

## APC Podcast 1.4: Jen Manion on What's Left of Queer Theory Now?

### Key terms & concepts

**gender binary:** “The distinction between feminine and masculine where these are regarded as the only two versions of how one might be gendered. This binary has come under critical scrutiny, especially since the 1990s with the emergence of **queer** and poststructural theorizations of gender.”<sup>1</sup>

**non binary:** Most people – including most transgender people – are either male or female. But some people don't neatly fit into the categories of "man" or "woman," or "male" or "female." For example, some people have a gender that blends elements of being a man or a woman, or a gender that is different than either male or female. Some people don't identify with any gender. Some people's gender changes over time. People whose gender is not male or female use many different terms to describe themselves, with non-binary being one of the most common. Other terms include genderqueer, agender, bigender, and more. None of these terms mean exactly the same thing – but all speak to an experience of gender that is not simply male or female.<sup>2</sup>

**queer:** “Word for strange or odd which was reclaimed in the 1990s to refer to people of divergent sexual orientations who might be part of the **LGBT** communities. Intended to transcend the binarisms of lesbian and gay and to signal the fluidity of sexed and gendered identities, queer has socially become increasingly identified with a particular sub-section of the LGBT communities as a highly fashion-conscious, stylized group of people. Queer is thus both a practice and a disposition.”<sup>3</sup>

**queer theory:** A gender theory which emerged in the early 1990s, rejecting sex and gender binarisms, that is the division of people into female and male based on their biological sex, in favour of a recognition of the fluidity and ambiguity of both gender identity and sexuality. Queer and queer theory provided opportunities for coalition building for gender activists, including trans people, beyond identity categories. Queer theory critiques heteronormativity. It encompasses both the analysis of 'queerness' and using queer strategies to interpret texts and sign systems. Key theorists associated with queer theory include Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, Jack (Judith) Halberstam, Jay Prosser, Leo Bersani, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Lee Edelman, Annemarie Jagose, and Jasbir K. Puar.<sup>4</sup>

**power:** “The ability to exert influence and control in a given situation. Power can be economic, social, political, physical, psychological, externally applied, or internalized. Gender scholars of the 1970s and 1980s often regarded power as a top-down issue, leading to the oppression of women and homosexuals, for example. However, under the influence of the work of Michel Foucault, who described power as distributed and not one-directional, gender scholars from the 1990s placed greater emphasis on the power of disadvantaged people to resist their oppression, and also engaged more sustainedly with the question of how power operates to induce people to self-discipline themselves.”<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> A Dictionary of Gender Studies, Oxford University Press, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> From National Center for Transgender Equality (<https://transequality.org/issues/resources/understanding-non-binary-people-how-to-be-respectful-and-supportive>)

<sup>3</sup> A Dictionary of Gender Studies, Oxford University Press, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> A Dictionary of Gender Studies, Oxford University Press, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> A Dictionary of Gender Studies, Oxford University Press, 2017.

**Passing:** Passing refers to an individual's ability to be viewed as having a particular gender, or sexual orientation, or race which may not conform to how they are officially classified.<sup>6</sup>

**Transgender:** Refers to gender identity and includes people who identify as female or male but were born or assigned the other sex at birth, people who identify as neither female or male, as a combination of both, or as genderfluid. Transgender as a term gained greater prominence from the 1990s onwards when the theoretical trend in gender scholarship, for example in the work of Judith Butler, to refuse binarisms such as male and female and regard them as cultural constructions became more common.<sup>7</sup>

Please see full list of definitions from Trans Student Educational Resources<sup>8</sup>

**Transgender studies:** According to Susan Stryker, "If queer theory was born of the union of sexuality studies and feminism, transgender studies can be considered queer theory's evil twin: it has the same parentage but willfully disrupts the privileged family narratives that favor sexual identity labels (like gay, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual) over the gender categories (like man and woman) that enable desire to take shape and find its aim."<sup>9</sup>

**Transgender Studies Quarterly:** "TSQ or Transgender Studies Quarterly" is the first peer-reviewed academic journal on transgender scholarship journal rooted in a non medical and instead analytical cultural approach. Founded by Susan Stryker.

Susan Stryker, author of:

Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria

Transgender Studies Reader 1 & Transgender Studies Reader 2

Transgender History

Queer Pulp: Perverse Passions from the Golden Age of the Paperback

Gay by the Bay: A History of Queer Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Judith Butler, foundational works include:

Undoing gender

Bodies that matter : on the discursive limits of "sex"

Gender trouble : feminism and the subversion of identity

Judith Butler's influential work "Gender Trouble" 1990: "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. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender."<sup>10</sup>

Video "Judith Butler: Your Behavior Creates Your Gender"<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> A Dictionary of Gender Studies, Oxford University Press, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> A Dictionary of Gender Studies, Oxford University Press, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.transstudent.org/about/definitions/>

<sup>9</sup> Stryker, Susan. "Transgender Studies: Queer Theory's Evil Twin." GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies, vol. 10 no. 2, 2004, pp. 212-215. Project MUSE, [muse.jhu.edu/article/54599](http://muse.jhu.edu/article/54599).

<sup>10</sup> Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge, 1999. [https://franklin.library.upenn.edu/catalog/FRANKLIN\\_9977330153503681](https://franklin.library.upenn.edu/catalog/FRANKLIN_9977330153503681)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bo7o2LYATDc>

**Gender Performativity:** Judith Butler questions the belief that certain gendered behaviors are natural, illustrating the ways that one's learned performance of gendered behavior (what we commonly associate with femininity and masculinity) is an act of sorts, a performance, one that is imposed upon us by normative heterosexuality. Butler thus offers what she herself calls "a more radical use of the doctrine of constitution that takes the social agent as an object rather than the subject of constitutive acts"(Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." 1990) In other words, Butler questions the extent to which we can assume that a given individual can be said to constitute him- or herself; she wonders to what extent our acts are determined for us, rather, by our place within language and convention.<sup>12</sup>

Jack Halberstam

Toward a Trans\* Feminism by Jack Halberstam  
Trans: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability  
Gaga Feminism : Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal

Jen Manion's blog : <https://crossinggender.tumblr.com>

Jen Manion's book: "U.S. women's history : untangling the threads of sisterhood"

---

<sup>12</sup> Felluga, Dino. "Modules on Butler: On Gender and Sex." Introductory Guide to Critical Theory. <<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/genderandsex/modules/butlergendersex.html>>.