the workings of gender oppression in cross-cultural context. It is less accommodating of non-western cultures and various forms of oppression.

This fictive universal status for patriarchy representing a common subjugated experience only may result in newer structures of dominance. The universal form of theorising in, Butler's opinion, can give rise to efforts which will colonise and appropriate non-Western cultures to support highly Western notions of oppression. It can even construct or side-line a third world or orient where gender oppression is certainly explained as symptomatic of an essential non-Western barbarism.


Butler argues that the exclusionary practises that ground feminist theory in a notion of women is subject undercut the feminist goal of equality. The attempt to make a universal category of women opens itself up to instances of gross misrepresentation. Feminism therefore, must reformulate a representational politics based upon something other than a stable unified subject.

Butler envisions the radical form of feminist politics to contest the reifications of gender body, and identity. To highlight the need for such an approach she has examined the limitations of existing scholarship including structuralism and psychoanalysis.

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### The Radical Splitting of Sex and Gender

- In the section titled “The Compulsory Order of Sex/Gender/Desire”, Butler highlights the construction of a “split” introduced in the feminist subject with a distinction between sex and gender.
- Butler here is questioning the stability of binary sex. She says, “the presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it.” (p. 10)
- She argues that sex is, itself, constructed as a gendered category.



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In the section titled “The Compulsory Order of Sex Gender Desire”, Butler highlights the construction of a split introduced in the feminist subject with a distinction between sex and gender. Butler here is questioning the stability of binary sex by saying that the presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it.

She argues that sex is itself constructed as a gendered category. Butler critically has analysed the common equation of sex with nature and gender with culture. She questions whether this notion of a split is scientific or simply a way to serve social and political interests. She has disagreed with the production of sex as pre-discursive because this precultural domain effectively secures the binary frame for sex and does not uncover the power relations that produce it.

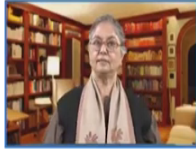
The sex-gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders.



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### Is Gender an Essential Attribute?

- In this section, Butler analyses the question, “What gender are you?”
- Is there “a” gender which persons are said to *have*, or is it an essential attribute that a person is said to *be*?
- Butler suggests that there is a determinism of gender meanings inscribed on anatomically differentiated bodies where those bodies are understood as passive recipients of an unstoppable cultural law. In such cases, not biology, but culture, becomes destiny.
- Butler discusses Beauvoir and Irigaray to debate the fundamental structures by which gender asymmetry is reproduced.



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So, is gender an essential attribute? Butler tries to analyse this question by asking what gender are you? Is there a gender which persons are said to have or is it an essential attribute that a person is said to be? Butler suggests that there is a determinism of gender meanings inscribed on anatomically differentiated bodies where those bodies are understood as passive recipients of an unstoppable cultural law. In such cases not biology, but culture becomes destiny.

Butler has discussed Beauvoir and Irigaray to debate the fundamental structures by which gender asymmetry is reproduced. Butler has suggested that by forcing cultural stereotypes on bodies, the differences between genders are then not biological, instead they are inscribed by social and cultural values.

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### Simone de Beauvoir

- While stating that one 'becomes' a woman, Simone de Beauvoir suggests that there is a degree of agency in the construction of gender. There is also cultural compulsion while *becoming* a woman, but that compulsion does not originate from 'sex' alone.
- Butler argues that "there is nothing in her [Beauvoir's] account that guarantees that the one who becomes a woman is necessarily female" (Butler, 1990, p.12).
- Butler underlines the influence of language in the politics of gender over the sex of the body. Bodies, thus, cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender.
- Similar to how Beauvoir finds body as *situation*, Butler argues that gender is a *signification*.



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Butler has analyzed Simone de Beauvoir's statement that one becomes a woman and in her opinion Beauvoir has suggested that there is a degree of agency in the construction of gender. There is also cultural compulsion while becoming a woman, but that compulsion does not originate from sex alone.


Butler argues that there is nothing in Beauvoir's account that guarantees that the one who becomes a woman is necessarily female. Butler has underlined the influence of language in the politics of gender over the sex of the body. Bodies thus cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender. Similar to how Beauvoir has found body as situation Butler also argues that gender is a signification.

