

BOOK REVIEW

Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity By Judith Butler

Author: Judith Butler

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By

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Judith Butler's idea in "Gender trouble" is radical regarding gender identity and the relation between gender and sex where she introduced gender as performance. Butler's claim in Gender trouble was based on two arguments that maintained one as epistemological in an academic literature and other as normative in societal morals.

Butler collected the thoughts of the 20th century feminists on their gender-sex division as a means of a difference in cultural expression of gender and biological fact of sex to struggle with the assumed biological determinants of science. Gender was associated with social construction and sex with biological innate. The gender-sex division was important for feminists because of their identity as a woman, and they made a distinction between sex and gender. They accepted the fact that certain bodily difference exist between women and men, but they pointed out most of the norms that determine the behaviors of men and women, in fact, social gender construction have little or nothing to do with our bodily sexes.

Butler criticized this theoretical division because it confined the feminists with the universal category of woman through their identity politics by attempting to change the class of woman in society. Basically, she criticized the unitary idea of gendered "woman" which she argued that there is no real meaning of gender and sex. She explained that there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender. Gender is a repeated stylization of the body, produced within a rigid frame of a set of repeated acts. Gender identity is just performance, and that is constituted by the everyday expressions of speech, utterance, gestures, dress codes and representations.

She described the gender essentialism as "intelligible gender" which is a socially coherent expression of gender performance. In her words "intelligible gender are

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those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practices and the desire". She said that all expressions of gender are not fundamental in nature but just repetition of habitual acts and behaviors which create compelling illusions of gender through language construction. She argued that the compelling illusion of gender is a result of a body of power structures of a heterosexist society which create heterosexual matrix in which sex and gender are categorized. In reality there is no essence of sex or gender but only the norms, categories and words with which we describe them.

Butler claimed that the universal category of woman is subject of feminist political identity, but before that it has normative or ethical association. All feminist discourse described the universal category of woman as a subject of oppression and emancipation. They focused on unitary, exclusionary and hegemonic idea of a woman at the expense of alternative gender expression. They believe that these hegemonic ideas are exclusionary, marginalize, confirmative and oppressive.

She believed that these concepts prescribe a socially recognized coherent form of gender expression, and it excludes incoherent gender expression (homosexuality). She described all essentialist concepts of sex and gender, a form of the heterosexist oppression because heterosexuality is a norm in society and people are judged on the basis on their sexual identity.

Butler said gender is not a reasonable alternative because different gender expressions did not destabilize the socially coherent, culturally construction of sex and gender.

Butler proposed to encourage a continual expression of incoherent gender expression, and she hoped that these expressions will change all socially constructed concepts of sex and gender and eventually make these concepts unintelligible and inexpressible.