

■ A Critique of Sources for the Notion of Sex and Gender in Judith Butler's Early Work

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Abstract

This paper focuses on Judith Butler's critical relationships with three French thinkers before and during the time of writing *Gender Trouble*: Simone de Beauvoir, Monique Wittig, and Michael Foucault. I propose that Butler has thoughtfully built the foundation for her own theory of sex and gender by appropriating, assimilating, and challenging Beauvoir, Wittig, and Foucault. In addition to scrutinizing how Butler incorporates and disputes with each of these three thinkers, I will also point out what I believe to be her critical contradictions or oversights. Interestingly, even while Butler openly acknowledges that *Gender Trouble* is rooted in French theory, a large portion of French society who opposed gay marriage during unprecedented demonstrations in 2012 and 2013, have targeted Butler as an "invader" and "terrorist," armed with gender conspiracies and a "gender ideology." Even though concepts of sex and gender are viewed differently today from how they were understood in the past, I believe Butler's ideas and her theory of sex and gender are still relevant in this age of the Internet, when one's sexual and gender identities can be a matter of choice and where a diverse spectrum of gender identities have increasingly emerged in real life.

Keywords: Judith Butler, Simone de Beauvoir, Monique Wittig, Foucault, sex, gender

Introduction

What is sex? What is gender? In this age of the Internet, when one's sexual and gender identities can be a matter of choice (for example, there exist 50 options for gender identity provided by Facebook), have we not evolved into something new? Do we still need to trouble ourselves with matters of sex and gender in the way that Judith Butler urged us to do in *Gender Trouble*, a groundbreaking book first published in 1990? To be sure, during this time period, there have been more substantive changes concerning the concepts of sex and gender than those associated with simply clicking some on-line options or hiding behind some game identities. For example, even though homophobia is still prevalent around the world, more and more celebrities, important people, and even political leaders have chosen to "come out" to the public and confront the media in order to change these traditional attitudes about "homosexuality."¹ In addition, while many countries around the world—especially in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia—still ban or disapprove of same-sex marriage, the number of countries which have legalized same-sex marriage has grown continuously from 2001.² According to "Human Rights Campaign," the former US President Obama "has proven to be the most pro-LGBT President in history," who in 2014 even signed an "Executive Order," banning discrimination against LGBT employees of federal contractors and federal workers in the US.³ Likewise, in March 2016, Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull attended the 38th Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade to show his support for members of the group.⁴

During these same years, more sex and gender-related words have emerged: the intersex, the third gender, genderqueer, or genderfluid, to name just a few.⁵ LGBT (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender) is evidently not an abstract term because the American Psychological Association provides guidelines, supportive

¹ Note that early in 1974 the term homosexuality was removed from the American Psychiatric Association's DSM-II (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders). In 1980, American Psychiatric Association used gender identity disorder (GID) in DSM-III.

² The majority of countries in North and South America have legalized same-sex marriage. In Europe, 14 countries have given the entire lawful rights and protections to same-sex married couples. Some other countries have given partial or certain legal rights to same-sex married couples. South Africa is the first and only African country to legalize same-sex marriage. Taiwan is most likely going to be the first country to do so in Asia.

³ See "President Obama's Historical LGBT Record."

⁴ See Joseph Patrick McCormick's "Malcolm Turnbull First Australian Prime Minister to Attend Mardi Gras."

⁵ According to American Psychiatric Association's 2013 DSM-5, gender dysphoria (formerly called gender identity disorder), is, like homosexuality, not a mental and psychiatric illness.

literature, and resources for LGBT people.⁶ In addition, LGBT is a category not only restricted to the US; LGBT organizations, groups, and communities around the world are recognized and growing in number. While LGBT can be expanded to LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex), LGBTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer/Questioning), and other forms of LGBT+, for many people LGBT has become an umbrella term to include all non-binary and non-cisgender people.

LGBT is an acronym not only understood and used as a category on its own websites or media (an organization named GLAAD is perhaps the best example); it is also an accepted term in most news agencies, especially ones that promote the visibility of issues surrounding the LGBT communities. One case, for example, is the London Underground, TfL (Transport for London). This agency recently announced that in order to reflect “the great diversity of London,” the customary greeting to the passengers, “ladies and gentlemen,” is soon to be replaced by more “gender-neutral” and fully “inclusive” phrases such as “Good morning everyone” or “Hello everyone.” According to a recent statement on the BBC, London Mayor Sadiq Khan showed great public concern and understanding about gender diversity. He stated, “I am aware that some customers may not relate to or feel comfortable with the way that certain station announcements are made. I am keen that TfL addresses these concerns by speaking in a more neutral way when referring to gender.”⁷ The BBC also reported that the LGBT campaign group called Stonewall responded to the change in this way: “Language is extremely important to the lesbian, gay, bi and trans community, and the way we use it can help ensure all people feel included.” Along with the BBC, other news agencies around the world have also highlighted this news. Bernard Reed, a trustee of the Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIRES), told the London Evening Standard: “People have a broad spectrum of gender identities, which could be as a man or as a woman, or in between those identities, or as non-gender. These diverse identities are increasingly recognised and respected within society.”⁸

In addition to becoming biologically more neutral and diverse, one's sex/gender can now also be determined some time after one's birth. This year for the first time ever, anywhere in the world, a Canadian baby named Searyl Atli was given a registered birth card which did not indicate sex or gender.⁹ *The Guardian*

⁶ See APA's “LGBT Resources and Publications.”

⁷ See “Tube to Change ‘Ladies and Gentlemen’ Announcements.”

⁸ According to *The Australian*: “The change was made after months of campaigning by LGBT groups for a change in the ‘outdated’ language used by train and bus staffs.”

⁹ According to CNN, without the registration of male or female, Searyl Atli has been issued a health card with the sex listed as “U.” Many identified the “U” as “unspecified or unknown” or “undisclosed or unidentified.”

announced the baby's birth this way: "A child without a gender challenges our preconceptions about sex." Similarly, CNN wrote this: "Canadian baby given health card without sex designation." New York Time's headline was this: "Canadian baby issued government health document that does not list a gender." These three headlines indicate that in our present age sex and gender may be considered one and the same; moreover, Searyl Atli's case, in particular, also seems to suggest a coming revolution with regard to how we think about this issue. *The Guardian* noted that Atli's parents, in spite of great difficulties with the pregnancy, were supported by "Gender Free I.D. Coalition" and were not the only applicants who wanted "to remove all gender/sex designations from identity documents." Atli probably will not be the only case of its kind to be "outside the medical system."¹⁰

In January this year (2017), *National Geographic* magazine issued "a special, single-topic issue on the shifting landscape of gender: *Gender Revolution*."¹¹ The following month, National Geographic channel broadcast a 90-minute documentary: *Gender Revolution: A Journey with Katie Couric*. By talking about gender issues with experts, as well as through "intimate conversations with transgender and gender non-conforming people and their families," Couric intended to show "how gender identity is defined, formed, and influenced by science, society, and self."¹² Though claiming to be "educational and enlightening," *Gender Revolution* has disappointed not a few. For example, Barbara J. Risman, a sociology professor at Illinois University, thinks the film is less about "a gender revolution" and more "about acknowledging the wide range of gender identities that exist in today's society." Risman adds that many people dislike the documentary because it's too revolutionary for them, noting that "within weeks of its debut, Trump's Office of Civil Rights has rolled back federal support for the legal protections of transgender youth in schools."¹³

Whether disappointing or outrageous, *Gender Revolution* is accurate in stating this: "To a degree unimaginable a decade ago, the intensely personal subject of gender identity has entered the public square." The interview with Gavin Grimm, a young transgender who has been fighting for his civil right to use the school's bathroom, shows how Grimm remains calm and assertive throughout his ordeal, from his schoolboard meeting all the way to the Supreme Court. A conversation between Hari Nef, a successful transgender model, actress, and activist, and Renee

¹⁰ See Zamira Rahim's "Canadian Baby Given Health Card without Sex Designation."

