

**"Being Without Restriction":
Contemporary Sociological
Theory and the Gender Anti-
Binary** 🧑 Ezra Richards (they/he),
Sociology

INTRODUCTION

- Transphobic policies and ideologies rely on reductive, label-based understandings of what queerness is.
- To combat this, gender must be defined completely outside the labels of cis, trans, male, female, etc.
- Using various contemporary sociological theorists, I argue for redefining gender based on embodied experiences rather than homogenizing labels.

MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY

- Science can only cover *some* of what the world has to offer. Other methods should be used to fill the gaps and explore the "depth" of human experience (1964, p. 2).
- **DEPTH:** unnameable and unquantifiable. Prioritizes subjectivity, embodiment, and sensory experiences.
- Labels have become limiting, so we should move beyond label-based discourses and into sensory dialogue!
- What does your gender feel like? Where do you feel it in your body? How would you describe that experience?
- Vocabulary becomes secondary to the feeling of being queer.

JUDITH BUTLER

- Gender is inextricable from its social and political contexts. Terms like 'woman' can never apply to everyone in that group (2007, p. 6).
- "Trans, queer," etc. have acquired such baggage that debates are more focused on debunking false claims than pursuing queer rights.
- We should consider feminism without women as its subject (2007, p. 8), and queer rights without queer people as the subject.
- How? Examine the social forces that impose homogenous identities; put the oppressor up for debate.

ARTWORK:
Ezra Richards

**FACULTY
MENTOR:**
Prof. Annaliese
Pope

Using various contemporary sociological theorists, I argue for redefining gender based on embodied experiences rather than homogenizing labels.



FULL ESSAY:



WALTER BENJAMIN

- **AURA:** a piece of artwork's unique signs of life, history, etc. Lost when the piece is copied (1936, p. 364). Without auras to engage with, people lose their critical thinking skills (1936, p. 377).
- The more that certain labels are used and spread around, the more inauthentic they become.
- Labels do make queerness more accessible, as does reprinting art. But when we prioritize that 'copy' over the original experience, they create more confusion than understanding.

**THEODOR ADORNO & MAX
HORKHEIMER**

- **CULTURE INDUSTRY:** standardizing and commercializing culture, to standardize all of society. Justified by the need to make culture digestible (1944, p. 386).
- Labels standardize queerness; they are treated as a necessity, rather than a shorthand for something bigger.
- Best example: corporate Pride! Turns queerness into something marketable and mass-produced.
- Through the culture industry (labels, festivals, etc.), all the nuance is removed from the queer experience. Queer people become homogenized, and turned into objects for profit.

CONCLUSION

- Instead of focusing on labels, we should completely remove language from the argument. Let queerness be unexplainable!
- Without labels, we can deconstruct the queer-cishet dichotomy, making queerness a natural human thing, rather than the antithesis of 'cishet.'
- Follow your joy and embody your gender, without the need to name it! Be **ANTI-BINARY.**

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