According to Beauvoir, there is a cultural compulsion while becoming a woman and this constraint does not originate from sex alone. Rather this constraint is built into the language which constitutes the imaginable domain of gender and this is what Butler means by the statement that body is a signification. This constraint is built into the language Butler has also reviewed the work of Luce Irigaray in a similar manner.


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**Luce Irigaray**

- Luce Irigaray is a prominent author in contemporary French feminism and Continental philosophy.
- She is an interdisciplinary thinker who works across philosophy, psychoanalysis, and linguistics.
- Irigaray argues that women constitute a paradox within the discourse of identity itself.
- Within a phallogentric language (a language which is pervasively masculine), women constitute the *unrepresentable* – the sex that cannot be thought, a *linguistic absence* because of the masculinist signifying economy.



Luce Irigaray  
Source: University of Sussex



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Luce Irigaray as we know is a prominent author in contemporary French feminism in continental philosophy. She is an interdisciplinary thinker who works across philosophy, psychoanalysis, and linguistics. Irigaray has argued that women constitute a paradox within the discourse of identity itself.

Within a phallogentric language, that is a language which is pervasively and persuasively masculine, women constitute the unrepresentable the sex that cannot be thought are linguistic absence because of the masculinist signifying economy. Irigaray has examined the uses as well as misuses of language in relation to women.

Her goal is to uncover the absence of a female subject position the relegation of all things feminine to nature, matter and ultimately the absence of true sexual difference in Western culture.

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- While women can become subjects if they assimilate to male subjectivity, a separate subject position for women does not exist.
- For Beauvoir, women are the negative of men, the lack against which masculine identity differentiates itself.
- In opposition to Beauvoir, for whom women are designated as the *Other*, Irigaray argues that both 'the subject' and 'the Other' are masculine ways of a closed phallogocentric signifying economy.
- Similar disagreements on the meaning of gender are what led Butler to conclude that there is a need for a radical rethinking of identity categories.



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While women can become subjects if they assimilate to male subjectivity a separate subject position for women does not exist. For Beauvoir, women are the negative of men the lack against which masculine identity differentiates itself. In opposition to Beauvoir for whom women are designated as the other; Irigaray has argued that both the subject and the other are masculine ways of a closed phallogocentric signifying economy.

Similar disagreements on the meanings of gender are what led Butler to conclude that there is a need for a radical rethinking of identity categories. Butler here notes a disagreement between Beauvoir and Irigaray as far as the concept of gender is concerned. When Beauvoir considers gender as a secondary characteristic of people, Irigaray argues that the very notion of the subject is positioned in language which is a masculinist construction.

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### Theorizing the Binary, the Unitary, and Beyond

- Although Butler acknowledges the linguistic aspect of signification clarified by Irigaray; in this chapter, she questions if the masculine signifying economy and oppression suggested by Irigaray is monolithic.
- By globalizing the masculinist oppression, there is an “epistemological imperialism” which fails to acknowledge the cultural operations of gender oppression.
- Butler promotes efforts to determine the true shape of a dialogue which can advance on a “coalition.” This coalition is rooted in multiplicity rather than “unity”.



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Although Butler has acknowledged the linguistic aspect of signification clarified by Irigaray, in this chapter she has questioned if the masculine signifying economy and operations suggested by Irigaray is monolithic.


By globalizing the masculinist oppression there is an epistemological imperialism which fails to acknowledge the cultural operations of gender oppression. Butler promotes efforts to determine the true shape of a dialogue which can advance on a coalition and this coalition is rooted in multiplicity rather than unity.

Butler notes that Irigaray’s effort to identify the enemy as singular in form is a reverse discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor. Instead, Butler calls for the need for a coalition which acknowledges its contradictions and mazes political actions by keeping the conflicts in mind. This kind of a dialogic understanding through coalition entails a better acceptance of divergence and fragmentation which are crucial elements of democratisation.

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### Identity, Sex, and the Substance of Metaphysics

- In this chapter, Butler returns to some of the fundamental questions, like what does one mean by “identity”? Is it the same as “gender identity”? Butler believes that questions around these two terms are not isolated from each other.
- It would be wrong to assume that discussions and debates around these two terms are separate. Because “*persons* only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility” (Butler, 1990, p. 22).
- She says that the regulatory practices of gender formation and division constitute identity.
- Therefore, questions of ‘identity’ cannot precede questions of ‘gender identity’.



