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GOOOD MORNING!

'The Rainbow Pens of Doom Meet Judith Butler'



Judith Butler on the culture wars, JK Rowling and living in “anti-intelle...

The philosopher and gender theorist discusses tensions in the feminist movement over trans rights.

<https://www.newstatesman.com/international/2020/09/judith-butler-culture-wars-jk-rowli...>

i) 'It is very important never to exclude and marginalise people, apart from when you are excluding and marginalising female people who centre female people in the movement for the liberation of female people from male dominance.'

By which I will over-write the material stability of sex.

Alona Ferber: In *Gender Trouble*, you wrote that "contemporary feminist debates over the meanings of gender lead time and again to a certain sense of trouble, as if the indeterminacy of gender might eventually culminate in the failure of feminism". How far do ideas you explored in that book 30 years ago help explain how the trans rights debate has moved into mainstream culture and politics?

Judith Butler: I want to first question whether trans-exclusionary feminists are really the same as mainstream feminists. If you are right to identify the one with the other, then a feminist position opposing transphobia is a marginal position. I think this may be wrong. My wager is that most feminists support trans rights and oppose all forms of transphobia. So I find it worrisome that suddenly the trans-exclusionary radical feminist position is understood as commonly accepted or even mainstream. I think it is actually a fringe movement that is seeking to speak in the name of the mainstream, and that our responsibility is to refuse to let that happen.

AF: One example of mainstream public discourse on this issue in the UK is the argument about allowing people to self-identify in terms of their gender. In an open letter she published in June, JK Rowling articulated the concern that this would "throw open the doors of bathrooms and

We're not.
Mainstream feminism is dominated by women who have either drunk the Kool-aid or have to pretend to keep their jobs or funding.

They are institutional power. We are the grassroots.

ITS VERY
SAD TO
EXCLUDE
AND
MARGINALISE
PEOPLE
APART
FROM WHEN
YOU ARE
EXCLUDING
FEMALE
PEOPLE
FROM THE
MOVEMENT
FOR THE
LIBERATION
OF FEMALE
PEOPLE.
THEN WE
MUST BE
RESOLUTE.

And they have sold us down the river in order to placate male power. Male power. What's that? SAYS JUDY.

ii) 'Its very important not to reproduce patriarchal gendered stereotypes apart from when you need to completely dismiss women's fears of male violence by repeatedly calling them hysterical 'fantasists.'

Bonus - 'who give a shit about cocks, I mean, it's not like we live in

It's extremely important not to reproduce gendered stereotypes except when you need to dismiss other women's fears of male violence by calling them delusional, hysterical, paranoid fantasists. So changing rooms to any man who believes or feels he's a woman", much so potentially putting women at risk of violence.

fucking patriarchal Freudian bullshit.

This is happening.
But of course, women are to blame for this fear.
No, it's people with penises who are raised in a society that codes the penis as a signifier of dominance & entitlement & haven of distasteful themselves of threat. (It's people with penises that have no respect for women boundaries that are a threat.)

JB: If we look closely at the example that you characterise as "mainstream" we can see that a domain of fantasy is at work, one which reflects more about the feminist who has such a fear than any actually existing situation in trans life. The feminist who holds such a view presumes that the penis does define the person, and that anyone with a penis would identify as a woman for the purposes of entering such changing rooms and posing a threat to the women inside. It assumes that the penis is the threat, or that any person who has a penis who identifies as a woman is engaging in a base, deceitful, and harmful form of disguise. This is a rich fantasy, and one that comes from powerful fears, but it does not describe a social reality. Trans women are often discriminated against in men's bathrooms, and their modes of self-identification are ways of describing a lived reality, one that cannot be captured or regulated by the fantasies brought to bear upon them. The fact that such fantasies pass as public argument is itself cause for worry.

It's interesting how you suddenly don't understand ANYTHING about phallocentrism. Are you even trained in French philosophy?

AF: I want to challenge you on the term "terf", or trans-exclusionary radical feminist, which some people see as a slur.

Put male projections brought to bear on women's political resistance. All cool.

