

THE  
TROUBLE  
WITH  
THE  
BINARY



disability



gender trouble



motherhood

gender binary

performance

gender



non-conformity

sexuality

womanhood

nonbinary



drag

expression



academia

performativity



hegemonic femininity



# Gender Trouble



Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*

revolutionized the concept of gender theory in relation to the idea of gender, sex, and sexuality.

She states that there is not a natural aspect to gender identity, and uses the concept of performativity to explain this.

\*WARNING: ARBITRARY LABELS

feminine.

MASCULINE



HONEY, ENFORCING STRICT IDEAS OF GENDER IS DESTROYING US!



Gender is not intrinsic.

It is prescribed.

gender is an ongoing performative act.

gender is socially constructed

sex ≠ gender

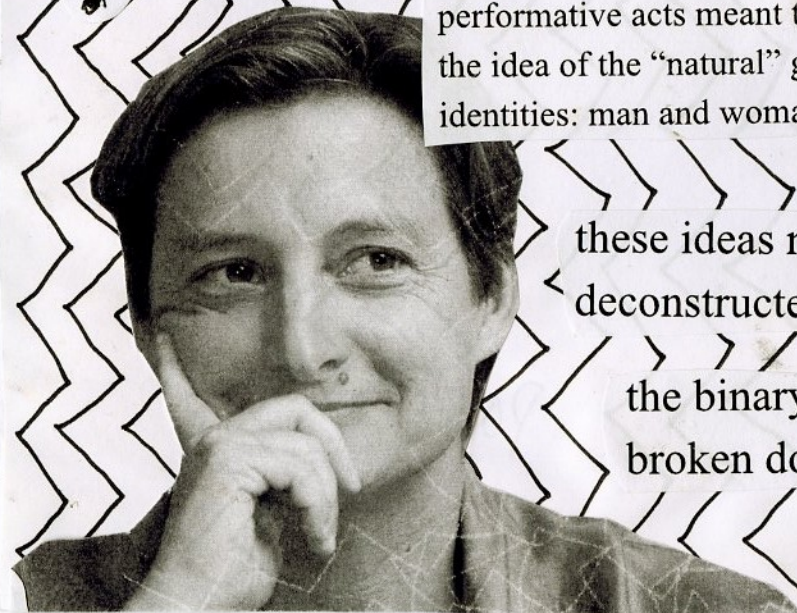


*GENDER PERFORMATIVITY*

gender is socially constructed through performative acts meant to maintain the idea of the "natural" gender identities: man and woman.

these ideas must be deconstructed.

the binary must be broken down.





— Performing Motherhood in a Disablist World:  
— Dilemmas of Motherhood, Femininity and Disability

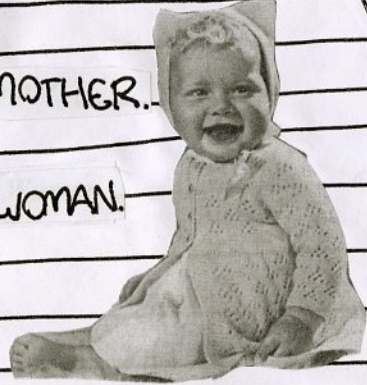
“Women are expected to aspire to norms of femininity that include ideal motherhood, where mothers are positioned as ever available, ever nurturing providers of active, involved and expert mothering”

These expectations are impossible to uphold.



-INADEQUATE MOTHER.

-INADEQUATE WOMAN.



Motherhood, like femininity, is not “natural” to women; it is learned. Motherhood can be deemed as performative as well.

Women in this study were very aware of this concept of ideal motherhood, and felt as if they did not achieve it.



Bodily Differences

Mother's disabilities create difficulties to conform to the ideal mother role.

Embodiment

Inaccessible spaces, government policies, and social stigma make it hard to embody the role as the ideal mother.



If we are to break down the gender binary, if we are to lift the societal restraint of gender expectations, these women will flourish.

The destruction of the gender binary will enable disabled mothers to be confident in themselves and in their parenting.

*Disabled women are resilient.*

*Disabled women are creative.*

*Disabled women are good mothers.*





## Virtual Youth:

Non-Heterosexual Young People's Use of the Internet to Negotiate Their Identities and Socio-Sexual Relations

# HER

"online platforms are used by non-heterosexual young people to rehearse new sexual identities, same-sex friendships and intimate relationships."

"LGBT-orientated social networking websites are spaces of relative safety, where young people can practice important turning points such as sexual disclosure before telling friends and family."