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When we look at the concepts of identity, sex and the substance of metaphysics we find that Butler in this chapter has returned to some of the fundamental questions like what does one mean by identity? Is it the same as gender identity? Butler believes that questions around these two terms are not, in fact, isolated from each other.

It would be wrong to assume that discussions and debates around these two terms are separate because persons only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility. She says that the regulatory practices of gender formation and division constitute identity.

Therefore, questions of identity cannot precede questions of gender identity. In other words, Butler explains that we cannot raise questions on the concept of identity without considering the element of gender. This shows the intertwined nature of gender and identity politics.

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- Within a hegemonic language which speaks of the “truths of sex”, ‘sex’ appears as a *substance* or metaphysically a self-identical being.
- “Truths of sex” is a term that Foucault uses ironically, and Butler employs this in *Gender Trouble* to counter the “substance” argument.
- There is a rationalization and reification of a dream symmetry between sex, gender, and desire.
- For Foucault, the substantive grammar of sex imposes an artificial binary relation between the sexes.
- Butler says that gender proves to be *performative* within the discourse of the metaphysics of substance.



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Within a hegemonic language which speaks of the truths of sex, sex appears as a substance or metaphysically a self identical being. “Truths of Sex” is a term that Foucault has used ironically and Butler has employed it in *Gender Trouble* to counter the substance argument.


There is a rationalisation and reification of a dream symmetry between sex, gender and desire. For Foucault, the substantive grammar of sex imposes an artificial binary relation between the sexes whereas, Butler says that gender proves to be performative within the discourse of the metaphysics of substance. This call for truths of sex is accompanied by a heterosexualisation of desire that gender expresses desire or desire reflects gender.

Butler has argued that this is false. Butler has claimed that argument of ontology of substances in the context of gender identity is artificial and essentially superfluous. The concept of performativity ties language to real world actions. Gender is not a mere signifier originating from arguments around internal essence, but gender is one that represents concrete social consequences.

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### Language, Power, and the Strategies of Displacement

- In the final chapter under Part one, Butler analyzes whether or not the destruction of a metaphysics of substance allows for an agent.
- She also questions if the matter of agency is related to language and displacement.
- Butler notes that Monique Wittig's "materialist theories" acknowledge a presence of agency.
- For Wittig, language is an instrument or tool that is in no way misogynist in its structures, but only in its applications. This is in clear opposition to Irigaray's call for phallogocentric erasure.



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In the final chapter under part 1; Butler has analyzed whether or not the destruction of a metaphysics of substance allows for an agent. She also questions if the matter of agency is related to language and displacement. Butler notes that Monique Wittig's materialist theories acknowledge a presence of agency.


For Wittig, language is an instrument or tool that is in no way misogynist in its structures, but only in its applications. This is in clear opposition to Irigaray's called for phallogocentric erasure. Wittig's humanism clearly presupposes that there is a doer behind the deed her theory delineates the performative construction of gender within the material practices of culture.

She is attuned to the power of language to subordinate and exclude women. As a materialist, however, she considers language to be another order of materiality. On the other hand, for Irigaray the possibility of another language or signifying economy is the only chance at escaping the mark of gender.



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- Butler discusses how to rethink subversive possibilities for sexuality and identity within the terms of power.
- She finds that compulsory heterosexuality and phallogocentric imposition are augmented through repetition.
- If repetition is bound to persist as the mechanism of the cultural reproduction of identities, then subversive repetitions are also possible.
- She revisits Beauvoir and says that the phrase '*becomes*' a woman suggests that '*woman*' itself is a term in process –  
"a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end" (p. 43).



