

GENDER & POWER: THE GENDER AND POWER TOOLKIT

INTRODUCTIONS + HOUSEKEEPING

- Introduction
 - Land acknowledgment: thinking about each of these nations, how do we understand them in relation to gender?
 - *Sé Sullivan: “How did you get your gender? Who gave it to you?”*

Guiding question: *What is gender? How do we begin to think about gender? What is the relationship between gender and race?*

Frye, Marilyn. 1983. “Oppression” in *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. New York: Crossing Press (pg. 1-16).

- “The word ‘oppression’ is a strong word. It repels and attracts. It is dangerous and dangerously fashionable and endangered. It is much misused, and sometimes not incorrectly” (1).
 - Key: what is oppression?
- “The root of the word ‘oppression’ is the element ‘press’....Something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict, or prevent the thing’s motion or mobility. Mold. Immobilize. Reduce” (2).
 - “The experience of oppressed people is the living of one’s life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers...[that] are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction” (4).
 - Oppression is always about *power*. What is power? The ability to coerce, to *press*, and to restrict.
- The birdcage metaphor (4-5).
 - “It is perfectly *obvious* that the bird is surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers, no one of which would be the least hindrance to its flight, but which, by their relations to each other, are as confining as the solid walls of a dungeon” (5).
 - “The ‘inhabitant’ of the ‘cage’ is not an individual but a group, all those of a certain category. If an individual is oppressed, it is in virtue of being a member of a group or category of people that is systematically reduced, molded, immobilized...” (8).
- “...people can and do fail to see the oppression of women because they fail to see macroscopically and hence fail to see the various elements of the situation as systematically related in larger schemes” (7).
 - Oppression is *systemic and systematic*.
- What is not oppression?
 - “If a rich white playboy who lives off income from his investments in South African diamond mines should break a leg in a skiing accident at Aspen and wait

in pain in a blizzard for hours before he is rescued, we may assume that in that period he suffers. *But the suffering comes to an end....Nothing in this picture suggests a structure of barriers and forces...*" (11).

- "The limits imposed by traffic regulations...are part of *a structure which shapes our behavior, not to our reduction and immobilization, but rather to the protection of our continued ability to move and act as we will*" (11).
- "The boundaries of a racial ghetto in an American city serve to some extent to keep white people from going in...But is it a product of the intention, planning and action of whites for the benefit of whites, to secure and maintain privileges that are available to whites generally, as members of the dominant and privileged group...the barrier does not exist in a systematic relationship with other barriers and forces forming a structure oppressive to whites...It is part of a structure which oppresses the ghetto dwellers and thereby...protects and furthers white interests as dominant white culture understands them" (11-12).
- Key: "*One must look at the barrier or force and answer certain questions about it. Who constructs and maintains it? Whose interests are served by its existence? Is it part of a structure which tends to confine, reduce, and immobilize some group? Is the individual a member of the confined group?*" (14).
- "One is marked for application of oppressive pressures by one's membership in some group or category..." (15).
- When we talk about "gender and power," we must understand that power and oppression do not just go hand-in-hand, but oppression is produced through the *systemic* application of power upon groups for the purpose of serving, protecting, and furthering the interests of the dominant group/dominant structures of power.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: 139-168.

- What is *intersectionality*?
 - Intersectionality is about how multiple systems of power are experienced, how they intersect, and how outcomes cannot be understood as simple additive relationships.
 - Intersectionality is **not about identity**.
 - Kimberlé Crenshaw: "Intersectionality Not Identity" - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPtz8TiATJY>
 - It's less about "I **am** an intersectional..." and more about how "The intersections of oppressions **result in** different, unique experiences to those living at those intersections."
- "Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. *Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them.* Similarly, if

a Black woman is harmed because she is in an intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination...But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm" (149).

Butler, Judith. 1993. "Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion" in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge Press (pg. 82-97).

