
A Study of Female Masculinity by Judith Halberstam

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Abstract

The paper is an attempt to understand the basic concept of Female Masculinity, a study done by Judith Halberstam. The construction of masculinity through social and cultural analysis of gender, the politics of maleness, and masculinity is not associated with females. Female masculinity is a form of alternative masculinities that challenges the hegemonic masculinity or the dominant masculinity. It is produced by both males and females, irrespective of their bodies. It is an important area of study, like feminism and queer studies. Masculinity can be explored within females as part of their growth and personality formation. This paper focuses on the possibility of studying "female masculinity." A critical book attempted and written by Judith Halberstam. She engages in her study from the past few years about those women who feel themselves to be more masculine than feminine. She studies and explains to us why, as a society and in our cultures, one seems to have so little interest in female masculinity and the need to educate about it over the amount of attention paid towards male femininity.

Keywords: Gender, Masculinity, Female Masculinity, Judith Halberstam, Tomboys.

Introduction

Masculinity without men, then 'What is Masculinity'? This is the critical question for us to explore through female masculinity. The construction of masculinity can be studied through social and cultural analysis of gender. To examine if masculinity is a political expression of maleness, we may not have a definitive answer to this question. But masculinity must not and cannot be reduced to the male body and its effects. We have a difficult time defining masculinity; as a society, we have little to no issues in recognizing it. We spend massive amounts of time and

money ratifying and supporting the versions of masculinity that we enjoy or seem to trust daily, like the "heroic masculinities," depending absolutely on the subordination of alternative masculinities. Instead of being an imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed. It could be possible that female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing. However, we do understand that heroic masculinity has been produced by and across both male and female bodies.

The concept of masculinity is usually taken for granted, and the need to explore it as a concept within the field of gender studies has to be done earnestly by scholars. It is an important area of study, like feminism and queer studies. Masculinity can be explored within females as part of their growth and personality formation. This paper focuses on the possibility of studying "female masculinity." A critical book attempted and written by Judith Halberstam. She engages in her study from the past few years about those women who feel themselves to be more masculine than feminine. She studies and explains to us why, as a society and in our cultures, one seems to have so little interest in female masculinity and the need to educate about it over the amount of attention paid towards male femininity.

The general population seems to agree about the existence of female masculinity as if they have grown up seeing it in their everyday lifestyle or they are completely alarmed about the existence of female masculinity in reality or in academic studies. They have limited or self-constructed ideas about the concept of masculinity from their observation or understanding of pop culture or within the typical patriarchal societies that they live in. However, there are limited studies that have been done on the masculinity that exists within women, and we can hardly find anything that is written about female masculinity in academic fields dedicated to gender studies. To our surprise, this culture generally reveals considerable anxiety about even the prospects of manly women who exist in our societies.

Halberstam's book opens discussion on masculinity for women in such a way that masculine girls and women do not have to wear their masculinity as a stigma but can infuse it with a sense of natural pride and, indeed, a natural social power. The lesbian counterproduction of female masculinity is taking aim at the cultural mandates against masculinity in women. Halberstam questions the aspects of cultural assault on the privileged reservation of masculinity for only men. She always knew that she was a masculine girl and later grew into a strong masculine woman. But for

much of her life, her masculinity has been looked upon as shameful by random public responses for her gender ambiguity. She was stigmatized for many years, and she finally gathered the wisdom to turn her stigma into an academic strength. Her studies are done through the lengthy process of self-examination and critical discussion with others from various backgrounds in social sciences and gender studies. Their contribution helped her emotionally and intellectually to continue her study of female masculinity through an analysis of cultural studies and interdisciplinary works.

Halberstam does not simply offer a conventional theoretical introduction to conceptualizing masculinity without men, but she attempts to compile the myths and fantasies about masculinity that have ensured that masculinity and maleness are profoundly difficult to interfere with. She, by way of a preliminary attempt to reimagine masculinity through numerous examples of alternative masculinities in her study of fiction, film, and lived experiences. These examples are mostly queer and female, and they show clearly how important it is to recognize alternative masculinities when and where they emerge. Her studies reveal that female masculinity has been blatantly ignored both in cultural studies and within academic studies of masculinity. This widespread indifference to female masculinity has clearly ideological motivations and has sustained the complex social structures that wed masculinity to maleness and to their power and their domination upon others. She firmly believes that a sustained examination of female masculinity can make crucial interventions within gender studies, cultural studies, queer studies, and mainstream discussions of gender in general.

Masculinity in our society inevitably conjures up notions of power, legitimacy, and privilege. It is often symbolically referred to the power of the state and the uneven distribution of wealth. Masculinity seems to extend outward into patriarchy and inward into the family. Masculinity represents the power of inheritance, the consequences of the trafficking of women, and the promise of social privilege. Many other lines of identification traverse the terrain of masculinity, dividing its power into complicated differentials of class, race, sexuality, and gender. If what we call “dominant masculinity” appears to be a naturalized relation between maleness and power, then it makes little sense to examine men for the contours of that masculinity’s social construction.

