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Psychoanalysis and Sexuation from Clinic to Culture: Reading Lacan with Other Theorists on Sex/Gender Constitution

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Abstract
This paper explores the complex interplay between psychoanalysis, sexuation, and cultural constructions of sex/gender constitution through a critical engagement with Jacques Lacan and other theorists. Drawing on Freud's early work on sexuality and its subsequent reinterpretation by Lacan, the study examines how the symbolic order and the Name-of-the-Father constitute the normative binary sex/gender. It traces the evolution of gender theories, from Stoller's distinction between sex and gender to Butler's performative critique, demonstrating how the Lacanian notion of sexuation challenges biological determinism by situating sexuality within linguistic and cultural frameworks. By engaging with Foucault's concept of discourse and power, the paper interrogates the ideological foundations of sex and gender. It also questions how normative structures regulate desire. The study further examines the possibility of subverting these regulatory frameworks through performativity and re-signification, questioning whether an alternative conceptualization of subjectivity can emerge beyond the phallogocentric order. In doing so, it contributes to contemporary debates on gender, sexuality, and psychoanalytic theory, offering a nuanced understanding of how identities are constructed, maintained, and potentially transformed.

Keywords: Sexuation, Lacanian Psychoanalysis, Sex/Gender and Culture, Subjectivity

1. Sex and Gender: A Theoretical Overview

Sex and gender are so slippery and so intricately related that their contents continuously flow into one another, making it almost impossible to determine where one ends and the other begins. Though gender has always been seen in academia as social and cultural in its origin, sex as a binary categorization of the human population into 'men' and 'women' was largely perceived as biological (Butler, 1990). It was only after the mid-18th century that sex started inquiring into different meanings. For example, Krafft-Ebing's influential book *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) maintains that the sexual instinct is engrained somewhere in the brain, though he is not sure where exactly (Krafft-Ebing, 1886). Sexual behaviour, he writes, is linked to a type of sexual personality/sensibility. Sexuality, referred to by Krafft-Ebing as 'mental individuality,' came to be located in the human psyche rather than anatomy.

Another contemporary thinker, Arnold Davidson, moved a step further away from anatomical determinism. Sexual identity, he writes, is not at all linked to biology or to "the anatomical structure of the internal and external genital organs" (Davidson, 1987, pp. 21–22). It is rather "a matter of impulses, tastes, aptitudes, satisfactions, and psychic traits" (Davidson, 1987, pp. 21–22). Towards the end of his career, Sigmund Freud (1940), discards what has been referred to as the 'prevailing view' of sexual life. Freud maintains that the prevailing view assumes that the desire for opposite-sex relations emerges at puberty and that "sexual life consists essentially in an endeavor to bring one's own genitals into contact with those of someone of the opposite sex" (Freud, 1940, p. 123). However, Freud mentions three facts that go against this narrow framework. First, it cannot be denied that there are people who are attracted to their own sex. Second, this framework does not include perverts (people who disregard sexual organs and their use despite having desires exactly like sexual ones). Third, children take an interest in and experience excitation of their genitals. Based on these neglected facts, Freud proposed three findings that explain them: (a) sexual life begins just after birth not at puberty, (b) the sexual is different and much wider than the genital, and (c) sexual pleasure is obtained from several erogenous zones, including the genitals, that get involved in reproduction later, though the two do not coincide completely (Freud, 1905).

Freud's theorization separates the sexual from the reproductive, which subsequently leads to the separation of the sexual from the anatomical. Earlier sexual behavior, irrespective of biology, suggests that biological instincts alone cannot determine sexuality (Freud, 1905). The infant's sexual identity develops through ambivalent psychic responses to the anatomical distinction between sexes. Furthermore, Freud (1905) refutes the prevalent view that sexual satisfaction can be compared to other corporal satisfaction like hunger. Freud suggests that unless we separate the psychic from the biological, we may not be able to account for sexual aberrations, as recorded by Krafft-Ebing and others, such as homosexuality, fetishism, and scopophilia (Freud, 1905). Freud sought a need to differentiate sexual instinct from the sexual object to explain what he terms as abnormal sexual behaviours. Freud (1905)

states that the experience with cases that were declared abnormal revealed that the two —sexual instinct and the sexual object— are fused in them, "a fact which we have been in danger of overlooking in consequence of the uniformity of the normal picture, where the object appears to form part and parcel of the instinct" (Freud, 1905, p. 56). Freud's students, especially since the theory of sexuality is being seen as detached from biology, have started to interpret *Trieb* (the German word) as drive not as instinct, as instinct brings with it the sense of biological determinism. In other words, we may conclude that sexual aberrations suggest that sexual drives have an arbitrary relation with sexual objects. Moreover, Freud maintains that normal sexual behavior (heterosexual intercourse) also involves behaviors such as kissing and touching that do not have any direct function in the reproductive process (Freud, 1905).