She describes women's fear of male violence as a fantasy THREE TIMES HERE. This is staggering Freudian patriarchal victim blaming bullshit.

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Put male projections brought to bear on women's political resistance. All cool.

in a world where men have invested their dicks with omnipotent power and used them as a weapon against women or anything is it?'

Phallocentrism you say? What's that? Derrida who? You think I know anything a French philosophy??? LOL.

iii) 'I'm very concerned about gender and violence but I have totally failed to notice the tsunami of misogynist sexualised abuse and intimidation being unleashed on non-compliant women but I am TOTALLY the authority on this.

They're probably just fantasising.

Oh, and prudes.'

Well then nothing you say on this matter has a single strand of credibility.

JB: I am not aware that terf is used as a slur. I wonder what name self-declared feminists who wish to exclude trans women from women's spaces would be called? If they do favour exclusion, why not call them exclusionary? If they understand themselves as belonging to that strain of radical feminism that opposes gender reassignment, why not call them radical feminists? My only regret is that there was a movement of radical sexual freedom that once travelled under the name of radical feminism, but it has sadly morphed into a campaign to pathologise trans and gender non-conforming peoples. My sense is that we have to renew the feminist commitment to gender equality and gender freedom in order to affirm the complexity of gendered lives as they are currently being lived. Or we could try and abolish gendered expectations totally.

AF: The consensus among progressives seems to be that feminists who are on JK Rowling's side of the argument are on the wrong side of history. Is this fair, or is there any merit in their arguments?

JB: Let us be clear that the debate here is not between feminists and trans activists. There are trans-affirmative feminists, and many trans people are also committed feminists. So one clear problem is the framing that acts as if the debate is between feminists and trans people. It is not. One reason to militate against this framing is because trans activism is linked to queer activism and to feminist legacies that

Queer Theory is not and should never have been included under the umbrella of feminism. As your contempt for women's concerns about male violence makes abundantly clear here.

Radical Sexual freedom for women requires freedom from patriarchal male sexual violence. GENDER EQUALITY + FREEDOM? SERIOUSLY - FUCK OFF.

Yes. That's on our side.

FEMINISTS. PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT AND CENTRE WOMEN? WE ARE GNC people. Its between people who centre the interests of female people & people who don't.

iv) 'It's very important to wilfully misconstrue the entire basis of second wave feminism as based on a biological determinist notion of gender, because we have to trouble gender, mostly by asserting that it exists in a real sense. They are the bad essentialists. HONEST.'

Not when you take that to mean; biology is irrelevant to the power structure and being a man or a woman is an essentialised gender identity, remain very alive today. Feminism has always been committed to the proposition that the social meanings of what it is to be a man or a woman are not yet settled. We tell histories about what it meant to be a woman at a certain time and place, and we track the transformation of those categories over time. *As long as we ignore everything about how that is related to the subjugation of women.*

We depend on gender as a historical category, and that means we do not yet know all the ways it may come to signify, and we are open to new understandings of its social meanings. It would be a disaster for feminism to return either to a strictly biological understanding of gender or to reduce social conduct to a body part or to impose fearful fantasies, their own anxieties, on trans women... Their abiding and very real sense of gender ought to be recognised socially and publicly as a relatively simple matter of according another human dignity. The trans-exclusionary radical feminist position attacks the dignity of trans people. *How about, it's oppressive bullshit?*

AF: In *Gender Trouble* you asked whether, by seeking to represent a particular idea of women, feminists participate in the same dynamics of oppression and heteronormativity that they are trying to shift. In the light of the bitter arguments playing out within feminism now, does the same still apply? *Did I mention the word 'HUSTLE' ???*

Women create oppression by describing it so just stop describing your oppression okay? *Also, this is the rhetoric used to justify the vilification + attacks against women so, well played.*

DID I MENTION THE WORD 'HUSTLE' ???

NOT WHEN IT REQUIRES ERASING SEX IN LAW AND OUR POLITICAL RECOGNITION.

→ EYESROLL

v) 'Blah blah gender freedom blah blah gender equality blah liberal individualist bullshit blah IT'S VERY BAD WHEN YOU MAKE 'TACIT ASSUMPTIONS' THAT REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH FEMALE PEOPLE.'

