



### GENDER AND QUEER THEORY: A STUDY

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#### ABSTRACT:

*'Gender studies' is an approach to literature that searches how ideas about men and women can be regarded as socially built by particular cultures. It asks: 'What is masculine and feminine?' It spreads out categories and definitions of what is masculine or feminine. It tends to regard sexuality as more complex than merely feminine or masculine, homosexual or heterosexual. It deals with gender identity. It searches the real (both physical and biological) gender differences between women and men, however, thinks especially critical about what these differences mean in a socio-cultural context. It comprises of a variety of disciplines: women's studies, men's studies, Queer theory and LGBT studies. Gender studies and queer theory explore issues of sexuality in both literature and culture. Though influenced by feminist criticism, much of the work in gender studies and queer theory comes from post-structural interest in fragmented, de-centred knowledge building, language, and psychoanalysis (Lacan).*

**Keywords:** Gender, sexuality, gender identity, Gender studies, Queer theory, etc.

Queer theory is an entirely new discipline of study; as a field it has only been called since 1991. It evolved out of gay or lesbian studies, a discipline that is itself very new and has only been alive in any organized form since about the mid-1980s. Gay or lesbian studies, in turn, evolved from feminist studies and feminist theory. Queer theory challenges essentialist concepts of heterosexuality and homosexuality in mainstream discourse and instead inserts an understanding of sexuality that emphasizes ambivalence, shifting boundaries, and cultural constructions that change depending on historical and cultural context. "To queer" means to make "normal" sexuality strange and unstable, to acknowledge heterosexuality as a naturalized socio-sexual norm, and to advance the concept of "indirectness" to challenge the hegemony of "straight" ideology. Judith Butler's influential work, particularly *Gender Trouble*, attempts to reject stable categories along with her now widely overused concept of performative sexuality and gender identity.

First, the use of the term queer can be seen as an attempt to reappropriate the word from what was its homophobic use to demonstrate that heterosexists should not be allowed to define the gay and lesbian experience. The act of defining terms of self-reference is a powerful move that says, among other things, "We're not afraid to be seen," "You don't tell us who we are—we tell us who we are!" and "We're proud to be different!" Or, as a popular queer slogan sums it up. "We're here, we're weird—we'll get used to it!" As gays and lesbians have learned, the term is a tool of oppression, but it's also instrument of change. It is in the world of male homoeroticism that we can see the potentially reactionary and misogynistic implications of

queer texts and queer reception: indirectness does not necessarily mean freedom. Perhaps the most striking example of this is the male-dominated genres such as gangster movies, action movies, westerns, and buddy movies that construct male homoeroticism as a means of creating and defending a 'universe of men' and crudely 'flattering hard.' masculinity against the softening effects of domesticity and heterosexual commitment.

Queer theory views both traditional and normative essentialist models of sexuality as failing in the conceptual work involved in properly describing how desires work and how sexualities are formed. The range of critical concepts, models and strategies outlined above proves to be true that it is no longer alive to think in terms of a single and coherent 'sexuality' and has influenced the transition from a 'natural' homosexual individual to whom rights can cling to the disorienting notion that all sexualities are perverted and can be reclaimed and celebrated as such. Given that gay and lesbian theory has always been defensively grounded in liberal rights, queer theory is a deeper philosophical challenge to the status quo that simultaneously aims to provide readings that simultaneously subvert sameness and celebrate otherness.

Our sexuality, for queer theory, is socially constructed—rather than innate to the extent that it is based on the way sexuality is defined by the culture in which we live. We encountered examples of the social construction of sexuality earlier when we discussed ancient Athens, where sexual categories were based on a caste system that did not differentiate between men and women, and the very different definitions of homosexuality operating in Mexico and the South. America, early twentieth century working class America and white today's middle class America. The belief that sexuality is socially constructed is behind the effort to read literature from the past not only in terms of our own definitions of sexuality, but in terms of the definitions operating in the culture from which the literature emerged.

A queer reading of Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" (1931) might evaluate how traditional definitions of gender identity (ie male versus female) and sexuality (ie homosexual versus heterosexual) fail to explain or encompass the character of Emily Greirson. Her gender categorization is not fixed, but crosses back and forth between masculine and feminine. She is both a slender maiden in white, dominated by her father, and a defiant maverick breaking class norms and moral laws to take what she wants from Homer Barron, including his life. She is both a childlike recluse who teaches women the art of porcelain painting and a domineering presence with iron gray hair, like a vigorous man who imposes his will on the male power structure, including the post office, tax collectors, the church and, in the person of the pharmacist, the medical profession.

Likewise, a queer reading of Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" can evaluate how the erotic dimension of the poem requires us to expand our understanding of sex. One of the hallmarks of Whitman's remarkable poem is its response to life: the speaker, who identifies as Whitman, revels in the beauty of nature, experiences a spiritual connection with Americans from all walks of life, and celebrates the pure joy of just being. alive. Reading the poem through a queer lens allows us to focus, in a way that Keller does not, on Whitman's eroticization of experience that transcends the contemporary white middle-class definition of homosexuality. One might argue that the sexuality depicted in "Song of Self" is too fluid to be contained within the boundaries of male same-sex desire.



If these cases of queer critique seem more slippery, indeterminate, and also more complicated than the aforementioned cases of lesbian and gay critique, keep in mind that it is the slippery, indeterminate, and complicated quality of human sexuality that the deconstructive project of queer critique attempts. underline. As the newest and most philosophical trend in lesbian and gay literary studies, queer criticism promises us an exciting future of theoretical inquiry and experimentation.

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