¹¹ See "National Geographic Magazine, January 2017."

¹² See Alex Schmider's "Learn About Gender with Katie Couric in National Geographic doc 'Gender Revolution.'"

¹³ Risman thinks the films should include some attention to the social construction of gender and also to how gender inequality is embedded in social organization beyond individual identities.

Richards, a former tennis player who took male-to-female sex reassignment surgery in 1975, also shows us a sharp generation gap between the youthful Nef and the middle-aged Richards. While Richards still believes in the binary categories of sex and gender, Nef considers gender as a fetish, wanting a gender free future. The generation gap notwithstanding, *Gender Revolution* suggests that a gender free future may be coming.

Return to the questions I posed at the beginning of this paper: what is sex and what is gender? Do we still need to trouble ourselves with the matters of sex and gender in the way that Judith Butler urged us to do in *Gender Trouble*, a groundbreaking book first published in 1990? While we may solicit many different answers to the question, "what are sex and gender," I believe Butler's exploration of matters concerning sex and gender is germane today. While concepts of sex and gender today are viewed very differently from how they were understood in the past, a vibrant public conversation is still important for many people around the world. This paper revisits Butler's discussion about sex and gender. More specifically, this paper focuses on Butler's critical relationships with three French thinkers, before and during the time of writing *Gender Trouble*: Simone de Beauvoir, Monique Wittig, and Michael Foucault.¹⁴ One may question: why are Butler's relationships with these three French thinkers so important? In fact, in the 1999 preface of the second edition, Butler acknowledges: "*Gender Trouble* is rooted in French Theory" (x). Before writing *Gender Trouble*, Butler published several articles about these three thinkers. From these articles, as well as in *Gender Trouble*, Butler has carefully constructed her own theory of sex and gender by appropriating, assimilating, and challenging Beauvoir, Wittig, and Foucault.¹⁵ In order to understand Butler's concepts of sex and gender, it is necessary to return to *Gender Trouble*, as well as her critical reading and critique of Beauvoir, Wittig, and Foucault.

Though Butler writes abundantly and continuously, *Gender Trouble* is without doubt her best and most inspiring work. Butler expresses that there were many critical challenges she faced after the publication of *Gender Trouble* and admits that it is inadequate and limited in certain ways.¹⁶ Still, *Gender Trouble* plays a

¹⁴ It should be noted that this paper will not include Butler's psychoanalytic analysis of and challenge to Julia Kristeva and Irigaray in *Gender Trouble* from Lacanian and Foucauldian perspectives. Unlike Wittig and Foucault, Butler highly affirms the use of psychoanalytic theory. She also emphasizes that fantasy, pleasures, desire, and the body can cause trouble to the melancholic heterosexual structure (*Gender* 68-71).

¹⁵ Though other issues such as desire, sexuality, and the body are also important to Butler and cannot be separated from her work and theory, I will mostly focus on sex and gender in this paper due to the limit of space and time.

¹⁶ Critics of *Gender Trouble* claim that Butler's denial of subjectivity is detrimental to the empowerment of women and to the cause of feminism in general. In a symposium with an announced topic on feminism and postmodernism, Butler confronted Seyla Behabib's critique of her abandonment of subjectivity.

significant role in the world, even in non-academic circles. For example, Bruno Perreau in *Queer Theory: The French Response* points out that in 2012 and 2013 massive French demonstrations in Paris attacked Butler as an American invader with her ideology of “gender theory,” for she is “the only queer writer to be widely known in France” (1, 58). Perreau’s *Queer Theory* on Butler will be further discussed in my conclusion.

I will review Butler’s treatment of the ideas of Beauvoir, Wittig, and Foucault respectively. In the first section, I will show how Butler is inspired by Beauvoir to view gender not merely as a social construct, but also as a mode of “becoming.” I will explore how and why Butler eventually challenges Beauvoir’s ideas. In the second section, I will show how Wittig’s concept of and challenge to compulsory heterosexuality inspires Butler to explain how sex becomes binary according to a “heterosexual matrix,” a term Butler draws from Wittig. While Butler agrees with Wittig that sex is not natural and pre-given, but rather a political category constructed by the system of heterosexuality, Butler disagrees with Wittig’s use of lesbianism as a strategy to dismantle and eradicate the category of sex. In the third section of Butler on Foucault, I will show how Butler interprets and challenges Foucault’s concepts of sex and sexuality. Throughout *Gender Trouble*, Foucault’s ideas play a crucial role when Butler challenges Beauvoir, Wittig and other thinkers and theorists.¹⁷ Butler mostly agrees with Foucault that sex, gender, and sexuality are not natural and pre-given, but rather that they are socially and culturally constructed by discursive mechanisms of power and knowledge.¹⁸ Despite Butler’s general debt to Foucault’s ideas, Butler criticizes Foucault as “self-contradictory,” claiming that there is “an unresolved tension” between Foucault’s two writings. For this, I intend to defend Foucault by highlighting that Butler makes some serious theoretical errors: Butler shapes Foucault’s usages of sex and sexuality as well as mixes up Foucault’s and Wittig’s “notion of sex.” I would like to suggest that Butler probably misconstrues these ideas in order to maintain her own theoretical consistency. To show how Butler misconstrues Foucault’s ideas, I will illustrate the meaning of and relationship between Foucault’s “notion of sex” and his idea about “the deployment of sexuality.”

Regarding Butler’s works, I will mainly focus on *Gender Trouble* and her

The symposium papers were extended and became a book, *Feminist Contentions*, with Nancy Fraser’s and Drucilla Cornell’s responses.

¹⁷ Sara Salih in *The Judith Butler Reader* notes that in her early writing “Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault,” Butler reads Beauvoir through Wittig and Foucault (21). I think it is in *Gender Trouble* that Butler has done so.

¹⁸ In her 1987 article, Butler also argues that the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* is worth appropriating since it offers “some strategies for the subversion of gender hierarchy” (137).

earlier articles, such as "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*" and "Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault." I will refer to a few of Butler's later works when necessary. Finally, I will also discuss four other works: Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Wittig's *The Straight Mind*, Foucault's *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, and his "Introduction" to *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*.

I. Butler on Beauvoir

In "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*," Butler observes that Beauvoir's "distinguished contribution" is "a potentially radical understanding of gender" (35, 49). For Butler, Beauvoir's fundamental tenet, "One is not born, but rather becomes, [a] woman,"¹⁹ sheds new light on the relationship between sex and gender, especially pertaining to women. First of all, Beauvoir shows that while one's sex is given and fixed, one's gender is socially and culturally constructed. Secondly, Beauvoir reveals that sex (biological anatomy) and gender (social acquisition) are two distinct matters: being female and being a woman are not the same thing. Thirdly, Beauvoir explains that sex does not determine gender, and gender is not necessarily produced by sex. Thus, to become a woman, one does not necessarily have to be biologically and anatomically female.