Sex and gender are different but not based on the former being biological and the latter being cultural. How are they different then? Perhaps the first serious and most thorough theorization of their distinction was attempted by the psychoanalyst and anthropologist R. J. Stoller. While analytically separating sex and gender, Stoller (1968) invokes the difference between 'gender identity' and 'gender role.' The latter, as discussed by Comfort (1963), is the role that one adopts "according to the standards of his culture" (Comfort, 1963, p. XX). It is learned not inherent. A gender role, in fact, "learned by the age of two years is for most individuals almost irreversible, even if it runs counter to the physical sex of the subject" (Comfort, 1963, p. XX). Gender in this sense is the sum total of variation in styles and behaviour which members of a culture associate with being male or female. Gender, therefore, can be studied as what Durkheim would refer to as a 'social fact.' Sex, on the contrary, is associated with what one is aware of, consciously or unconsciously, about what sex s/he belongs to.

Towards the end of the above paragraph, sexuation/gender identity is alienating, for it is imposed externally upon a being at the cost of the being itself. Stoller makes such claims based on his clinical work. The children, argues Stoller, usually in the first few years develop stubborn gender identities that sometimes clash with their wishes and experiences. For example, children with genital abnormalities, brought up in 'parental doubt,' develop a 'hermaphroditic gender consciousness,' a unique core identity that is not recognized by the binary gender identity. Such children feel that they are misfits because they do not belong to either of the binary.

Soon after, Stoller's distinction between sex and gender was used by others, sometimes wrongly, to substantiate their argument that sex is natural and gender is biological. Kate Millett, who drew upon Stoller's work to underscore her argument in *Sexual Politics* (1970), one of the formative texts of second-wave feminism, states that "male and female are really two different cultures" (Millett, 1970, p. XX). Contrary to Stoller's individualistic theorizing, she seems to regard sex as biological and gender as psychosocial. In another influential work, Rubin (1975) distinguishes between sex and gender. Rubin states that gender identity is not a manifestation of natural distinction but a repression of similarities between the two genders. It enforces suppression of the feminine feature in men and vice versa so that the two appear distinct and act differently (Rubin, 1975, pp. 179–180).

Apart from showing the prominence of similarities between the two genders, Rubin (1975) shows how the imposed differences repress the similarities. The sex/gender identity is culturally imposed in the name of nature, which is fundamentally a flawed concept. The aim of a theorist and critic, therefore, must be to liberate human beings from such repression. Rubin's theorization is remarkable in providing an account of the culturally constructed nature of gender inequalities.

The main argument of Michel Foucault (1978) is to understand how sex as an essential notion was established by deploying the discourse of sexuality with its various strategies. All forms of sexual behaviour except heterosexuality have been treated as abnormal or pathological. Foucault further states that the theory of sexuality generated through the deployment of the discourse of sexuality became indispensable with time because of the importance of the functions it performed in society. The notion of sex generated through the discourse "made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures" (Foucault, 1978, p. 154). After this, sex as the fictitious unity was used 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" (Foucault, 1978, p. 155). For Foucault, the unity of various constituents that formed the notion of sex as an identity is fictitious in the first place. Foucault does not leave any scope for essentialist thinking while discussing sex. Foucault's theory of sexuality paved the way for a new way of thinking about sex. Sex, understood as a power-laden discursive formation, redefined the theoretical models of masculinity and femininity as necessarily anti-essentialist.