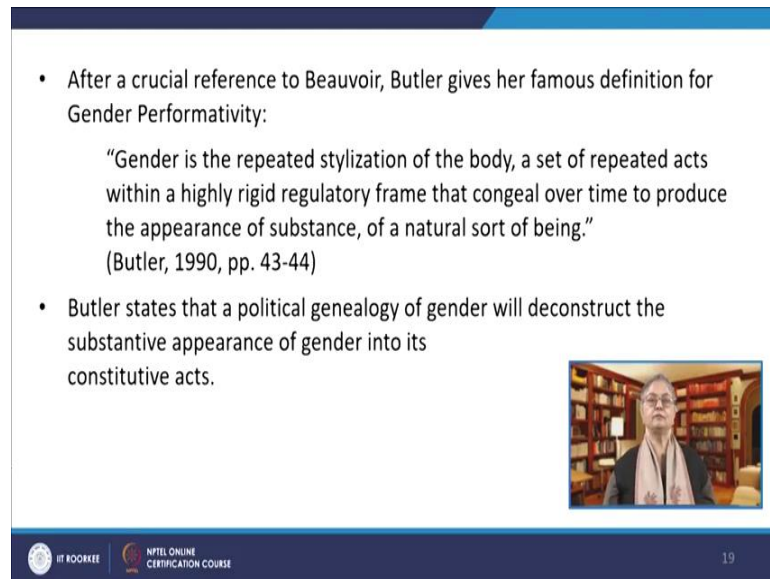
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Butler discusses how to rethink subversive possibilities for sexuality and identity within the terms of power. She finds that compulsory heterosexuality and phallogocentric imposition are augmented through repetition.

If repetition is bound to persist as the mechanism of the cultural reproduction of identities, then subversive repetitions are also possible. She revisits Beauvoir and says that the phrase "becomes a woman" suggests that "woman itself is a term in process a becoming a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end."

Beauvoir's phrase becomes a woman then is aligned with Butler's idea of gender performativity, showing the indefinite nature of gender that it is a continuous action rather than an internal or essential feature by birth. Butler believes that subversive repetitions are also possible if repetition is bound to persist as the mechanism of cultural reproduction of identities.


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• After a crucial reference to Beauvoir, Butler gives her famous definition for Gender Performativity:

“Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.”  
(Butler, 1990, pp. 43-44)

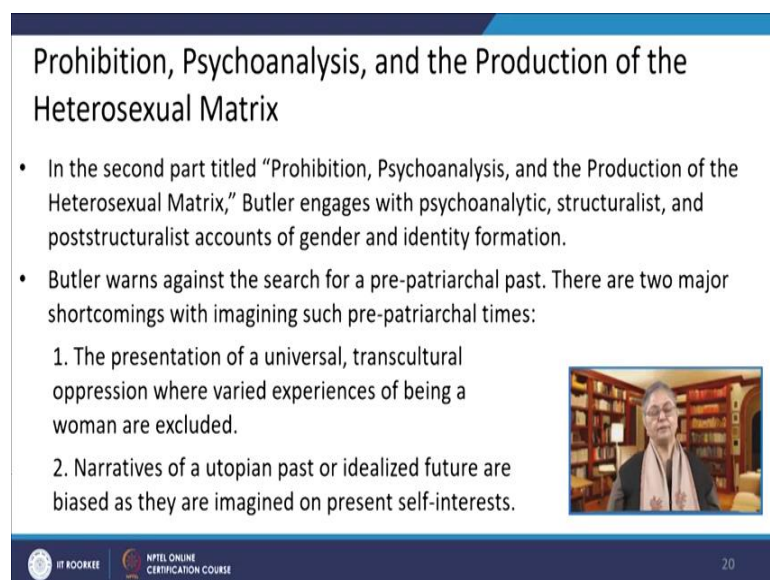
• Butler states that a political genealogy of gender will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts.



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After a crucial reference to Beauvoir, Butler gives her famous definition for gender performativity quoted below, that “gender is the repeated stylization of the body. A set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance of a natural sort of being.” Butler states that a political genealogy of gender will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts. With this definition, Butler is calling for locating the compulsory frames set by various forces of power that police the social appearance of the acts of gender.

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### Prohibition, Psychoanalysis, and the Production of the Heterosexual Matrix

• In the second part titled “Prohibition, Psychoanalysis, and the Production of the Heterosexual Matrix,” Butler engages with psychoanalytic, structuralist, and poststructuralist accounts of gender and identity formation.

• Butler warns against the search for a pre-patriarchal past. There are two major shortcomings with imagining such pre-patriarchal times:

1. The presentation of a universal, transcultural oppression where varied experiences of being a woman are excluded.
2. Narratives of a utopian past or idealized future are biased as they are imagined on present self-interests.