Butler further argues that Beauvoir's notion of "becoming" allows gender, ambiguously, two possible constructions. On the one hand, gender can be seen as "a cultural construction imposed on identity," on the other hand, gender is "a choice" made by "a choosing agent." To Butler, Beauvoir's "theory of gender" offers us a radical view: rather than fixed and passive, gender is "an incessant project" of becoming ("Sex and Gender" 36, 37, 40).

In this article, Butler emphasizes that Beauvoir's view of the body as "a situation" offers gender an "emancipatory potential" ("Sex and Gender" 41). Butler remarks that for Beauvoir, although the body is "a cultural reality laden with sanctions, taboos, and prescriptions" ("Sex and Gender" 40) and is always within "an already established social and cultural context" ("Sex and Gender" 39), it is not passive and fixed. When one chooses "to assume a certain kind of body, to live or wear one's body a certain way," the body can in this way become a "mode of becoming" ("Sex and Gender" 40, 45). Therefore, the radical potential of Beauvoir's

¹⁹ Note that in Candace Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier's 2009 translation of Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, there is not "a" before woman. For the rest of the paper, I will use "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman."

theory of gender, according to Butler, hinges on the notion that one's body is a situation: to assume "a certain kind of body" is a "self-reflexive process" of taking up one's gender and "a personal way of taking up and reinterpreting received gender norms" ("Sex and Gender" 36-8).²⁰ In short, to Butler, Beauvoir shows us how gender is "a contemporary way of organizing past and future cultural norms, a way of situating oneself with respect to those norms, an active style of living one's body in the world" ("Sex and Gender" 39-40).

Butler expands "the radical potentials" that she has learned from Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. In her "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*," Butler emphasizes the following: the causal relationship between sex and gender, a radical view that gender is non-natural but a social construction, and most important of all, a view that gender is not fixed but always a "mode of becoming." However, contrary to her overall acclaim for Beauvoir's "distinguished contribution" in *The Second Sex*, Butler argues in *Gender Trouble* that Beauvoir's views of sex and gender are problematic and limited.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler challenges Beauvoir's view that sex is pre-given and that gender is acquired. From a genealogical perspective, Butler contends that it is implausible to identify the particular or exact moment when one allocates or becomes a certain gender. To Butler, not only are women "always already gendered," but all human beings are born gendered (*Gender* 111). Another issue Butler has with Beauvoir's ideas is Beauvoir's concept of gender. Butler disputes Beauvoir's idea that gender can be both a matter of social construct as well as a personal choice. Butler agrees that the word "becomes," as "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman," suggests that gender is a social construct, and therefore demands one's conformance to social norms. However, Butler argues that this phrase also implies that gender is "a matter of choice," determined by an agent or cogito, a prediscursive free subject (*Gender* 8). Butler does not agree with the idea that an autonomous subject is able to transcend the law.²¹ In short, Butler agrees with Beauvoir that gender is not fixed, but Butler does not think gender can be "reduced to just a form of choice" (*Gender* 8), acquired or constructed by a free agent or an autonomous subject.

While Beauvoir calls for the right of women to become "existential subjects," Butler argues that in *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir actually excludes the possibility that women can be subjects. Butler points out that according to Beauvoir, only

²⁰ Butler explains that Beauvoir is taking from Sartre's doctrine of "prereflective choice," which is "the kind of choice we make and only later realize we have made" ("Sex and Gender" 40).

²¹ It is also one of Butler's major objectives in *Gender Trouble* to remind feminist theorists to liberate themselves from having an autonomous subject.

men can be subjects; women, by contrast, are always “the Other,” restricted to their sexed bodies and confined in their feminine positions (*Gender* 10-11). Regarding her change of view toward Beauvoir's concept of the body, Butler writes, “[d]espite my own previous efforts to argue the contrary, it appears that Beauvoir maintains the mind/body dualism, even as she proposes a synthesis of those terms” (*Gender* 12). Butler maintains that Beauvoir's “uncritical reproduction” of the traditional distinction between soul and body not only reinforces the phallogocentric hierarchy of mind over the body but also fails to mark “gender asymmetry” (*Gender* 12). Butler also attacks Beauvoir's view of the (female) body as a “situation,” contending that in this way the body can only serve as an “instrument” or “medium,” subjected to personal freedom or choice (*Gender* 8, 12).

To Butler, the biggest problem of Beauvoir's concept of sex and gender is that Beauvoir fails to see the “seemingly radical consequences” in her work; since sex and gender are “radically distinct,” gender, accordingly, does not need to be “restricted to the usual two” but can “potentially proliferate beyond the binary limits imposed by the apparent binary of sex” (*Gender* 111-12). In summary, Butler thinks that while Beauvoir helps highlight the point that gender is not natural, she fails to understand that sex, also, is not natural. Butler claims that it is Wittig and Foucault who draw inspiration from Beauvoir and then help “release gender from sex in ways which Simone de Beauvoir probably did not imagine” (“Sex and Gender” 47).

Before moving to the next section, I would like to make some comments about Butler's critique of Beauvoir. First, it is remarkable that Butler can infer some radical concepts of gender from Beauvoir's statement: “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman” (“Sex and Gender” 35). However, I note that Butler chooses to ignore Beauvoir's different usages of “woman” and “women.” Butler tends to use the term “women” in her discussion of Beauvoir's writings. Apparently, in *The Second Sex* there is a distinction between “woman” as myth and women as oppressed beings.²² Beauvoir aims to inform women why and how they are oppressed and dominated by men under the name “woman,” which she claims is a mythical category. The first sentence in *Volume 1: Facts and Myths* is, “I hesitated a long time before writing a book on woman” (Beauvoir 22). Beauvoir further declares that while man is “a socially autonomous and complete individual,” woman is called “the sex,” meaning that for man, woman is nothing but “a sexed being” (26).²³ Aiming to demystify the rooted ideas that women are weak, passive, and inferior, Beauvoir

²² To some, however, it may be disappointing that while Beauvoir argues that women must work collectively for liberation (753), at the same time, she also thinks that despite their “natural differentiation,” men must unequivocally treat women equally and “affirm their brotherhood” (863).

²³ Again, while Beauvoir uses “woman”, Butler changes into “women” (*Gender* 19).

argues that the term “woman” is nothing natural but a manmade “product” (856). Therefore, when Beauvoir asserts, “On ne naît pas femme: on le devient,” it is “woman,” not “a woman.”²⁴ To Beauvoir, “woman” is a coerced and imaginary category which women should not take for granted or as pre-given. Butler, however, chooses to ignore this critical distinction that Beauvoir elaborates in various writings.

Secondly, I wish to address Butler’s analysis of Beauvoir’s body as “a situation.” Butler points out that Beauvoir is greatly influenced by Sartre’s existential interpretation of the body, as articulated in *Being and Nothingness*. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir describes the body as “a situation” instead of “a thing;” this description suggests that Beauvoir does not think “woman” can determine or define her body. Beauvoir says, “The woman’s body is one of the essential elements of the situation she occupies in the world. But her body is not enough to define her; it has a lived reality only as taken on by consciousness through actions and within society” (71). Thus, Butler’s interpretation of Beauvoir is different from how I understand Beauvoir. Butler talks of Beauvoir’s concept of the body as a situation and gender as a mode of becoming. To Beauvoir, however, “becoming woman” is not related to an autonomous subject because woman is always “determined and differentiated in relation to man,” and is “nothing other than what man decides” (66). Beauvoir states: “woman is not a fixed reality but a becoming; she has to be compared with man in her becoming; that is, her *possibilities* has to be defined” (68).