Judith Butler (1990) confronts the difference between sex and gender, raising the fundamental difficulty in treating sex as biological or at least essential and gender as cultural. Gender, if assumed as the culturally constructed signification of the body of either sex, cannot correspond to sexuality in any way. The distinction between the two, she writes,

then surfaces a "radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders" (Butler, 1990, p. 6). Considering binary sex as stable, how logical is it that masculine as a category is exclusively constructed on male bodies only and vice versa? The morphologically assumed different sexes unproblematically correspond to the culturally constructed gender identity. For Butler, it is pretty obvious that gender imitates sex and is also restricted by it. Theorizing gender as a cultural construction and at the same time independent of sex, one must note that gender can then be assumed as what she calls 'a free-floating artifice'. She maintains that man/masculine could then signify a female body as easily as it can signify a male one and the other way around too (Butler, 1990, p. 10). Butler refutes the sex and gender distinction by stating that sex is also a cultural construct as is gender (Butler, 1990, p. 7). For her, then, there is no reason to maintain the distinction of sex as essential and immutable and gender as something constructed by culture. Sex is a category discursively constructed as gender. Sex and gender, nevertheless, are intimately related but different, not because the former is natural and the latter cultural. Rather, both are cultural constructs. They constitute the ways/methods by which the human bodies are signified, understood, and described. The two concepts confusingly overlap, but sex is more of an identity and gender a role.

2. Sexuation/Gendering and the Lacanian Subject

Probably the most striking account of sex being cultural in origin comes from Jacques Lacan when he separates the symbol/signifier from the body and particularly the phallus from the penis (Lacan, 1977). Lacan's reading of Freud in general disengages Psychoanalysis from biological determinism, which, as we see, was already started by Freud himself. He too, towards the end of his career, dissociated eroticism from biological mechanisms (Freud, 1923). Psychoanalysis provides a detailed commentary on the idea that sexuality is separate from reproduction and shall be perceived that way.

Lacan, in his discussion on sexuality, integrates sexuality and the operation of language/culture in the process of subject formation. In Lacan's theory of subject formation, the child experiences jouissance before his introduction to the symbolic, which is also expressed in Freud's 'blissful smile' (Lacan, 1977). Such bliss is lost once the child enters the symbolic. "One who speaks or who is already in language," declares Lacan, "can never experience jouissance" (Lacan, 1977, p. 287). The introduction of the Phallus, the privileged signifier, brings about castration as well as forbids infantile jouissance. Castration in the Lacanian sense is the substitution of the thing with the symbol/signifier. The child as a concrete being is repressed by the signifier/phallus, which then stands in as the subject in the symbolic. After that, there is another substitution when the phallus is substituted by another signifier which then functions as the master signifier and determines the signification/meaning of the signifier battery for both masculine and feminine subjects (Lacan, 2006). Name-of-the-Father embodies the cultural law as well as the signifying conventions for the subject. It is the master signifier that determines the power and privilege of the two sexes/genders of the normative binary system of sex and gender.

Lacan (1958/2006) demonstrates the relation between the subject and the phallus as a signifier irrespective of the biological distinction between sexes. Based on clinical facts, Lacan declares that it is difficult to explain at least the following points with respect to women without delinking the Phallus from the anatomy:

1. That a girl child considers herself to be castrated, even if it is for a very brief period. She feels deprived of the phallus first by her mother and later by her father (Lacan, 1958/2006, p. 579).
2. Both sexes more primordially believe that the mother has the phallus (Lacan, 1958/2006, p. 580).
3. The signification of castration takes full weight in the formation of symptoms only after its discovery that the mother is castrated too (Lacan, 1958/2006, p. 581).

He right away rejects Jones's reading of Freud by declaring it as something contrary to Freud's preliminary ideas. Jones, in his articles on sexuation, writes Lacan, is trying to re-establish the natural rights close to the proclamation in the Bible where God says that he created the male and female (Jones, 1927, p. 12). According to Lacan, there is an internal contradiction if we, as Jones suggests, normalize the function of the Phallus as part-object and invoke Freud's position, as revealed by Melanie Klein with whom he does not contradict, regarding the child fantasy of the mother being phallic (Lacan, 1977). Lacan rejects Jones' position on the belief that Freud could not have such contradiction and he certainly was more guided than any of his followers.