PERFORMING IDENTITY

### Performativity and Embodiment

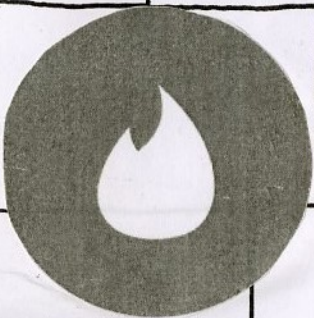
Young LGBT individual's performance of gender both online and offline is generally atypical, which can lead to social exclusion.

Online interactions are highly performative, and using labels to describe identities is very common within online communities.

Username or email address \*

Password \*

LOGIN  Remember me



IDENTITY



Young LGBT people are using the internet to break down binaries of masculinity and femininity



Young LGBT people are breaking down the ways we think about and express ourselves within socio-sexual relations



COMMUNITY



The internet is very important for young LGBT individuals, fostering community and safe spaces where they otherwise would not have the opportunity for community.

These spaces affect the offline world as well, allowing these young people to find others like them in the offline world, and embody their labels in a physical setting.

The internet is not just a "rehearsal" of labels and identities, but simply another medium of expressing these labels and identities, which often blends in with the physical world.



When there is no physical community, where do you GO?

This area of study is incredibly under-researched.



# Drag Kings in the New Wave

"Bridging gaps between the academic,  
the artistic, and the 'man' on the street."

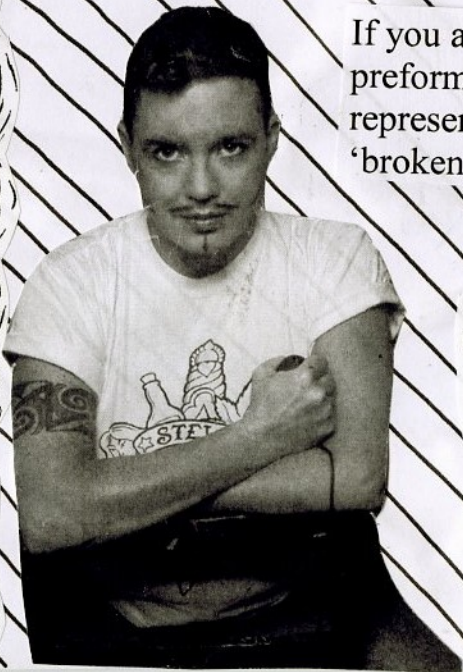
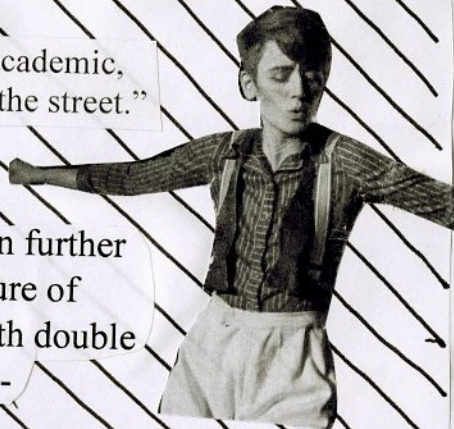
Subversion in drag goes even further  
beyond the "imitative structure of  
gender" Butler mentions, with double  
drag, androgyny, and double-  
sexuality.

creation of an illusion

If you are feminine presenting and  
perform drag, it exemplifies the idea  
of gender fluidity, but does not  
subvert the gender binary.

If you are masculine presenting and  
perform drag, gender fluidity is not  
represented, but the gender binary is  
'broken down'

disruption  
to the  
binary.



# GENDER: a recreational pursuit



In each instance, ideas of traditional  
femininity and masculinity are broken  
down through performance.

There is no natural gender  
presentation, and drag kings continue  
to perform these traditional ideas of  
masculinity not as a critique of natural  
gender presentation, but prescribed  
gender presentation.



BUTCH  
≠  
DRAG  
KING.



FREAK!



The Razor Edge of Accommodation:  
Violent Perception and the Nonbinary Body in *Gender Failure*

"Although an arbitrary system, the gender binary serves as a mechanism of so-called social truth: because the nonbinary reality rejects this truth the nonbinary gender performance not only appears unintelligible to the binary other but also represents a threat to social stability."



Nonbinary individuals are people who identify as neither man nor woman—challenging the standard man/woman dichotomy.



Within a phenomenological framework, knowledge of the self is always sound, and knowledge of the other is imperfect.

Circle one:

- a) Man
- b) Woman
- neither

This makes the binary "other" fare much better as the binary "other" conforms to expectations of this dichotomy, and nonbinary identities do not.

The feelings of an individual do not always relate to how that individual is perceived. This breaking down of the performativity of gender can incite violence upon nonbinary individuals, in relation to how they are perceived.



ALL-GENDER RESTROOM



# GENDER FAILURE

Often, nonbinary individuals are forced to perform society's expectations of sex and gender, to ensure safety and non-violence.