In “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*,” Butler ends the article by claiming that Wittig and Foucault help “release gender from sex in ways which Simone de Beauvoir probably did not imagine” (47). In “Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault,” Butler further emphasizes how both Wittig and Foucault reject natural sex as “a primary given” and consider the binary opposition between the “sexes” to be a result of hegemonic culture and a heterosexual system (137). Butler stresses the common traits between Wittig and Foucault. Before exploring these common traits, I will focus on Butler’s critical reading of and challenge to Wittig.

²⁴ According to Candace Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier, Beauvoir “rarely uses femme without an article to signify woman as determined by society as just described.” This is the reason why they translate Beauvoir’s famous sentence “On ne naît pas femme: on le devient” into “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman,” different from H. M. Parshley’s translation with the article “a” before the woman (16-17).

II. Butler on Wittig

Butler believes Wittig is indebted to Beauvoir's ideas as shown in her article, "One is Not Born a Woman," initially presented at the Simone de Beauvoir conference in 1979. However, Butler observes an important shift: instead of adhering to Beauvoir's formulation that "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman," which concerns gender acquisition, Wittig carries Beauvoir's argument even further: "one is not born female but becomes female," which is a challenge to the notion that sex is natural (*Gender* 113). Butler interprets Wittig's ideas this way: what is taken by society as an "immediate given" of sex—that is, the biological difference between man and woman—is, in effect, a "mythic construction" ("Variations on Sex" 134). Further, sex forcibly imposes, in "a violent process," "an artificial unity" among sex, gender, and the body for the purpose of stabilizing and consolidating the "political and cultural operation of compulsory heterosexuality" (*Gender* 114).

Butler continues to explain Wittig's ideas in this way: in order to challenge the institution of compulsory heterosexuality, we must eradicate the category of sex. Only a lesbian, who is "neither a woman nor a man" (*Gender* 113), and who does not belong to either of the two sexes, can overthrow and transcend the binary category of sex. For Wittig, the lesbian body, which is inherently dislocated and detached from the universal and coherent representation of the female body, can also successfully shatter the univocal link between women and the sexed body. Finally, the binary gender system inevitably collapses, as the binary category of sex is deposed (Butler, "Variations on Sex" 137).

Butler does not agree with Wittig's use of lesbianism as a theoretical strategy. Butler casts doubts on Wittig's vision of a lesbian to overthrow and transcend "the binary opposition between woman and woman" (*Gender* 113). According to Butler, Wittig suggests that lesbian norms supersede binary sexual differences. However, Wittig overlooks the fact that this lesbian state of "being beyond opposition is still a way of being related to that opposition" ("Variations on Sex" 136-37). Butler contends (echoing Foucault) that Wittig's theory of lesbianism remains a replicate of the patriarchal sex and gender system, embedded in and conditioned by the entire system of heterosexuality. That is to say, the lesbian's body cannot transcend the binary category of sex because it is still conditioned by the juridical discourse on sex (*Gender* 99). Therefore, according to Butler, Wittig's vision of transcending heterosexuality through lesbianism is not subversive, but rather is dependent on that very heterosexuality Wittig wishes to transcend (*Gender* 124).

Wittig's two novels, *The Lesbian Body* and *Les Guerilleres*, reveal to Butler Wittig's attempt to disrupt, deconstruct, and overthrow the category of sex by appealing

to linguistic, textual, and literary strategies (*Gender* 124-25). Specifically, since sex is discursively produced, naturalized, and materialized by heterosexuality, in order to overthrow the category of sex and the system of compulsory heterosexuality, according to Wittig, it must be done through language, especially literature. In addition, Wittig insists that women, lesbians, and gay men must become “speaking subjects” through the power of language (*Gender* 115-17).

However, Butler contends that Wittig’s idealistic and humanistic aim to transcend language is problematic; it is impossible, Butler thinks, to construct subjects who both use language and transcend it at the same time. Put differently, Wittig’s aim is based on “a problematic metaphysics of presence” (*Gender* 124). Wittig’s strategy to usurp the speaking positions from the “straight mind” paradoxically affirms the same notion of power as displayed by heterosexual dominance and oppression, according to Butler. In addition, Wittig fails to see the great complexity among lesbians and gays; in particular, Wittig fails to acknowledge the possibility that some lesbians and gays may still conform to the heterosexual norms of identities and desire. Butler thinks (again echoing Foucault) that power should not be restricted to domination vs. oppression. Butler argues that heterosexuality for Wittig is by definition a display of oppressive and compulsory power.

The “radical disjunction,” posited by Wittig, between heterosexuality and homosexuality, according to Butler, is not only false but it represents the same kind of binary thinking that Wittig wants to undermine (*Gender* 121). Butler continues to argue that a more successful strategy required to overthrow “both the category of sex and the system of compulsory heterosexuality” should be a subversion from within; that is, a disruption of the heterosexual structure within its heterosexual context (*Gender* 115). For example, Butler explains (again, from Foucault’s concept of the body)²⁵ how the performance of drag “fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of true gender identity” (*Gender* 137).²⁶

Butler also notes that Wittig makes no distinction between sex and gender, arguing that since for Wittig, “gender is built into sex, and sex proves to have been gender from the start,” accordingly, the category of “sex” is itself a “gendered” category. For Wittig, only women are “ontologically suffused with sex;” accordingly, “sex is always already female, and there is only one sex, the feminine” (*Gender* 112-13).

²⁵ According to Butler, in *Discipline and Punish* Foucault challenges the belief of the binary distinction between inner (soul) and outer (body) (*Gender* 134-35).

²⁶ Butler argues that in the presence of three contingent dimensions of corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance, when imitating gender, drag “implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency” (*Gender* 137).

Butler's analysis of Wittig most importantly highlights the difference between French and American intellectual traditions. To Butler and many American feminists, sex and gender are different but closely related "matters" which cannot be restricted to the linguistic or philosophical spheres. Wittig, however, writes about gender from a French perspective. In her preface to *The Straight Mind*, Wittig expresses that she has noted the use of gender in England and the United States, but she thinks "gender" is "imprecise" (xvi). Wittig's comment on gender in "The Point of View: Universal or Particular" clearly shows that she thinks gender is only relevant to specific spheres: political, conceptual, and linguistic. Wittig writes, "Gender is the linguistic index of the opposition between the sexes. Gender is used here in the singular because indeed there are not two genders. There is only one: the feminine, the 'masculine' not being a gender. For the masculine is not the masculine but the general" (60). In another of her writings, "Mark of Gender," Wittig writes that even though both English and French are "gendered" languages, the American feminists have extrapolated gender from grammatical and linguistic index and used it as a sociological category (77). Gender in French is like sex, she argues, and still plays an instrumental role in oppressing women. Thus, "sex, under the name of gender, permeates the whole body of language," says Wittig (79). Wittig believes that gender in French does not allow woman the possibility to become an absolute subject; therefore, gender must be eradicated (81). In her two novels, Wittig claims to have identified the problems and then disrupted the binary opposition of sex and gender through language.