I mean, who the fuck cares why women are oppressed anyway, amirite??

Because male power & entitlement doesn't exist + it's much better to just let men + their interests take over women's liberation project.

JB: As I remember the argument in *Gender Trouble* (written more than 30 years ago), the point was rather different. First, one does not have to be a woman to be a feminist, and we should not confuse the categories.

Men who are feminists, non-binary and trans people who are feminists, are part of the movement if they hold to the basic propositions of freedom and equality that are part of any feminist political struggle.

When laws and social policies represent women, they make tacit decisions about who counts as a woman, and very often make presuppositions about what a woman is. We have seen this in the domain of reproductive rights. So the question I was asking then is: do we need to have a settled idea of women, or of any gender, in order to advance feminist goals?

I put the question that way... to remind us that feminists are committed to thinking about the diverse and historically shifting meanings of gender, and to the ideals of gender freedom. By gender freedom, I do not mean we all get to choose our gender. Rather, we get to make a political claim to live freely and without fear of discrimination and violence against the genders that we are. Many people who were assigned "female" at birth never felt at home with that assignment, and those people (including me) tell all of us something important about the

Handwritten notes:

- You are sucking a basic liberal Jody.
- We assume laws about reproduction rights refer to people who do reproductive labor. Such TACTICNESS
- Gender ESSENTIALISM
- How're female? I know you're not strong should be strong
- Jody: with GENDER OR WITH BEING? FEMALE. Because that would be internalized misogyny.
- No. They refer to female people. Or did. It's not that. It's SELF EVIDENT.
- You can redefine feminism as nothing to do with female liberation + an exercise in gender freedom all you want - THAT IS NOT FEMINISM.

vi) 'I will now go on about how terrible it is to make 'demeaning' and 'phobic' misogynist 'caricatures' like I didn't just spend an entire paragraph calling women concerned about male violence hysterical fantasists.'

Sure you are Judy. But you don't know
 what is a slur. So you know absolutely fuck
 all about the victimisation we are subject to.

JB: I am against online abuse of all kinds. I confess to being perplexed
 by the fact that you point out the abuse levelled against JK Rowling, but
 you do not cite the abuse against trans people and their allies
 that happens online and in person. I disagree with JK Rowling's view on
 trans people, but I do not think she should suffer harassment and
 threats. Let us also remember, though, the threats against trans people
 in places like Brazil, the harassment of trans people in the streets and
 on the job in places like Poland and Romania - or indeed right here in
 the US. So if we are going to object to harassment and threats, as we
 surely should, we should also make sure we have a large picture of
 where that is happening, who is most profoundly affected, and whether
 it is tolerated by those who should be opposing it. It won't do to say that
 threats against some people are tolerable but against others are
 intolerable.

AF: You weren't a signatory to the open letter on "cancel
 culture" in Harper's this summer, but did its arguments resonate with
 you?

JB: I have mixed feelings about that letter. On the one hand, I am an
 educator and writer and believe in slow and thoughtful debate. I learn
 from being confronted and challenged, and I accept that I have made
 some significant errors in my public life. If someone then said I should

What a surprise.

What's the point of just dismissing people as hysterics?

So left
 me just
 zoom out
 to a global
 scale so
 I can
 completely
 ignore the
 most insane
 wave of
 misogynist
 abuse
 against
 women.
 They're just
 being
 hysterical
 anyway.
 Well
 apart
 from that,
 just need to
 dismiss people as
 hysterics.

HAND
 WAIVE.

Now
 let's
 talk
 about
 the
 abuse
 that
 matters
 And has
 nothing
 to do
 with
 the
 feminist
 women in
 the UK
 you
 evidently
 give not
 a single
 fuck
 about -

viii) 'I do kind of think we should have a free exchange of ideas and now I'm going to pretend I don't understand that the Harper's letter was about censorious authoritarianism on the left and not about trying to shut down demands for justice.'