NONBINARY

By breaking down the gender binary, and expanding the vocabulary individuals use to express themselves, we are creating a safer world for nonbinary people.

THEY/THEM

girl failure

The gender binary must be broken down:

MAN failure

to keep people safe.

to make people feel comfortable in the ways they are perceived.

to release people from the harmful expectations of binary gender roles.



"RETIRED FROM GENDER"



# Femininities/masculinities and a Sense of Self:

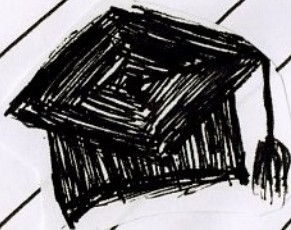
## Thinking Gendered Academic Identities and the Intellectual Self

Women have long fought for a space in the academic and intellectual world, and the image of the intellectual is still largely masculine.

A+

What does it mean to be an academic?

Academic life is highly gendered, rejecting traditional femininity and women as a whole.



The intellectual self exists as a way to assert selfhood within an academic setting.

The performative aspect of academic work is capable of disruption.



In order to create a more comfortable space for women in academia, we must break down the role of gender in these spaces.

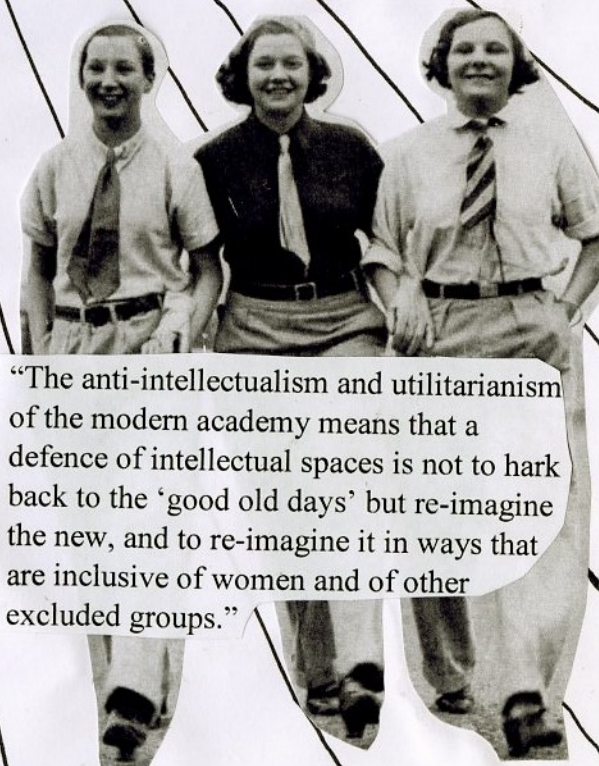


Destruction of the binary will allow us to rethink the academic self and create spaces for women within the academy and outside of it.

Some women may hyper-perform within these spaces to compensate for the rejection of women within academia.

MIND/BODY DUALISM

break  
down  
the  
binary.



"The anti-intellectualism and utilitarianism of the modern academy means that a defence of intellectual spaces is not to hark back to the 'good old days' but re-imagine the new, and to re-imagine it in ways that are inclusive of women and of other excluded groups."





### Statement of Intent

I created *The Trouble with The Binary* to exemplify ideas expressed in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, and more specifically, the concepts of performative gender and the gender binary. I created a handmade zine to pay homage to the impact of activist zines in earlier waves of feminism. I set the project up by deciding upon my primary source (*Gender Trouble*), really delving into what other scholars had applied her concepts to and building up a central focus for the zine.

I chose five separate sources, the first being *Performing Motherhood in a Disablist World: Dilemmas of Motherhood, Femininity and Disability*. This article discusses the difficulties of being a disabled mother, with particular emphasis on performing motherhood, similar to how one performs gender. The second, *Virtual Youth: Non-Heterosexual Young People's Use of the Internet to Negotiate Their Identities and Socio-Sexual Relations* which discusses the internet's role in LGBT youths' gender/sexuality performance, both on and off of the internet. *Drag Kings in the New Wave*, the third text, explores the somewhat unknown art of Drag Kings, and their relationship with the gender binary, performing gender, and sexuality. The fourth text, *The Razor Edge of Accommodation: Violent Perception and the Nonbinary Body in "Gender Failure"* focuses on *Gender Failure*, a biography by Rae Spoon and Ivan Coyote- two nonbinary individuals- that recounts their experiences with the gender binary as nonbinary people. The last article I chose, *Femininities/Masculinities and a Sense of Self: Thinking Gendered Academic Identities and the Intellectual Self*, illustrates how the gender binary and performance of gender impacts life in the academic world.