According to Wittig, the category of sex is both the cause and effect of the institution of heterosexuality. In "Category of Sex," she stresses that the category of sex is "the political category that founds society as heterosexual" (5); at the same time, the category of sex is "the product of heterosexual society" (6). While Wittig falls short of stating that men create a heterosexualized society, she does believe that the divisions between men and women, male and female, masculine and feminine are all social categories produced by the category of sex for the purpose of dominating and oppressing women (2, 5). Thus, to Wittig, the category of sex is just like a totalitarian law and controls women tightly. In "One is Not Born a Woman," Wittig returns to Beauvoir's concept of the "myth of woman," arguing that the category of sex is an imaginary, political, and ideological formation, and that women as a class must destroy the category of "woman" (15-6).

From Butler's critical reading of Wittig and Wittig's own explanations, it appears to me that the two feminist theorists have very different perspectives on sex and gender, mostly, I would argue, due to cultural and linguistic differences. Butler, an American, is not able to accept Wittig's important statement as a powerful political strategy: "Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories

of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is not a woman, whether economically, or politically, or ideologically” (20).

III. Butler on Foucault

According to Butler, Wittig’s humanistic call for an eradication of the category of sex finds support in Foucault’s first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (*Gender* 18, 20). Butler argues that like Wittig, Foucault rejects “natural sex” as a “primary given” and considers the category of sex—that is, the binary opposition between man and woman—to be a forced category. Butler makes it clear that Foucault does not focus on the issue of gender or speak on behalf of women; however, Foucault “understands his own project to be an inquiry into how the category of ‘sex’ and sexual difference are constructed within discourse” (*Gender* 96). Butler reminds us that Foucault admonishes against using the “fictitious” category of sex to facilitate a “fictitious unity” (*Gender* 91). Thus, according to Foucault,

The notion of “sex” made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomic elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning, a secret to be discovered everywhere; sex was thus able to function as a unique signifier and as a universal signified. (*History* 154)

Butler argues that both Wittig and Foucault think it is essential for a heterosexual society to construct the notion of sex as natural so as to stabilize and consolidate its power. For Wittig, the system of compulsory heterosexuality aims to restrict women to their reproductive function; for Foucault, the heterosexual hegemony serves to regulate not only people’s sexual difference and identities, but also to consolidate the “internal coherence of sex, gender, and desire” (*Gender* 18, 19, 23). In Butler’s view, both Foucault and Wittig agree on wishing the category of sex to entirely disappear. Butler puts it this way:

Consider . . . those positions, Foucault’s, for instance, that assume that the category of sex, whether masculine or feminine, is a production of a diffuse regulatory economy of sexuality. Consider also Wittig’s argument that the category of sex is, under the conditions of compulsory heterosexuality, always feminine (the masculine remaining unremarked and, hence, synonymous with the “universal”). Wittig concurs, however paradoxically, with Foucault in claiming that the category of sex would itself disappear and, indeed, *dissipate* through the disruption and displacement of heterosexual hegemony. (*Gender* 18)

Butler continues that while Wittig believes the category of sex is produced by compulsory heterosexuality (*Gender* 18), Foucault “suggests that the category of sex, prior to any categorization of sexual difference, is itself constructed through a his-

torically specific mode of sexuality" (*Gender* 23). For Foucault, sexuality and power are coextensive, which "refutes the postulation of a subversive or emancipatory sexuality which could be free of the law" (*Gender* 29). Within the Foucauldian matrix of "power relations," there is no sense of "outside," "before," or "after" power/law. Thus, Butler believes Foucault does not claim for a utopian transcendence of sex or presume a subject, that is, "a doer behind the deed," as Wittig does (*Gender* 25, 29).

Butler desires to establish a link between Wittig and Foucault through their rejection of the category of sex and their notion of natural sex. However, I believe Butler has incorrectly conflated Foucault's "sex" with Wittig's "the category of sex," as shown in many of the above quotes. Wittig's concept of the category of sex is clearly different from what Foucault puts forth. For Wittig, the category of sex is related to the binary sexual difference between man and woman. Foucault, on the other hand, makes clear in his first volume of *The History of Sexuality* that sex is not about the anatomical sexual difference, but rather sex as sexual desire, sexual activity, or sexual pleasure.²⁷

Butler maintains that Foucault's purpose in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* is to show us how the "historical production of the sex as a category" is an "effect" of power relations (*Gender* 95).²⁸ However, Butler incorrectly presumes that for Foucault, sexual identity is inseparable from sex as sensation, pleasure, and desire,²⁹ arguing that to Foucault, "the univocal construct of 'sex' (one is one's sex and, therefore, not the other) is produced for the social regulation and control of sexuality" (*Gender* 94).³⁰ We may wonder: on what basis does Butler make this case about Foucault's ideas? Clearly, Butler frequently alters Foucault's usage of sex into "the category of sex" in order to reinforce the link between Wittig and Foucault and, more importantly, to challenge Foucault as self-contradictory (*Gender* 101).³¹

²⁷ Johanna Oksala in *Foucault on Freedom* notes that though the original French word "sex" can refer to the categories of male and female based on the anatomical and biological differences, Foucault's stress is "clearly on the sense of the natural function, an embodied foundation or principle that belongs in common to both men and women" (116).

²⁸ Butler also makes the same inference about Foucault's notion of sex in her article, "Variations on Sex and Gender," saying that: "One's 'sex,' i.e. one's anatomically differentiated sexual self, is intimately linked to 'sex' as an activity and a drive" (138).

²⁹ According to Sara Salih, in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, Butler refers to sex as one's sexed identity, not to "sexual intercourse" (77).

³⁰ In her note for this passage, Butler refers to the source from Foucault's explanation of the function of the "notion of sex" on page 154 in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*.

³¹ Note that in "Revisiting Bodies and Pleasures," Butler suggests that "For Foucault, the regulatory operation of 'sex' operates as an abstract monolith that regulates bodies in uniform ways; sexual difference is, of necessity, secondary to sex" (12).

I will try to expound upon the relationship between sex and sexuality in Foucault's first volume of *The History of Sexuality* to show how Butler misreads Foucault's "notion of sex." In this work, which is a genealogical study of the historical formation of sexuality in the West, Foucault observes that for more than three centuries, everyone has been drawn to "the task of telling everything concerning his sex" (23). He also notes that Western society "compels everyone to transform their sexuality into a perpetual discourse" (*History* 33). Contrary to the "hypothesis" that "sexuality" has been repressed since the Victorian age, Foucault stresses that "sex" has been talked about "more than anything else" (*History* 33).

Foucault's usages of "sex" and "sexuality" in the above quotes seem to suggest that sex and sexuality are interchangeable to him. Certainly, I do not believe this is the case. Yet, many readers, especially including Butler, fail to acknowledge the different definitions that Foucault gives to sex and sexuality. Although the following discussion is lengthy and complicated, I will need to clarify what Foucault means about sex and sexuality in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*.