The child enters the symbolic as the subject. Castration, as already discussed, is here the substitution of the real being by the signifier, phallus, in the symbolic. It, in other words, means that the child enters the symbolic as a signifier (Lacan, 2006). Both male and female children at the moment prior to their entrance into the symbolic imagine themselves as the imaginary phallus for the mother. Their entrance into the symbolic is castration also in the sense that the imaginary phallus is substituted by the signifier or the symbolic phallus. This happens to children of both sexes alike. The sexuation is a phenomenon that takes place after this in the process of signification of phallus, the signifier. Lacan, in Seminar III, points out one basic principle on which

Freud's position of sexuality relies, which is that the subject's sexual position is one already present in the symbolic apparatus (Lacan, 1955-1956). At the time of his/her entrance into the symbolic, the child finds his/her subject position already instituted there. It is the symbolic forms of masculine and feminine existing before an actual being embraces them that determine the sex/gender of the being. The symbolic/ideological form is before being/reality that prevails over the latter. The actual/concrete being acquires meaning through the symbolic/ideological form. This is why sexuation is itself inherently alienating. It is something that is imposed externally upon the being once s/he enters the symbolic.

Sexuation is brought about by the process of the Oedipus complex resolution. The phallus, which as a signifier substitutes the real being, is not a proper signifier in the sense that it cannot act as a master signifier because it does not regulate the signifying conventions or fix the meaning of the battery of signifiers. It, therefore, needs to be substituted by a proper signifier in the process of its signification. The phallus is a signifier, writes Lacan, whose function in the intersubjective domain is "to designate the meaning effects as a whole, insofar as the signifier conditions them by its presence as signifier" (Lacan, 2006, p. 579). The phallus as master signifier/Name-of-the-Father generates meaning effects purely as a structural phenomenon. It determines what Lacan calls quilting points or points-de-capiton, which in turn fixes the meaning of all the signifiers of the signifier battery.

About the nature of the phallus, Lacan further writes: "The phallus is the signifier of this very Aufhebung, which it inaugurates (initiates) by its disappearance" (Lacan, 2006, p. 580). Lacan hints at the disappearance of the phallus, the signifier, by way of its signification as well as its metaphoric substitution by Name-of-the-Father. The metaphoric substitution and the signification of the signifier phallus is probably how it disappears. The phallus in and of itself does not function as a signifier proper unless it is substituted by a proper signifier like Name-of-the-Father, which after substitution functions as the phallus as well as the master signifier. The phallus in our lifetime can be substituted by any signifier that would act as the meaning-fixing signifier, but at this point in the life of a child, Name-of-the-Father takes its place. The unveiling of the phallus here suggests the substitution at this point with the Name-of-the-Father.

The moment of its substitution/signification introduces the subject to cultural law, signifying conventions, constraints of culture, or Foucault's discursive structure (Foucault, 1977). The substitution and signification are simultaneous because, through signification, it is able to fix meaning to the rest of the signifiers by hooking the signifier chain with the signified, and by signification, the subject is sexuated. The simultaneous substitution and signification put a constraint on signification. We must not forget that the Name-of-the-Father is itself a signifier that embodies the law. It in itself does not mean anything, but it defines the signifying conventions for all other signifiers. The Name-of-the-Father is the first master signifier which determines the meaning universe of the subject.

For Lacan, the signification of the symbolic phallus (Φ) as Name-of-the-Father happens with the imaginary phallus (φ). The male child identifies positively with the phallus (Φ) as Name-of-the-Father because he has an imaginary phallus. The girl child, on the contrary, identifies negatively with the phallus (Φ) as Name-of-the-Father, for she is (-φ). In this way, the male child is sexuated as one who has the phallus, and the girl child is sexuated as the one who desires to have it.

For analytical purposes, the child's entrance into the symbolic can be described in two phases. The first is the child's entrance into the system of signifiers without any signifying conventions, and the second is his/her entrance into the cultural law or the signifying conventions or constraints imposed by culture. The first instance is the substitution of the real by the signifier/phallus, which is obviously enigmatic because it does not signify anything at all. It happens to both male and female children. The first phase is the castration proper when the real being as well as the imaginary phallic gestalt is substituted by the signifier in the Other/Symbolic.

The second phase of the symbolic is when the child enters into the cultural law that determines its cultural conventions of signification. The second phase is inaugurated by Name-of-the-Father. The introduction of Name-of-the-Father introduces the signifying convention of culture or cultural law, which is the moment of privation as well. Once the phallus signifies Name-of-the-Father, the child realizes that the mother is castrated. Lacan, in the essay 'The Signification of the Phallus,' explains the phenomenon of sexuation that happens at this stage in the development of the child (Lacan, 1958/2006). By introducing Name-of-the-Father, the child is being introduced to sexuality, which is also the child's entrance into the discursive structure in the symbolic order.

