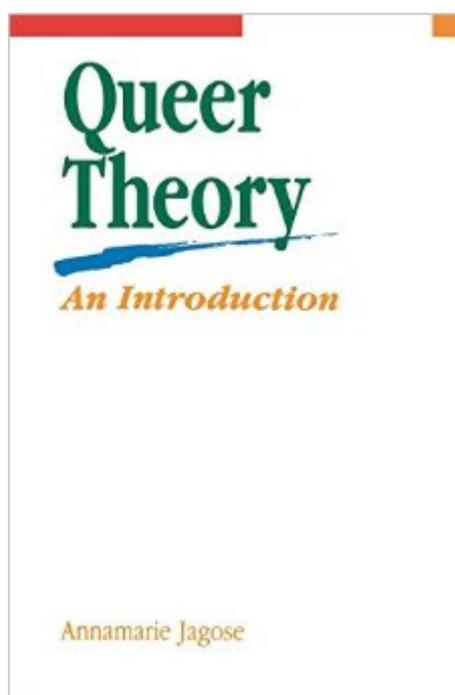


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# Queer Theory: An Introduction



## Synopsis

The political and academic appropriation of the term queer over the last several years has marked a shift in the study of sexuality from a focus on supposedly essential categories as gay and lesbian to more fluid or queer notions of sexual identity. Yet queer is a category still in the process of formation. In *Queer Theory*, Annamarie Jagose provides a clear and concise explanation of queer theory, tracing it as part of an intriguing history of same-sex love over the last century. Blending insights from prominent theorists such as Judith Butler and David Halperin, Jagose argues that queer theory's challenge is to create new ways of thinking, not only about fixed sexual identities such as heterosexual and homosexual, but also about other supposedly essential notions such as sexuality and gender and even man and woman.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Jagose's slim book is a historical/genealogical account of queer theory, placing it in a historical context of growing gay and lesbian liberation movements, from the homophile movement of the Mattachine Society to lesbian feminism, gay liberation, and the appropriation of the term queer as a strategic term. The essence of modern queer theory as proposed here is to move beyond "identity politics" in gay and lesbian studies. The proposal of any sexual orientation as normative, whether straight or gay, is counter to the deconstructive tendencies of queer theory, which problematizes the whole notion of "orientation" or "gender" or "sexuality." Some have called queer theory the "deconstruction" of gay and lesbian studies, where shifting and unstable sexual identities are

destablized in favor of open-ended and multiple readings of cultural phenomena. This points to the stormy reception queer theory has received. Some have argued that this deconstruction of sexual orientation and gender serves the political interests of the right-wing, preserving male and heterosexist hegemony while undermining women's voices and progressive politics. Queer theory, like bisexuals, poses a "crisis of meaning" for many who wish to carve out a safe and protective space for gays and lesbians. As gay and lesbian studies have often relied on sexual orientation/sexual identity as a fundamental category, queer theory attempts to destabilize this "bedrock," revealing the power structures and discursive limits within. The main qualm I have with this book is its relative lack of literary and artistic culture and the role different authors and figures played in the shifts within queer culture. The book would be all the stronger for the inclusion of such material.

As a graduate student, I ran across several references to this book, and decided that reading it would be essential in gaining a better understanding of queer studies. I don't regret committing the energy I did to reading it. The book is slim but dense. Jagose nimbly covers a vast swath of LGBTQI history while also outlining thorny arguments within the gay "community" concerning identity politics and nomenclature. Probably the best chapter in the work is on Lesbian Feminism; here Jagose carefully outlines lesbian and feminist concerns of giving primacy to gender over sexuality in denaturalizing queer discourse. It is not at all an easy chapter to grasp, but I would rank its importance EXTREMELY high in getting to the heart of the historically exclusionary effects the gay and feminist movements have had for lesbians. This is an outstanding place to start in beginning a foray into LGBTQI studies; the thought of Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Michelle Foucault, and Adrienne Rich all figure prominently. I question her arranging the book in narrative form as though there is a "story" to queer studies and wonder how such a configuration may relate to the theorization of queer temporality. I would LOVE to see it re-written and re-released in light of all the developments that have transpired over the last twenty years. It would certainly benefit from an added chapter on media and / or visual culture, and definitely a chapter on a discussion of the queer body / embodiment.

The author, demonstrating knowledge that can only be termed encyclopaedic, gives an excellent overview of a diverse body of literature devoted to the issues of gender, sexuality and identity. After reading this book I have a firm understanding of the evolution of queer theory and the bibliography will prove invaluable in reading further about various aspects of this fascinating subject. The book is

especially valuable as it gives mention to various movements, such as homophile, gay liberation and lesbian feminist, in an Australian as well as American context. Be warned though, you may find it handy to have a dictionary around.

Author Annamarie Jagose does a good job of highlighting the top scholars in the queer studies field and putting them together in one, concise volume. As a media communications scholar with an emphasis in queer studies I found this book immensely helpful. Jagose does a good job of chronicling history as well, so that the reader gets an insight of what was going on historically in the gay rights movement. I applauded the chapter also on lesbian feminism since that is often left out of many queer studies books. Highly recommended for scholar new to this field. While the definition(s) of "queer" are hard to define, I can at least appreciate someone who can make some sense of an often confusing and muddy subject.

This text will give you a lot to think about. There are a lot of things that Jagose covers in the comparatively short page number she takes. Thankfully, this text is a very clear introduction to queer theory, allowing those of us unfamiliar with the theory, the history, or even the lifestyles discussed a great beginning into a currently vast field. For the most part, Jagose describes queer theory in a chronological way, discussing the various movements that have led to what queer theory has become. One very important note is to know that this text is one of the most referred to text in queer theory, if you don't know what's in here, taking on something as excellent, yet heady as "The Routledge Queer Studies Reader" will leave you a bit lost. I will say that, if nothing else, this is a great way to start your studies of gender theory and the like.

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