The title of the first volume of Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* suggests a study about the development of various forms of sexuality throughout the course of history. A close reading tells us, however, that it is in fact a genealogical investigation of the origin and emergence of sexuality. According to Foucault, "sex"—that is, one's sexual instincts, pleasures, desires and activities—is by no means pre-given or as natural as we faithfully believe it to be. This does not mean that "sex" is not real or that it is, somehow, imaginary. Foucault argues that instead of being a spontaneous instinct and ungovernable drive, "sex" is an "historical construct" (*History* 105) by the "historically bourgeois" (*History* 127). What we think of sex—that is, our understanding, definition, and interpretation of sex—is strongly and deeply dominated and operated by innumerable complex mechanisms and discursive strategies; Foucault calls these strategies, collectively, "the deployments of sexuality" (*History* 103, 152, 155, 156, 157).³²

³² Though many feminists have attacked Foucault for neglecting the role of women in his books, Foucault illustrates how and why women's sex became solely reproductive in the 18th and 19th centuries. Reproductive sex is the way women's sexuality is and should be. Since such naturalization and normalization was accomplished not through law or the sovereign power but discourses, this strategy or machinery-like method is what Foucault calls the deployment of sexuality. Under this standard, women's sex in the 18th and 19th century was first defined and then controlled through a threefold process of their bodies. The first step was to analyze and sexualize the feminine body, the second, to regulate it in the medical and biological spheres, and the final, to associate the female body with the social body (*History* 104). According to Foucault, in the 18th and 19th centuries women were considered to have sex and sexual desire. However, only perverse, sick, and mad women would indulge themselves with unproductive sex. Dominated by "hysteria," only the "nervous woman" was inclined to sexual power and thus needed a "thorough medicalization of her body and her sex" (*History* 146). In contrast to all the harmful, immoral, perverse,

Foucault petitions repeatedly for a careful observation of the role and function of sex, especially in its discursive relationship with “the deployment of sexuality.” Foucault’s question is this: “Is ‘sex’ really the anchor point supporting the manifestations of sexuality, or is it not rather a complex idea that was formed inside the deployment of sexuality?” (*History* 152). This question not only illustrates that for Foucault, sex is not about sexuality but, more importantly, “the deployment of sexuality” is the cause of sex. Put in Foucault’s own words:

Sex—that agency which appears to dominate us and that secret which seems to underlie all that we are . . . is doubtless but an ideal point made necessary by the deployment of sexuality and its operation. We must not make the mistake of thinking that sex is an autonomous agency which secondarily produces and manifolds the effects of sexuality over the entire length of its surface of contact with power. On the contrary, sex is the most speculative, most ideal and most internal element in a deployment of sexuality organized by power in its grip on bodies and their materiality, their forces, energies, sensations, and pleasures. (History 155, emphasis added)

Foucault argues that it is inaccurate that sex is the spontaneous overflow of “forces, energies, sensations, and pleasures” from the body. Rather, by creating the imaginary element that is “sex,” the “deployment of sexuality” established “one of its most essential internal operating principles: the desire for sex” (*History* 156). In order to operate sex, sex has to be, first and foremost, turned into an “imaginary effect” and “a speculative element” by the “deployment of sexuality,” so as to become a universal and univocal causal principle (*History* 157).³³ To elaborate the intricate and causal relationship between sex and sexuality, Foucault states the following:

So we must not refer a history of sexuality to the agency of sex; but rather show how ‘sex’ is historically subordinate to sexuality. We must not place sex on the side of reality, and sexuality on that of confused ideas and illusions; sexuality is a very historical forma-

peripheral, unnatural, and abnormal sex of the four targets—the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult—sex of the legitimate couple must serve as a norm so as to ensure its reproductive function.

³³ In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault points out that *scientia sexualis*, which emerged in nineteenth century Western societies, is a good example of the “deployment of sexuality.” In his view, society took “an entire machinery” for the sake of producing “true” discourses on “sex” (*History* 67). “Bourgeois, capitalist, or industrial society,” demanded and compelled everyone to “formulate the uniform truth of sex” (*History* 69). In such societies, “sex” for all—men, women, and children—needs to be regulated and controlled to insure reproductive goals. For “producing true discourse on sex,” the “slowly developed discursive practice” which constitutes the *scientia sexualis* “enables something called ‘sexuality’ to embody the truth of sex and its pleasures” (*History* 68). Similar to the ancient mode of confession in transforming sex into discourse, *scientia sexualis* means utilizing thorough, meticulous scientific procedures and methods to pursue the “knowledge of sex” (*History* 72). This also means that though highly instrumental and functional, the deployment of sexuality achieves its aims not through juridical law and repressive coercion, but through techniques and strategies.

tion; it is what gave rise to *the notion of sex*, as a *speculative element* necessary to its operation. (*History* 157, emphasis added)

For Foucault, under the operations of the “deployments of sexuality,” this “notion of sex” serves as a unique and universal signifier to integrate and normalize all biological functions—actions, sensations and pleasures—into one fictitious and artificial unity (*History* 155). Foucault emphasizes that the transformation of sex into “a complex idea” is not achieved by coercive force but rather through discursive power relations.³⁴ When power is defined in terms of relations, it is productive and allows for change and resistance. Foucault believes that sexuality is closely linked to power, not because it needs power to repress or to liberate the “uncontrollable” or “dangerous” nature of sex, but because sexuality needs to conceal and perpetuate the mechanisms of its deployment.³⁵

Foucault’s usage of sex is radically different from Wittig’s concept of sex, as is clear from his ideas in the above block quotation. Foucault is concerned with understanding the nature of sexual desire, pleasure, or activities whereas Wittig is interested in how sex relates to the category of sexual identity. Butler, however, makes a problematic equivalence between Foucault’s and Wittig’s concepts of sex. Furthermore, Butler also fails to differentiate, either purposefully or inadvertently, between Foucault’s different usages of sex, which he delineates in two different works, and then attacks him for being contradictory.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler uses more than fifteen pages to challenge how Foucault contradicts his own concept of sex in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* with his introduction to *Herculine Barbin* (91-102, 105-06). Butler argues that in the former, Foucault offers a genealogical critique of how the category of sex discursively constructs heterosexual desire and sexuality; in the latter, according to Butler, Foucault shows a “sentimental indulgence in the emancipatory discourse” (*Gender* 94). Butler contends that this inconsistency provides us with the opportunity “to read Foucault against himself” (*Gender* 97). I disagree with Butler that Foucault contradicts himself.

³⁴ It should be emphasized that it is power relations, rather than power, that Foucault always has in mind. In a 1984 interview, he states why he emphasizes power relations over power: “I hardly ever use the word ‘power’ and if I do sometimes, it is always a short cut to the expression I always use: the relationships of power These relations of power are then changeable, reversible and unstable That means that in the relations of power, there is necessarily the possibility of resistance” (*Politics* 11-2). When Foucault discusses power, his focus shifts from the macro-level to the micro-level, that is, from how certain subjects and groups are empowered or disempowered to how individuals exist under the effects of disciplinary power.

³⁵ Foucault explains in an interview, “It seemed to me then that sexuality, in so far as it is heavily regulated in every society, and ours in particular, was a good area to test what the mechanisms of power actually were” (*Politics* 102).

When Foucault asks the question in the introduction of *Herculine Barbin*, “Do we truly need a true sex?” Butler argues that Foucault reveals a “sentimental indulgence in the emancipatory discourse” which is contradictory to his own theory (*Gender* 94). Butler contends that Foucault clearly understands that there is always “an urgent social need to keep sex down to just the usual two” (“Variations on Sex” 139). Further, Butler takes issue with Foucault because, in her view, he indulges himself in Herculine Barbin’s “happy limbo of a non-identity” and a sexual non-identity utopia. Butler continues, by claiming that for Foucault, Barbin’s “unregulated” pleasure, achieved through an androgynous body, is just a utopia (*Gender* 96, 100). For Butler, such “unregulated” sexual pleasure and freedom or transcendence of sexual identity is illusory (*Gender* 98). In order to make this point, she uses Foucault’s own formulation: sex and body can never be outside of the law (*Gender* 97, 105).