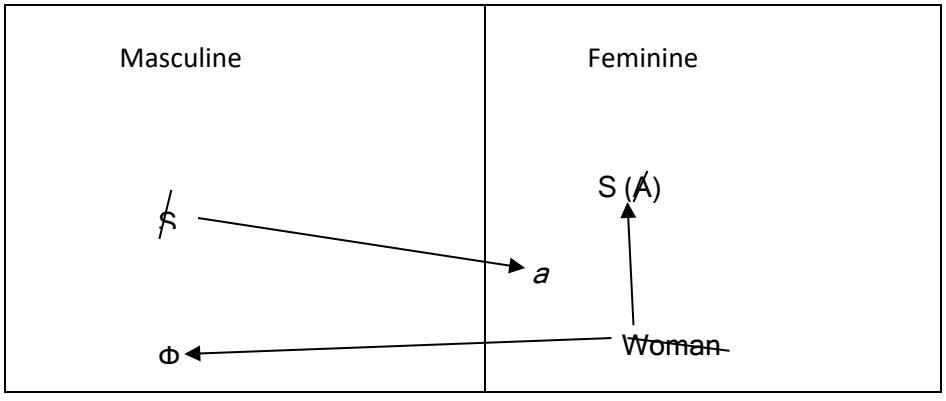
It must be noted that the symbolic/ideological form is again prior in his context too. The name-of-the-father is the symbolic form/signifier that is prior to the real father (Lacan, 1977). It is to be interpreted as the surname of a super-individual who embodies the law/prohibitions regarding what is available for the child and what is not. For the child, the father is the law himself. There are no prohibitions for him. He is who decides prohibitions for the child, and everything that the child desires is available to him.

The child does not interpret his/her real father through the real father but through the name which is a symbolic/ideological form because the real father is himself a desiring being with a lack like the child (Evans, 1996). This is how the symbolic/ideology precedes the real.

In a similar sense, the phallus is a symbolic form that is imposed upon understanding men possessing the phallus. The real organ in itself has nothing that makes it so important. It is how it is signified through symbolic/ideology that makes it something indispensable. It is this ideological form that imposes its lack upon the female body, which in reality lacks nothing. The female body in reality is complete, but when it is signified/interpreted through the symbolic/ideological form in the inherently patriarchal master signifier, it is signified as a body that suffers the lack of the phallus (Lacan, 2001). This signification/interpretation of real beings and things through the symbolic ideological form constitutes ideological misrecognition. The symbolic/ideological signification/interpretation precedes reality. The way we understand women is through the ideological form, not reality.

Father is now the one who possesses the phallus because the phallus here signifies name-of-the-father, which in itself is still enigmatic. The father has the authority to donate the phallus or withdraw it. The sexuation happens with respect to one signifier which is the phallus, which signifies name-of-the-father. The phallus as name-of-the-father has the central role in sexuation (Lacan, 1977). Both boys and girls are castrated at this point, castration precedes sexuation. The desire to be the imaginary phallus for the mother must have been renounced by the child. The girl child attains her sexuality by realizing the absence of the father's symbolic 'phallus' (name-of-the-father). The deprivation in the case of the girl is only symbolic because in real being she does not lack anything. The boy, on the contrary, identifies with the father and develops in terms of having the father's symbolic phallus. Having the symbolic phallus for him means that one day he will attain the position of the father as the embodiment of Law. Renunciation of being the imaginary phallus in the case of a girl is substituted by not having the symbolic phallus (name-of-the-father), which also means the minus of the father's 'plus'. In the case of a boy, the renunciation of being the imaginary phallus is substituted with having the father's symbolic phallus or the plus of the father's phallus (Evans, 1996). Though the girl in real does not lack anything, symbolically she lacks the father's symbolic phallus. All this suggests that sexuation is asymmetrical for men and women. The girl child cannot identify with the mother because she cannot obtain a 'minus' from the mother's 'minus'. She also develops with respect to the father's symbolic phallus in terms of not having it. She tries to have it in the form of a baby in the future.

Lacan's idea of sexuation would be better explained through the 'Lacanian loop' as described in Seminars XVIII to XX (Lacan, 1998):



The left of the divide in the figure is masculine, where the subject 'S' with a slash is the barred subject, typically a male with lack who desires to make up for it with what Lacan refers to as object a. Desire leads the masculine subject across the line, which he perceives as the object a. Man seeks the 'woman' as object a on the right side of the structure, which is 'Woman' who, Lacan says, does not exist except as idealized masculine fantasy. Greek Φ, the phallus, is not attached to the 'S' with a slash, which shows that the desire for *object a* or 'woman' does not arise from the phallus.