But, it's probably okay to say that about those two hypotheses.

not be read or listened to as a result of those errors, well, I would object internally, since I don't think any mistake a person made can, or should, summarise that person. We live in time; we err, sometimes seriously; and if we are lucky, we change precisely because of interactions that let us see things differently. Well, maybe you should actually listen to your critics then?

On the other hand, some of those signatories were taking aim at Black Lives Matter as if the loud and public opposition to racism were itself uncivilised behaviour. Some of them have opposed legal rights for Palestine. Others have [allegedly] committed sexual harassment. And yet others do not wish to be challenged on their racism. Democracy requires a good challenge, and it does not always arrive in soft tones. So I am not in favour of neutralising the strong political demands for justice on the part of subjugated people. When one has not been heard for decades, the cry for justice is bound to be loud. It's the authoritarianism people was objecting to. Which is not justice.

AF: This year, you published, *The Force of Nonviolence*. Does the idea of "radical equality", which you discuss in the book, have any relevance for the feminist movement?

JB: My point in the recent book is to suggest that we rethink equality in terms of interdependency. We tend to say that one person should be treated the same as another, and we measure whether or not equality

Who? And the signatories of that letter explicitly said that neither were they

COOL. So you are in favour of mutual recognition then. How about you try to do that then -

ix) 'Now I'm going to say a bunch of ostensibly decent stuff about recognising dependency but I'm just going to completely ignore that that patriarchal structure is fundamentally based on the denial of dependence on women's bodies because NO ONE TALK ABOUT WOMEN'S BODIES.'

It is. So why are you supporting an entirely individualist and anti materialist class based analysis then?

has been achieved by comparing individual cases. But what if the

individualism - and individualism - is part of the problem? It makes a difference to understand ourselves as living in a world in which we are

fundamentally dependent on others, on institutions, on the Earth, and to see that this life depends on a sustaining organisation for various forms of life. If no one escapes that interdependency, then we are equal in a different sense. We are equally dependent, that is, equally social and ecological, and that means we cease to understand ourselves only as demarcated individuals. If trans-exclusionary radical feminists understood themselves as sharing a world with trans people, in a common struggle for equality, freedom from violence, and for social recognition, there would be no more trans-exclusionary radical feminists. But feminism would surely survive as a coalitional practice and vision of solidarity.

Under present conditions this is what bears no relation to 'social reality.'

AF: You have spoken about the backlash against "gender ideology", and wrote an essay for the New Statesman about it in 2019. Do you see any connection between this and contemporary debates about trans rights?

JB: It is painful to see that Trump's position that gender should be defined by biological sex, and that the evangelical and right-wing Catholic effort to purge "gender" from education and public policy accords with the trans-exclusionary radical feminists' return to

Correct. Nothing in your analysis of the priority of individual gender essence does that.

Solidarity requires the recognition of difference

OW
WOMEN'S BODIES??
DON'T BE SILLY JANE.

We're gender abolitionists. We don't want kids being taught they have gender essence.

x) 'Sex is a medical construct, gender is a historical reality. This is what good feminists believe. Anyone who talks about the relation of women's bodies to the power structure or mentions male dominance is a bigot in league with the Pope.

QED.'

→ ITS NOT BIOLOGICAL ESSENTIALISM.
ITS ANTI GENDER ESSENTIALISM.

biological essentialism. It is a sad day when some feminists promote the

anti-gender ideology position of the most reactionary forces in our

society.

Well maybe you could actually engage with the left-wing radical feminist

AF: What do you think would break this impasse in feminism over trans

rights? What would lead to a more constructive debate?

JB: I suppose a debate, were it possible, would have to reconsider the

ways in which the medical determination of sex functions in relation to

the lived and historical reality of gender.

argued better than just ratiocinating

→ Oh stop talking crap. THERE YOU GO.

SEX IS A MEDICAL CONSTRUCT + GENDER A HISTORICAL REALITY.

2.
SO MUCH FEMINISM.

Anti-feminism -

- 1) Male violence is not a thing and women who are concerned about it are hysterical fantasists.
- 2) Sex does not exist + gender is real.
- 3) Misogynist abuse of women does not register.
- 4) Excluding + marginalising ppl is bad except when they're trans.

...