Is it possible that “transcendence” precedes “discourse”? Butler asks. Foucault’s answer to this, of course, is that “transcendence” does not find any place in his formulation. However, his notion of “resistance” gives us insight into his belief. For Foucault, Barbin’s (or Alexina’s) non-identity is made possible only when such society or “the law” requires a definite sexual identity. In the case of Alexina, her non-identity does not need to be outside the law or outside discourse. Instead of proposing the concept of transcendence for the sake of emancipation or subversion, Foucault shows that Alexina’s resistance to a definite sexual identity—a delight in a “happy limbo of a non-identity”—is paradoxically produced by the very law which refutes its existence. That is, Alexina’s “non-identity” exists in “limbo” only because it exists in a system that requires binary sexual identity.

Butler claims that Foucault is suggesting that “homosexuality is instrumental to the overthrow of the category of sex” (*Gender* 100). I disagree with this reading of Foucault. I believe, instead, that his point is that sexual ambiguity such as Alexina’s can only exist in a boarding school-type environment that strictly requires all students to have only one “true sex” (Foucault, “Introduction” x, xi, xiii). The narrow, protected and confining environment of the boarding school represents a world that strictly requires everyone, including the hermaphrodite, to have one “primary, profound, determined and determining sexual identity” (Foucault, “Introduction” viii). Naturally, only one sex is allowed there, and of course, it is the female one. Foucault points out that ironically, with its “intensive quest for a definitive true sex,” the school provides Alexina the opportunity to “proliferate” sexual ambiguity and sexual identities through bodies and pleasures (“Introduction” xiii).

Before Barbin’s androgynous body is exposed through medical examination, the hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin has already confused and destabilized the

boundaries and categories of what would be called “normal” heterosexual or “abnormal” homosexual relationships. Though Barbin uses the female name Alexina, and feminine adjectives for self-reference, before and during “her” intimate relationship with another student named Sara, Barbin’s self-consciousness, according to Foucault, is not limited by any sexual or gender identity. According to Foucault, when Alexina composes “her” memoirs after her “true” and “definite” identity “had been discovered” and “established,” she still does not write them from the point of view of her new male identity. Foucault argues that Alexina “was still without a definite sex” (“Introduction” xiii). In other words, it is not possible to define or determine a genuine or “true” sexual identity or a gendered source for her desire even prior to when Alexina (or Herculine Barbin) gets “caught.”³⁶

A comparison between Butler’s and Foucault’s views about Herculine Barbin’s “sex” unavoidably points out their differing concepts of the body,³⁷ as well as power relations in general. According to Butler, Herculine Barbin’s androgynous body demonstrates to Foucault how such a body could successfully challenge and destabilize a society that requires every individual to have a “true sex”—that is, a society requiring a clear-cut sexual identity. Butler contends that Foucault romanticizes Barbin’s sexual pleasure and her relations with the young girls in the boarding school. Foucault’s romanticization ought to be rejected, according to Butler, for it invokes the illusion that an unregulated body can stand before the law (*Gender* 97).

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler makes the case that the body is always inherently sexed and gendered; therefore, the body cannot be outside the law (111). Butler argues that Barbin’s androgynous body is produced by “an amalgamation of binary opposites, a particular configuration and conflation of male and female,” both while alive and after Barbin’s death; therefore, Barbin’s body fails to transcend the binary category of sex because it is still conditioned by the juridical discourse on sex (*Gender* 99). Foucault’s theory of sex, Butler contends, does not allow one to go beyond the binary category of sex (*Gender* 101).

Butler proposes a “true” liberation of the body, not through pleasure, as Foucault suggests, but through “a subversion from within the terms of the law” (*Gender* 93). That is to say, while the human body is socially and historically constructed and cannot disassociate itself from the categorization of sexual identity, however, one can “play” with gender norms. What Butler has in mind is a re-inscription

³⁶ According to the translator of the Memoirs, Richard McDougall, the element of sexual ambiguity is even more obvious and complex in the French text than the English version, in which Herculine Barbin abundantly uses masculine and feminine adjectives for self-reference (Foucault, “Introduction” xiii).

³⁷ A broader scope of comparing Foucault’s and Butler’s understandings of the body can be seen in David Dudrick’s “Foucault, Butler, and the Body.”

of the body through a parody of gender. In this way, gender is performative in the sense that it remains an ongoing practice, which involves a repeated "stylization of the body." Through a parody of an assumed original gender, the body can destabilize a naturalized gender. This imitation of a fabrication can take place with cultural practices of drag queens and cross-dressers (Butler, *Gender* 33, 140, 136).³⁸

In his first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault explains that his purpose is to envisage "a history of bodies," not "a history of mentalities" (151-52). Though controlled by disciplinary power, the body for Foucault is by no means passive and inert. Foucault believes that the best "rally point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality" is through "bodies and pleasures" (*History* 157).³⁹ Foucault's interest in *Herculine Barbin* demonstrates his idea that power relations always allow dispersion and proliferation.

To summarize, whether intentional or inadvertent, Butler's argument about Foucault's inconsistency and "unresolved tension" is itself problematic. Butler has a problematic interpretation of Foucault's concept of sex and misconstrues Foucault's notions of "sex" and "category of sex." In addition, regarding Foucault's introduction to *Herculine Barbin*, Butler fails to acknowledge that the "sex" that both she and Foucault refer to with respect to Barbin's sexual identity is not the same notion of "sex" analyzed in Foucault's first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, which deals with bodily desires, pleasures and sexual activities.

Conclusion

I have mostly focused on Butler's critical reading of and challenge to Beauvoir, Wittig, and Foucault. My argument is that by appropriating, assimilating, and challenging these three French theorists, Butler has thoughtfully built the foundation of her own theory of sex and gender. I focus on these three thinkers because during her early writings Butler has explicitly used their ideas to shape her own thinking. Butler challenges Beauvoir, Wittig, and Foucault more often in *Gender Trouble* than she did during her earlier writings. In *Gender Trouble* Butler

³⁸ For Butler's further critique on Foucault's reference to bodies and pleasures, see Butler's "Revisiting Bodies and Pleasures," in which Butler argues that queer activists tend to turn away from sex-desire to Foucault's taking bodies and pleasures as "a conjectured site of resistance" (12).

³⁹ For Foucault, the body is not personal, but rather situated in a social context by power relations. He emphasizes, in his article "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," the importance of defining and analyzing the body historically. Foucault says, "The body is the inscribed surface of events . . . the locus of a dissociated self . . . Genealogy as an analysis of descent is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the processes of history's destruction of the body" ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 83).

establishes her own theory, in part by showing how her ideas are rooted in French theory.

In each section, I have scrutinized how Butler reads and challenges each thinker. I also have pointed out what I believe to be critical contradictions or oversights that Butler has made. Specifically, I have addressed four most important issues: the confusion of Wittig's and Foucault's "notion of natural sex," the misreading of Foucault's "sex" in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, the change of Foucault's "sex" into "category of sex," and a confusion of Foucault's different usages of sex in his different works. In addition, I have cast doubt on Butler's challenges to Beauvoir's and Wittig's "theory of gender;" I believe her concepts of sex and gender seem to parallel the broad differences between French and American feminist theory. Finally, I have questioned Butler's understanding of Foucault's concept of power as expressed with respect to Foucault's emphasis on bodies and pleasures.

