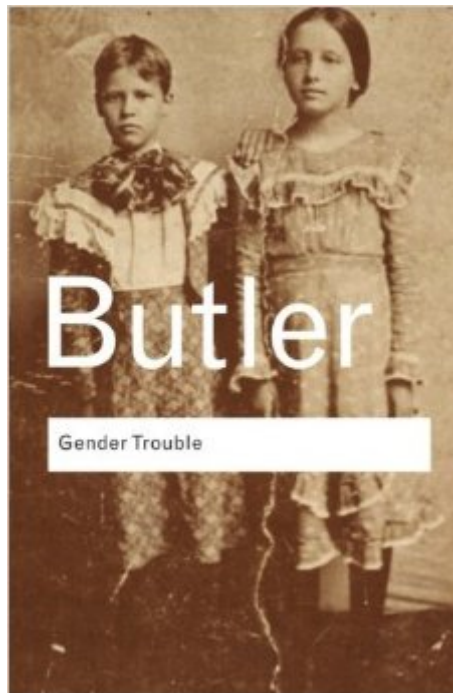


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# Gender Trouble: Feminism And The Subversion Of Identity (Routledge Classics)



## Synopsis

One of the most talked-about scholarly works of the past fifty years, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* is as celebrated as it is controversial. Arguing that traditional feminism is wrong to look to a natural, 'essential' notion of the female, or indeed of sex or gender, Butler starts by questioning the category 'woman' and continues in this vein with examinations of 'the masculine' and 'the feminine'. Best known however, but also most often misinterpreted, is Butler's concept of gender as a reiterated social performance rather than the expression of a prior reality. Thrilling and provocative, few other academic works have roused passions to the same extent.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Of course Butler's books on gender are breathtaking classics and receive 5 stars from me in their print editions. I assign them all the time in my Gender Studies class. But this Kindle edition is messy. This is the problem I keep finding with the Kindle editions. It's insulting of to assume that Kindle readers don't care about clean editing and formatting. As a PhD student in Literature I am looking for a better tool for amassing my huge reading list. Students in every field would be ecstatic with a Kindle that actually served our needs. I also think Kindle is underestimating the common reader who also appreciates careful editing and presentation. We need to know more information about the Kindle editions--i.e. who edits and Introduces the volumes and whether they are exact replicas of their print editions. We also need to be able to cite actual page numbers from known editions for quotes, essays, papers and dissertations. I hope Kindle fixes this in the next generation. At the moment I'm making due with the messiness because of the convenience of carrying 300

volumes in one light device. But I'd be out shouting Kindle's praises in the streets (and to the classrooms full of college undergrads I teach) if Kindle would just pay attention to these few details. The search tool can be so helpful as to be heavenly. The dictionary tool should be expanded to include philosophical and theoretical terms also! Come on Kindle!

I'm no expert but I'm reminded of what a friend once confessed to me: it's hard talking about gender without it turning into a freak show. To her credit, Judith Butler speaks sincerely, with great subtlety, about a very touchy subject. Nevertheless, when you consider that words like "sex," "heterosexual," and "homosexual" are hardly a century old, you have to ask why do they seem so certain, so meaningful, so permanent and timeless? Why is it so hard to consider these words as concealing rather than revealing? In the tradition of Marx and Foucault, Butler begins to demystify their credibility and reveals how gender is something which is 'performative'. By this, she does not mean like a role which is donned (though those who don reveal) but rather as a repetitive, cultural activity from which identity is derived. This work is thought to be the beginning of 'queer theory.'

Though I agree with what others have written of Butler's prose, I think her approach to the ubiquitous "nature versus nurture" question of gender is an important one (politically, socially, culturally, psychologically...) At times her rhetoric is questionable & her ideas somewhat biased (to the point of bordering on... well, less than practical). However, that should not, by any means, dissuade anyone from reading her work. Despite the difficulties it might present, "Gender Trouble" is challenging, thoughtful and thought-provoking-- an enlightening experience for anyone willing to put forth some effort.

Readers who are willing to tolerate labyrinthine sentences and brain-cramping scholarly vocabulary and who already have a working understanding of Freud, Lacan, Foucault, and deconstruction will find in Butler a challenging, highly stimulating theorist of sex, gender, and sexuality. Readers looking for a breezy and accessible discussion of gender roles in modern society should definitely look elsewhere.

This is a densely written but repeatedly rewarding study of the constructions of gender and sex as they relate to women, lesbians and gay men, and, to follow the logic of Butler's argument, all of us. This work shows not only the relativity of our cultural understanding of femininity but also the limits of our scientific understanding of female-ness. For feminists, Butler's book offers a much-needed

examination of what exactly the female subject is and how woman is defined in (or by) our particular culture. Butler goes far beyond Foucault in examining sexuality as socially constructed and, in the process, offers valuable insights to (and critiques of) the writing and thinking of Beauvoir, Kristeva, Lacan, and Wittig. The book's one flaw is a turgid, sometimes redundant prose (i.e. phrases like "judicial law" and "'he' [sic]") all too common in technical and philosophical writing, especially, alas, of the postmodernist variety. But once the reader survives the first quarter of the book, he [sic] will find Butler's observations not only accessible but fascinating and, for whatever it's worth, socially important.

Most of the existing reviews give a good idea of how this book has come across to readers. I decided to create a review because I had a couple of points to add. The first is a reiteration - Butler's prose is, in places, exceedingly difficult to read without a lot of former practice in reading feminism, philosophy, linguistics, and literary criticism. This is the main reason for loss of one star. She makes such wonderful deconstructive arguments showing how categories of not only gender but sex itself are constructed. Having said that, even if you only pick up about 50% of the meaning, the rephrasing and recouching of multiple ideas from different standpoints conveys the basic ideas the author wishes to convey. The second point is that one may be left wanting more. As Butler says in her updated preface (1999 - the original was 1990) - if she were writing this book today she would also include a discussion of transgender and intersexuality and surgical intervention. I believe such a discussion would bring a valuable contribution to feminism, as feminism brings so much to any consideration of transgender and intersex issues.

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