Femininity, on the right side, the barred 'woman' shows two directions towards which the jouissance is sought. One possibility of feminine desire leads to the phallus on the left side. The woman is again represented by the lack that desires the phallus. The other possibility that Lacan shows is towards the 'S' bracket barred 'A' which is the sight for what is being referred to as the transcendental jouissance of her own. The second one is enigmatic, somewhere defined by Lacan as 'the lack in the Other' (Lacan, 1977). She desires to be what the Other lacks. Woman, in response to having the phallus, seeks to

be desired as well as loved by the one who has it. The phallus, which is the signifier of her desire, is with the one who she wants to be desired by and from whom she demands love.

Sexual difference in Lacan is not essentially a binary with some kind of foundation. The masculine and feminine subjects are constituted by cultural law. Heterosexual desire is the result of how the Other constitutes the subject. The Other's demand to fulfil its lack takes the shape of a desire for the subject. It is the Other that is responsible for the subject's heterosexual desire. The masculine subject develops into a desire to be the father who has the phallus. The feminine, on the contrary, is the signification of the lack which is signified by the symbolic or the law (Lacan, 1977). The symbolic itself, therefore, brings about the sexuation of the child into masculine or feminine. The sexual subject positions or the heterosexualization develop under the basic prohibitions of the symbolic law/name-of-the-father. For Butler also, the masculine and feminine "positions are thus instituted through prohibitive laws that produce culturally intelligible genders, but only through the production of an unconscious sexuality that re-emerges in the domain of the imaginary" (Butler, 1990, p. 72). Kinship in societies is the product of these prohibitive laws of the symbolic. The name-of-the-father declares certain sexual relations impossible for both masculine and feminine subjects, which defines kinship in society.

3. The Possibility of Subversion

We must note here that the name-of-the-father acts as the master signifier for both masculine and feminine subject positions. It fixes the meaning of the battery of signifiers by defining/regulating the signifying conventions for both male and female subjects. The signifiers are quilted through it, which makes it function as a discourse/ideology. The subject is determined by the signifier, name-of-the-father, which bars the actual being and stands for it in the symbolic. The subject, in this sense, is inevitably patriarchal. In Irigaray's view too, the subject that assumes the attributes of both masculine and feminine is, in fact, a binary that masks the hegemonic discourse of the masculine (Irigaray, 1985). The signifier, name-of-the-father, through which the first quilting of all signifiers of the signifier battery takes place, is in truth phallogocentric, which, in other words, means that the ideological meaning fixation of the signifiers itself at the outset silences the feminine. The fundamental achievement of Lacanian theory of the subject is that he succeeded in describing the subject on account of being a construction. But the question still remains whether there is any possibility to retrieve feminine subjectivity outside the cultural law.

The fundamental question of whether there is any possibility to retrieve sexuality outside the hetero-normative cultural law is confronted, among others, by Foucault and Judith Butler. Though both of them believe that gender and sexuality in the way we know it is constructed through the discursive operation of cultural law, they fundamentally differ in their ways of confronting the oppressive regimes of natural-looking normative identities and bringing about change. None of the two thinkers are too concerned with talking about the concepts of sexuality and gender in the sense of discussing what they are, but they theorize their genealogies in order to disclose the constructed nature of the categories of identity in their own ways. The fact that we perceive an apparent "truth" of sex, as Foucault calls it, is brought into being by the regulatory practices of sex/gender/desire (Foucault, 1978).

Sexuality, for Foucault, may be described as something like bodily pleasure desired and experienced. But the pleasure is not straightforwardly available but regulated by a set of factors. What part or form of this pleasure is available to a being is determined by the ways ideas or knowledge about sexuality is circulated and thereby regulated by different institutions of society. "In a word," writes Foucault, "the deployment of alliance is attuned to a homeostasis of the social body" (Foucault, 1978, p. 106). In almost all cultures, the alliance or grouping of individuals is prescribed by defining a reproductive unit called family. This is done by deploying the idea of family as an essential basic thinkable unit. Such an organization in societies regulates reproductive as well as sexual behaviour among its members by prescribing laws and threats for those who think and act otherwise. The discourse governs a society by operating and disseminating in the form of knowledge/power, which in turn polices the permissible ways of behaviour like sexuality. Foucault's idea of power is something other than an authoritative apparatus. He uses power/knowledge together to convey that circulation and distribution of knowledge, discursive in nature, is itself what enforces norms and regulates us for better or for worse. Power/knowledge imposes its ways but, at the same time, creates sites of resistance.