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In the second part titled ‘Prohibition Psychoanalysis and the Production of the Heterosexual Matrix,’ Butler engages with psychoanalytic structuralist and poststructuralist accounts of gender and identity formation. Butler warns against the search for a pre-patriarchal past and it is a very significant aspect of a theory. There are two major shortcomings with imagining such pre-patriarchal times.

First, the presentation of a universal transcultural operation where varied experiences of being a woman are excluded. Secondly, narratives of a utopian past or idealized future are biased as they are imagined on the basis of present self interests. Feminists has often searched for origin stories to combat the argument that patriarchy is an inevitable and natural state of affairs. According to Butler this is only a myth. Butler has called it a myth because this line of inquiry has been made by socialist feminists who have taken a structuralist approach to analyze. Butler has now taken a closer look at structuralism and has reviewed the work of the famous structural anthropologist Claude Levi-Strass.


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### On Levi Strauss and Structuralism

- Structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss drew a distinction between nature and culture, holding that culture is a separate force that acts on nature.
- This relationship has been transferred by some theorists to define a similar distinction between sex and gender.
- Lévi-Strauss held that all human society arises from a central Law which he called universal kinship or the law of the father.
- Butler is considered a post-structuralist, and her analysis in *Gender Trouble* critiques many concepts of structuralism.



Claude Lévi-Strauss  
Source: Firstpost.com



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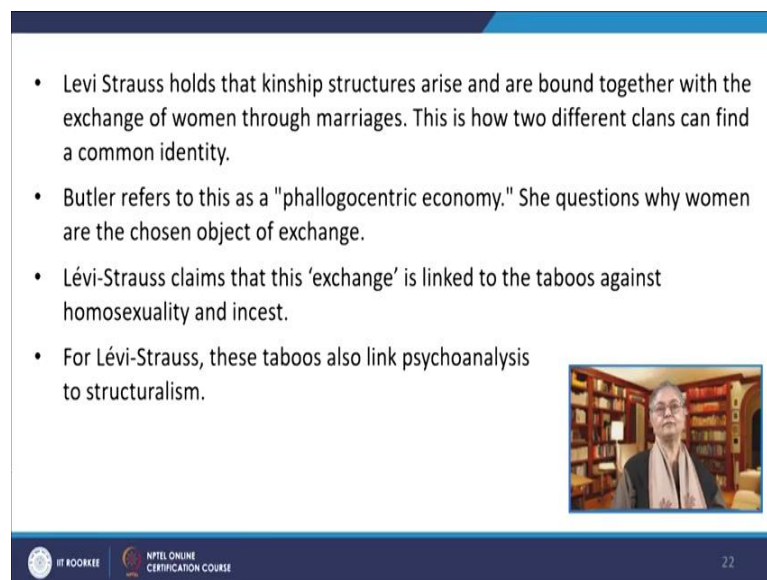
Claude Levi-Strauss has drawn a distinction between nature and culture and held the opinion that culture is a separate force that acts on nature. This relationship has been transferred by some theorists to define a similar distinction between sex and gender. Levi-Strauss held that all human society arises from his central law which he called ‘universal kinship’ or the law of the father.

Butler is considered a poststructuralist and her analysis in Gender Trouble critiques many concepts of structuralism. Claude-Lévi Strauss was one of the founders of structuralism which is a way of conducting analysis within the social sciences and it has also been applied to linguistics, philosophy as well as to some other disciplines.

Structuralism analyses entities in terms of structures and their component forms. The meaning of each part in the structure and of the structure as a whole arises from the formal relationships of these parts. In literacy theory, structuralism challenged the belief that a work of literature reflected a given reality. Instead, a text was constituted of linguistic conventions and situated among other texts.

Structuralism regarded language as a closed and stable system, but by the late 1960s it had given way to poststructuralism.

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- Lévi Strauss holds that kinship structures arise and are bound together with the exchange of women through marriages. This is how two different clans can find a common identity.
- Butler refers to this as a "phallogocentric economy." She questions why women are the chosen object of exchange.
- Lévi-Strauss claims that this 'exchange' is linked to the taboos against homosexuality and incest.
- For Lévi-Strauss, these taboos also link psychoanalysis to structuralism.