All of these articles illustrate the negative aspects of the gender binary in some way. I used a mix of text, photos, and hand-drawn illustrations to point to the main takeaways of each article and show how it relates to Butler's theories of performativity and the gender binary. Overall, Butler has made an incredibly significant contribution to gender theory. The concept of performativity in relation to the social construct of the gender binary has revolutionized how many think of gender, leading to leaps and bounds being made across fields and topics. *Gender Trouble* has created a lasting impact, and the research and analyses in these texts portrays this impact with the application of Butler's concepts. These texts really drive home the (usually negative) impact of the social construction of gender, and the extreme pressure to perform to this construction.

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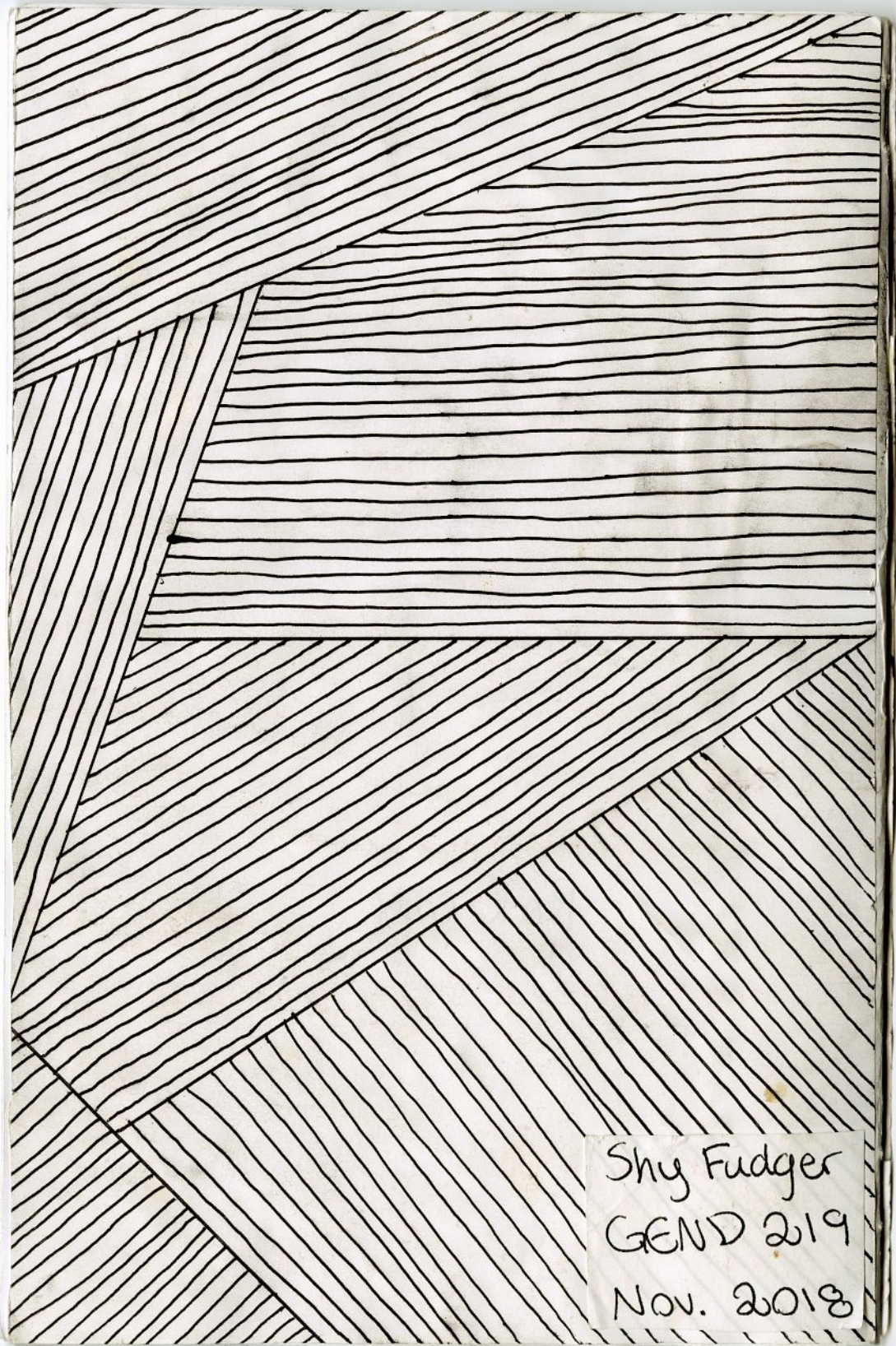
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Shy Fudger

GEND 219

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