Regarding sexuality, Foucault seems to be concerned about how it is deployed rather than explaining what it is. He talks about the ways in which power/knowledge constructs it, makes it visible, and available to us to consume. He demonstrates the channels by which it is fed to desire to mold it in a certain way. His approach is not principally focused on what something *is*—like 'sexuality' or, for that matter, 'family'—but rather, what he precisely tries to explain is how the deployment of power/knowledge feeds us ideas and makes us think about these concepts the way we think about them. He is concerned about how the basic concept of alliance, that is, family, gets channeled through power/knowledge and from which reproduction arises. The heteronormative sexual behavior is

deployed as normal, probably based on alliance and reproduction (Foucault, 1978).

Butler, at the outset, is against any kind of categorization, for she believes that categories—for instance, 'women' as the subject of feminism, whose aim is emancipation—though well-intentioned, have coercive/regulatory consequences of construction. She regards any such categorization as misrepresentation. Such categorization of the identity of women, for example, is the reification of gender binarism, which is what feminism is resisting. Theorists like Simone de Beauvoir, who in *The Second Sex* (1949) writes that "one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one" (de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 267), have all been trying to explain the constructed nature of sex and gender. However, Butler is asking an altogether different question. She is mulling over the idea of the possibility of human agency to change the way it is constructed or how it is. She believes that if biology *is* destiny, then culture becomes destiny. She, as an answer to this query, argues that "the limits of the discursive analysis of gender presuppose and pre-empt the possibilities of imaginable and realizable gender configurations within culture" (Butler, 1990, p. 147). There are limits on gender possibilities—the binary structure—set by the hegemonic cultural discourse that appears as natural, rational, and common sense. Gender, in this sense, then, becomes the cultural signification of already differentiated sexual bodies as one of the prominent binaries in the discursive structure, where one term gives meaning to another; that is, the two signifiers act as a structure where the signification of one is limited to the absence/trace of another (Butler, 1990).

In Butler's view, we perceive identities, including sex and gender, as stable and coherent, but the instability, fluidity, and incoherence of these categories are revealed by "the cultural emergence of those 'incoherent' or 'discontinuous' gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined" (Butler, 1990, p. 23). The heterosexualization of desire, writes Butler, results in the institution of the discrete, asymmetrical, and opposite categories of masculine and feminine. These categories are then understood as attributes of heteronormative sexes of male and female. For maintaining heteronormative sexual identities, other possible identities become abnormalities, and in order to make those gender identities that follow from sex intelligible, those that do not follow from sex cannot exist (Butler, 1990).

Sex within hegemonic language, argues Butler, is made to appear as a substantive subject, which is achieved through the repetitive performance of language or discourse that, in turn, conceals the fact that a stable being—whether of sex or gender—is a fiction. The metaphysics of being is itself a problematic assumption. When an analysis uncritically presupposes being to gender, it is bound to lead one to believe that gender is a virtue of a person's sex, that is, a psychic sense of self. Such an assumption would act as a unifying principle of self in opposition to the opposite sex/gender, which would create coherence in sex, gender, and desire. If we remove the substantive assumption of identity and treat it, as Butler views it, as an effect of performance, gender would not appear as merely an added attribute but something that constitutes the identity. The substantive effect of identity or gender is performatively enacted (Butler, 1990). Gender is, therefore, a performance—not of the subject that is thought to pre-exist, but the latter is itself constituted by it. The performance of identity, for Butler, is a potential way of (1) showing the constructed nature of heteronormative sex/gender desire and (2) bringing about change, if at all possible. Phallogocentric heteronormative sex identities seek to retain their hegemony and hold by constant repetition. Repetition or performance, for Butler, is the mechanism for the formation and constant augmentation of the power regimes of identity. Repetition itself is then capable of providing a possible mechanism, if there is any, to confront the hegemonic discursive power regimes. "If there," writes Butler, "is something right in Beauvoir's claim that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman, it follows that woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end" (Butler, 1990, p. 33). If this is so, then there is a potential to intervene in the process of her becoming at any point.

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