Lévi-Strauss held that kinship structures arise and are bound together with the exchange of women through marriages. And this is how two different clans can find a common identity. Butler refers to this as a phallogocentric economy. She questions why women are the chosen object of exchange. Lévi-Strauss claims that this exchange is linked to the taboos against homosexuality and incest. For Lévi-Strauss these taboos also link psychoanalysis to structuralism.

Levi-Strauss suggests that unacceptable homoerotic desire between men is subverted into the acceptable heterosexual exchange of women. The bonds between men are solidified without violating these taboos. As a poststructuralist, Butler moves towards Jacques Lacan, Lacan who is sometimes termed as the most controversial psychoanalyst since Freud.


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### Lacan and the Strategies of Masquerade

- Psychoanalyst and philosopher Jacques Lacan further developed Lévi-Strauss's ideas by connecting the sexual taboo to language.
- Lacan posited that culture is identical to language. He used the term "the Symbolic" to denote the linguistic structures that make up culture. In harnessing speech, the subject comes into being.
- In Lacan's narrative, being and gender differentiation arise within the realm of the Symbolic in accordance with the structuralist law of universal kinship and through the medium of language.
- According to Lacan, the essential female position is one of lack or absence. The Phallus is the constellation of symbolic concepts that initiates this process.



Jacques Lacan  
Source: University of Nottingham



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Psychoanalyst and philosopher Jacques Lacan had developed further the ideas of Levi-Strauss by connecting the sexual taboo to language. He had posited that culture is identical to language and had used the term the 'Symbolic' to denote the linguistic structures that make up culture.


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According to Lacan, the essential female position is one of a lack or absence. The Phallus is the constellation of symbolic concepts that initiates this process. Butler notes that in Lacan women are both literally as well as symbolically the sight of heterosexual male desire. The term 'masquerade' in this context refers to the masking or covering of something to create the appearance of another thing.


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### Lacan and Joan Riviere

- Lacan claims this arrangement forces women to undertake the practice of masquerade, "the effect of a melancholy that is essential to the feminine position."
- Butler counters this "melancholy argument" by referring to Joan Riviere (1883–1962), a British psychoanalyst, who also explored the concept of masquerade in her essay "Womanliness as a Masquerade" (1929).
- Riviere argues that women sustain masculine identifications not to occupy a position in a sexual exchange, but to pursue a rivalry that has no sexual object.



Joan Riviere  
Source: Institute of Psychoanalysis



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Lacan claims that this arrangement forces women to undertake the practice of masquerade, the effect of a melancholy that is essential to the feminine position. Butler has countered this melancholy argument and has referred to Joan Riviere to support her arguments. Joan Riviere is a British psychoanalyst who had also explored the concept of masquerade in her essay titled as “Womanliness as a Masquerade” which was published in 1929.

Riviere had argued that women sustain masculine identifications not to occupy a position in a sexual exchange, but to pursue a rivalry that has no sexual object. Riviere greatly differed from Lacan on the concept of masquerade. By showing how Riviere calls into question these naturalised typologies through an appeal to a psychoanalytic account, Butler had argued that masquerade can be read as a performative denial of a constructed masculinist notion of feminine desire. Butler thus logically counters and demolishes previously held theories.


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### Freud and the Melancholia of Gender

- In this section, Butler explores the narrative of gender and character formation posited by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), the Austrian neurologist who founded psychoanalysis.
- For Freud, a mechanism called "melancholia" is responsible for character and gender formation.
- Melancholia is a response to the loss of a beloved. Through acts of imitation, the ego preserves itself through identification with the lost beloved.
- Gender identity arises through the mechanism of melancholia as a result of the incest taboo, which prohibits the fulfillment of the desire generated within the Oedipal complex.



Sigmund Freud  
Source: Live Science



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Butler has also explored the narrative of gender and character formation posited by Sigmund Freud. For Freud, a mechanism called ‘melancholia’ is responsible for character and gender formation. Melancholia is a response to the loss of a beloved. Through acts of imitation the ego preserves itself through identification with the lost beloved.

