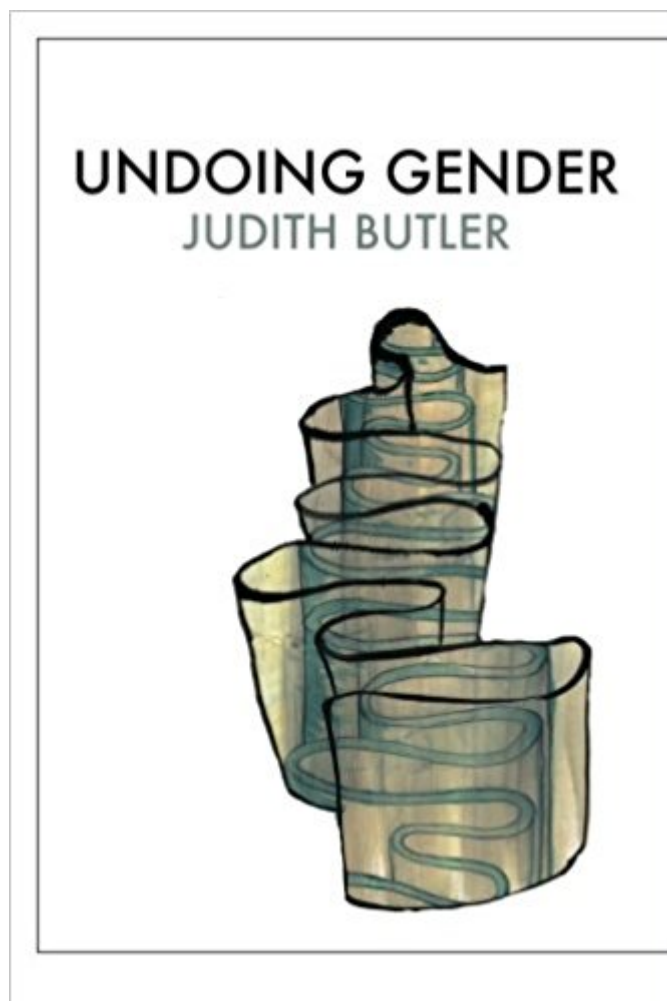


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Undoing Gender



Synopsis

Undoing Gender constitutes Judith Butler's recent reflections on gender and sexuality, focusing on new kinship, psychoanalysis and the incest taboo, transgender, intersex, diagnostic categories, social violence, and the tasks of social transformation. In terms that draw from feminist and queer theory, Butler considers the norms that govern--and fail to govern--gender and sexuality as they relate to the constraints on recognizable personhood. The book constitutes a reconsideration of her earlier view on gender performativity from Gender Trouble. In this work, the critique of gender norms is clearly situated within the framework of human persistence and survival. And to "do" one's gender in certain ways sometimes implies "undoing" dominant notions of personhood. She writes about the "New Gender Politics" that has emerged in recent years, a combination of movements concerned with transgender, transsexuality, intersex, and their complex relations to feminist and queer theory.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Undoing Gender" is a dense and scholarly tome which demands careful consideration and perhaps repeated readings to fully appreciate. I would give it five stars but for Chapter Three where I found Professor Butler's focus on the David Reimer case a somewhat superficial rehash of what has already been written, lacking in the critical analysis Butler uses to excellent effect elsewhere throughout her work. On the famous case of David Reimer, whose penis was burned completely off during a botched circumcision when he was eight months old, Professor Butler writes: "David was born with XY chromosomes and at the age of eight months, his penis was accidentally burned and

severed in the course of a surgical operation to rectify phimosis, a condition in which the foreskin thwarts urination. This is a relatively risk-free procedure but the doctor who performed it on David was using a new machine, apparently one that he hadn't used before, one that his colleagues declared was unnecessary for the job."Judith Butler reports elements of David's tragic story, complete with the errors and embellishments so often repeated. Phimosis is a condition of tightness of the foreskin preventing retraction over the glans, but it does not prevent or thwart urination. Phimosis is a natural condition of the developing infant penis, in many cases retraction of the foreskin is not possible until well into childhood or later. Jean-Marie Huot, the so-called doctor who destroyed David's penis, diagnosed both David and his twin brother Brian with phimosis, though after the accident with David, Brian was left genitally intact and his condition of phimosis cleared up naturally as it does with almost all intact males, showing the error of Huot's "diagnosis" and "treatment."

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