In spite of my own challenge to Butler's work, *Gender Trouble* has been groundbreaking by radically reshaping our conception of sex and gender.⁴⁰ While Butler is not the first scholar to introduce the term gender,⁴¹ she probably is the first to highlight the problems and limitations of past feminist thoughts on sex and gender. Butler's theory of "gender performativity," which she first introduced in *Gender Trouble*, has encouraged gender/queer studies by showing that gender is not necessarily binary and fixed, but that gender can be fluid and not necessarily determined by sex.

In addition to being a noted theorist, feminist, and philosopher, Butler is an activist.⁴² In "The End of Sexual Difference" of *Undoing Gender*, Butler expresses, "Feminist theory is never fully distinct from feminism as a social movement" (175). Butler also mentions how she faced pressure from the Vatican for using gender instead of sex at a 1995 UN conference. She writes that the Vatican "not only denounced the term gender as a code for homosexuality but insisted that the platform language return to the notion of sex" (*Undoing* 182).

The Vatican's fear that gender may propagate homosexuality is pertinent to Butler's gender theory. On 22 December 2008, Pope Benedict XVI gave an end-

⁴⁰ In the preface of the second edition (1999), Butler herself declares that it is out of her expectation that *Gender Trouble* has been receiving so much attention from not just the academic fields but also people whose genders were/are considered abnormal and "queer."

⁴¹ In 1955, the term "gender role" was first introduced by John Money, a celebrated professor of John Hopkins University. Then, during the 1970s the distinction between sex and gender—while sex is a natural given, gender is a social construction—was proposed by the second wave feminists.

⁴² Butler has served as the chair of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission board, now called OutRight Action International, a global ally to the LGBTI.

of-the-year message in which he talked about the issue of gender. According to academic theologian Angela McRobbie, the pope “has one particular theorist in mind when he lectures,” that is, Judith Butler, who was also “the real source of the pope’s ambivalent fear and admiration.”⁴³ McRobbie further comments, “So far no feminist philosopher has won this critical attention from a holy father.” Peter Popham notes that the Pope repeatedly turns to the questions of gender.⁴⁴ Interestingly, in his 2012 Christmas greetings, Pope Benedict XVI further argues that it is Simone de Beauvoir’s words, “one is not born a woman, one becomes so,” which “lay the foundation for what is put forward today under the term ‘gender’ as a new philosophy of sexuality.”⁴⁵ Benedict XVI’s successor, Pope Francis has also repeatedly criticized gender theory and considers it “ideological colonization.”⁴⁶ Pope Francis recently changed his attitude regarding his own acceptance of homosexuals, saying: “If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?” Despite this change of rhetoric from the Pope, David Paternotte argues that the likelihood of such change for the church as a whole is highly unlikely.⁴⁷

Bruno Perreau remarks that in the winter of 2012 and 2013, the scope of demonstrations against same-sex marriage in France was “unprecedented” (57), mostly supported by the Vatican (37).⁴⁸ The French opponents are not only against gay marriage; they think the “growing empire” of gender theory is invading the nation and attacking the school curricula (Perreau 2). The French Education Minister, Vincent Peillon, according to David Paternotte, was compelled to repeatedly argue that “French schools were not teaching ‘gender theory,’ implying the existence of such a theory.” The demonstrators denounced “gender theory” and took it as a gender conspiracy and “gender ideology” developed in the United States.⁴⁹ According to Perreau, Butler is the most known American scholar and has been targeted as an invader and terrorist as a result of the translation of her works in France. Perreau asks, “What do French opponents of queer theory mean when they talk of an ‘American’ theory? Why do they turn Judith Butler into

⁴³ See Angela McRobbie’s “The pope doth protest.”

⁴⁴ See Peter Popham’s “Meditation on gender lands Pope in hot water.”

⁴⁵ See “Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI on the Occasion of Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia” (2012).

⁴⁶ See Cindy Wooden’s “Pope Francis criticises gender theory ‘indoctrination.’”

⁴⁷ See David Paternotte’s “Christian Trouble: The Catholic Church and the Subversion of Gender.”

⁴⁸ Perreau notes that other European countries, such as Belgium, Italy, Germany and Poland also have polemics over gender theory, but not so vehemently (57).

⁴⁹ According to Perreau, French people did not use the word “queer” until in the mid-2000s some French TV shows or series used it as “a promotional device,” that is, as “a gay marketing strategy,” targeting at the gay audience (94-5).

the symbol of a theory they claim to oppose?” (75). Perreau agrees with Alain de Benoist (founder of Research and Study Group for European Civilization, Greece), who explains:

The notion of “gender” as used in the theory of the same name appeared in the 1950s and 1960s in clinical studies of pathological categories such as hermaphroditism, intersexuality, and transsexuality. In the United States, gender theory then became popular among feminist movements, followed by the major universities, where “gender studies” soon displaced the earlier “feminist studies” and “women’s studies.” In 1990, Judith Butler provided the canonical form of the theory in a book that enjoyed nearly worldwide success. (qtd. in Perreau 74)

This paper has shown how Butler’s ideas of sex, gender, and sexuality, especially during her early writings, are greatly influenced by three French theorists: Beauvoir, Wittig, and Foucault. Their influence underscores the irony that Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, a book rooted in French theory, has been so disturbing to French anti-gay marriage opponents, intellectuals and even the Vatican.⁵⁰ Butler’s ideas and her theory of sex and gender obviously still matter greatly in this age.

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⁵⁰ In *Queer Theory* Perreau has given very detailed explanations of how the French “reception” of gender/queer theory is different from Belgium, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Portugal. While the latter have had pragmatic debates, France focused on theoretical concerns of national identity and ideological invasion. In addition to political campaigns, social movements, and educational policies, gender/queer theory has also greatly affected intellectual battles.

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試論茱蒂絲·巴特勒 (Judith Butler) 性別理論之建構起源與策略

摘要

茱蒂絲·巴特勒 (Judith Butler) 之《性別惑亂—女性主義與身分顛覆》(Gender Trouble)，自1990年出版後，立即引起各界熱烈關注與討論，更推動酷兒理論與性別議題的研究熱潮，至今仍受許多研究領域之重視與運用。值得注意的是：在科技與網路發達的今日世界，即使性別與性別議題早已更為複雜且多元化，巴特勒及其論述在當代社會仍然扮演極為重要的角色。除了學術界，巴特勒的性別論述至今仍帶給梵蒂岡高度的壓力與困擾，而近年在法國巴黎舉行的多次大規模反同性婚姻示威活動，更視巴特勒的性別論述為文化與思想侵略，認為對法國社會造成動盪與不安。事實上，巴特勒之性別論述深受法國哲學家與思想家的影響。本文主要探討巴特勒在建立其性別論述之初期，如何受到法國三位重要學者：西蒙·波娃，莫尼克·維蒂格以及傅柯的影響。本文認為：透過對這三位法國思想家的討論、批評、修正與整合，巴特勒逐漸發展出其性別理論的脈絡與觀點。此外，本文也針對巴特勒如何混淆與混用上述三學者的問題提出質疑與探討。

關鍵字：茱蒂絲·巴特勒、西蒙·波娃、莫尼克·維蒂格、傅柯、性、性別