Gender identity arises through the mechanism of melancholia as a result of the incest taboo which prohibits the fulfilment of the desire generated within the Oedipal complex. According to Freud, the incest taboo creates the inevitable loss of the desired parent whether mother or father. The ego might identify with its lost parent and thus takes on the gender characteristics of that parent.

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- The process, which Freud calls "gender consolidation," may produce "primary dispositions" towards either masculinity or femininity, as well as heterosexuality or homosexuality, in both male and female psyche.
- Butler challenges this idea of "primary dispositions."
- Freud's narrative of identity formation claims the existence of a pre-discursive, inherent, natural gender disposition.
- Butler's deconstruction of the heterosexual matrix found in Freud and other psychoanalysts is crucial in exposing the oppression of the feminine, the homosexual, and all identities that do not fall within its prescribed configurations of sex, gender, and desire.



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The process which has been termed as gender consolidation by Freud may produce primary dispositions towards either masculinity or femininity as well as heterosexuality or homosexuality in both male as well as female psyche. Butler has challenged this idea of primary dispositions. Freud narrative of identity formation claims the existence of a pre discursive, inherent, natural gender disposition.

Butler's deconstruction of the heterosexual metrics found in Freud and other psychoanalysts is crucial in exposing the operation of the feminine, the homosexual in all identities that do not fall within its prescribed configurations of sex, gender and desire. For Freud, normal gender consolidation occurs when heterosexuality results from melancholia.


In this case the taboos have been fully internalized. When this loss is incompletely resolved because of the taboos not being fully internalized, homosexuality is the result. Butler's critique demonstrates that this claim is unfounded.



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**Conclusion**

- In the first part of *Gender Trouble*, Butler looks at various approaches towards Gender such as Structuralism by Levi-Strauss and Psychoanalysis by Freud and Lacan.
- She finds that theories born out of discursive elements cannot account for complex and subversive performances found in non-heterosexual identities.
- By undertaking a historical study of gender theories, she replicates a style similar to that of Foucault's attempts at tracing genealogies.
- Butler concludes that one has to acknowledge the "play of appearances", which are fluid and dynamic in nature.



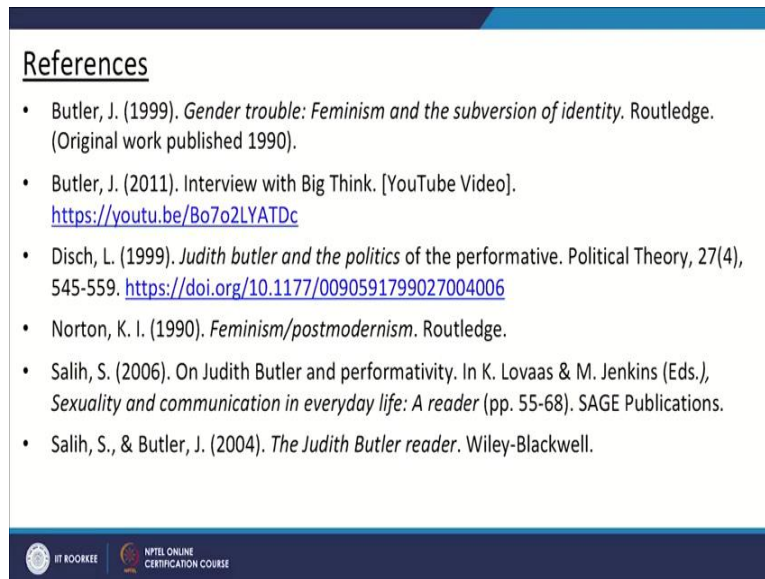
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In the first part of 'Gender Trouble', Butler has looked at various approaches towards gender such as structuralism by Levi-Strauss and psychoanalysis by Freud and Lacan. She finds that theories born out of discursive elements cannot account for complex and subversive performances found in non-heterosexual identities.

By undertaking a historical study of gender theories, she replicates his style similar to that of Foucault's attempts at tracing genealogies. Butler concludes that one has to acknowledge the 'play' of appearances which are fluid and dynamic in nature. In the coming module, we shall look at how Butler has attempted to decode the discourse of gender in a poststructuralist fashion.

The final part of 'Gender Trouble' deals with the concept of subversion and parody in addition to engaging with philosophers like Julia Kristeva and Michel Foucault.

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Thank you.