- Why does Butler begin with Althusser's notion of *hailing* or *interpellation*?
 - "Althusser conjectures... 'hailing' or 'interpellation' as a unilateral act, as the power and force of the law to compel fear at the same time that it offers recognition at an expense. In the reprimand the subject not only receives recognition, but attains as well a certain order of social existence..." (82).
 - "Here the performative, the call by the law which seeks to produce a lawful subject, produces a set of consequences that exceed and confound what appears to be the disciplining intention motivation the law. Interpellation thus... creates more than it ever meant to, signifying in excess of any intended referent" (82).
 - Being *hailed* or *interpellated* by the police, Althusser argues, forms subjectivity *and* its violations.
 - In other words, being *hailed* or *interpellated* by law (power) is how we become determined or *constructed* as subjects.
 - "***There is no subject prior to its constructions***, and neither is the subject determined by those constructions; it is always the nexus, the non-space of cultural collision, ***in which the demand to resignify or repeat the very terms which constitute the 'we' cannot be summarily refused, but neither can they be followed in strict obedience...***" (84)
 - For something to be socially-constructed is so that it *both* can never be fully achieved *and* that non-obedience to that construction is punished.
 - Why does this punishment exist? Who is implementing this punishment? We return to Althusser: it is power (not *just* the state but those who work *for* power).
- Why does Butler turn to *Paris is Burning*?
 - Paris is Burning original trailer:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVueHRtpBbg>
 - "To claim that all gender is like drag, or is drag, is to suggest that 'imitation' is at the heart of the *heterosexual* project and its gender binarisms, that ***drag is not a secondary imitation that presupposes a prior and original gender, but that hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations***" (85).
 - Further: ***"***Identifying with a gender under contemporary regimes of power involves identifying with a set of norms that are and are not realizable, and whose power and status precede the identifications by which they are insistently approximated.*** This 'being a man' and 'being a woman' are internally unstable affairs" (86).***

- In other words: as a social construct, gender is being performed by *everyone*. There is no “original” gender to return to—it is all a copy of a copy of a copy.
 - “In this sense, then, ***drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality’s claim on naturalness and originality***” (85).
 - We turn to *Paris is Burning* to show that drag is subversive but *only insofar* as it shows that the gender binary—of which heterosexuality is wrapped up—is not the “natural” or “original” state of being.
- *Paris is Burning* and “realness”:
 - “‘Realness’ is not exactly a category in which one competes; it is a standard that is used to judge any given performance within the established categories....This effect is itself the result of an embodiment of norms, a reiteration of norms, an impersonation of a racial and class norm, a norm which is at once a figure, a figure of a body, which is no particular body, but a morphological ideal that retains the standard which regulates the performance, but which no performance fully approximates...” (88).
 - “For a performance to work, then, means that a reading [i.e., “exposing what fails to work at the level of appearance” or performance] is no longer possible...” (88).
 - “The [contesting of realness] involves the phantasmatic attempt to approximate realness, but it also exposes the norms that regulate realness as *themselves* phantasmatically instituted and sustained....What *Paris is Burning* suggests...is that ***the order of sexual difference is not prior to that of race or class in the constitution of the subject; indeed, that the symbolic is also and at once a racializing set of norms, and that norms of realness by which the subject is produced are racially informed conceptions of ‘sex’...***” (89).
 - To Butler, then, *Paris is Burning* reveals the full performativity of these gendered (and racialized) norms. “Realness” is phantasmic, and moreover, these gendered norms are informed by/co-constructed by race.
 - Gendered norms, then, work through the “...accumulated force of a historically entrenched and entrenching rearticulation...” (91): again, a copy of a copy of a copy of a copy.
- “...prior hegemony also works through and as its ‘resistance’ so that the relation between the marginalized community and the dominative is not, strictly speaking, oppositional....the hegemony that reinscribed the privileges of normative femininity and whiteness wields the final power to *re* naturalize Venus’s body and cross out that prior crossing, an erasure that is her death” (91).

TAKEAWAYS:

- What is gender?
 - According to Butler, gender is a historically-produced *social construction* linked to and enforced by power.
 - Gender is phantasmic, with no “original” or “real” referent.
 - Both “womanhood” and “manhood” are symbols whose perfect embodiment is unattainable, but to which conformity is enforced and deviation from punished.
 - In other words, the gender binary and the “two binary genders” as symbols within the binary are not natural, and everyone is *performing* gender.
 - This does not mean that gender does not matter, especially for “real life.” It instead means that, especially when it comes to the binary genders that we take for granted, we must recognize that those symbols are fictions that we all must attempt to live up to *or be punished*.
 - Whose interests are being advanced because of this? Who has a stake in maintaining the binary gender system?
 - This performance of gender is linked to the physical bodies we occupy (“sex”) but it is also fundamentally linked to productions of race.
 - Think about Venus Xtravaganza: she was killed not *just* because she was a trans woman (always already “performing gender incorrectly” according to the binary gender system) but because she was *also* Latina *and* a trans woman.
 - Oppression comes as the result of power.
 - Power/oppression are also *intersectional*.
- What is power/oppression?