According to Halberstam, masculinity becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male middle-class body. Till now, the arguments of masculinity studies tend to focus on Black masculinity, Latino masculinity, Asian

masculinities, Working-Class bodies, and Upper-Class bodies. These stereotypical constructions of variable masculinity mark the process by which masculinity becomes dominant in the sphere of white middle-class maleness. The general studies about masculinity attempt to account for the power of white masculinity recenter this white male body by concentrating all their analytical efforts on detailing the forms and expressions of white male dominance. Her study searches for the political contours of masculine privilege not in men but in the lives of aristocratic European cross-dressing women in the 1920s. It describes the details of masculine differences by comparing not men and women but butch lesbians and females to male transsexuals. Her study examines masculinity's iconicity not in the male idol but in a history of butches in culture. Her arguments ultimately find that the shapes and forms of modern masculinity are best showcased within female masculinity.

She begins her study of female masculinity by deposing one of the most persistent male heroes "James Bond". Bond's boss M, is a noticeable butch older woman who calls Bond a dinosaur and chastises him for being a misogynist and sexist. His secretary, Miss Moneypenny, accuses him of sexual harassment. His male buddies betray him and make him a dupe. Masculinity in his action films like *The Goldeneye* (1995) has little to do with biological maleness and is signified more often as a technical superiority or special provisions. In *Goldeneye*, it is M who most convincingly performs masculinity, and she does so partly by exposing the sham of Bond's own performance. It is M who convinces us that sexism and misogyny are not necessarily part and parcel of masculinity, even though historically, it has become difficult, if not impossible, to untangle masculinity from the oppression of women.

Bond's masculinity is linked not only to a profoundly unnatural form of masculine embodiment but also to gay masculinity. In the scene in which Bond goes to pick up his newest set of gadgets, a campy and almost queeny science nerd gives Bond his brand-new accessories and demonstrates each one with great enthusiasm. It is no accident that the science nerd is called Agent Q. We might read Q as a perfect model of the interpenetration of queer and dominant regimes- Q is precisely an agent, a queer subject who exposes the workings of dominant heterosexual masculinity. The gay masculinity of Agent Q and the female masculinity of M provides a remarkable representation of the absolute dependence of dominant masculinities on minority masculinities. When you take his toys away, Bond has very little propping up his performance of masculinity. The masculinity of the white male, what we may call "epic masculinity," depends absolutely on a vast subterranean network of secret

government groups, well-funded scientists, the army, and a villain who is contesting for rewards of hegemonic masculinity as a male but is finally defeated or dies.

Tomboys

According to Judith Halberstam, "Tomboyism" generally describes an extended childhood period of female masculinity. Tomboyism is quite common for girls and does not generally give rise to fears. According to her, we tend to believe that female gender deviance is much more tolerated than male gender deviance, though it cannot be measured by any means in general. Tomboyism tends to be associated with a "natural" desire for the greater freedoms and mobilities enjoyed by boys. Very often, it is read as a sign of independence and self-motivation, and tomboyish behavior may even be encouraged to the extent that it remains comfortably linked to a stable sense of a girl's identity. Tomboyism is punished, however, when it appears to be a sign of extreme male identification and when it threatens to extend beyond childhood and into adolescence. Teenage tomboyism presents a problem and tends to be subject to the most severe efforts to reorient.

Gender conformity is pressed onto all girls, not just tomboys, and this is where it becomes hard to uphold the notion that male femininity presents a greater threat to social and familial stability than female masculinity. Female adolescence represents the crisis of coming of age as a girl in a male-dominated society. If adolescence for boys represents a rite of passage much celebrated in Western literature in the form of the bildungsroman and an ascension to some version of social power, for girls, adolescence is a lesson in restraint, punishment, and repression. It is in the context of female adolescence that the tomboy instincts of millions of girls are remodeled into complaint forms of femininity. Perhaps any girl emerges at the end of adolescence as a masculine woman, which is quite amazing. The growing visibility and, indeed, respectability of lesbian communities, to some degree, facilitate the emergence of masculine young women. The image of the tomboy can be tolerated only within a narrative of blossoming womanhood, and within such a narrative, tomboyism represents resistance to adulthood itself rather than to adult femininity. For example, in the animated movie *Brave* (2012),

Psychoanalysis posits a crucial relationship between language and desire such that language structures desire and expresses, therefore, both the fullness and the futility of human desire. We always desire, but we are never satisfied. Halberstam understands desire and sexuality to be the most regimented forms of social conformity, as we are supposed to desire only certain people and only in certain ways.

But desire does not work that way, and we are torn between longing and belonging. We desire in a conventional way. We tend to avoid desire altogether, and our struggle with language in our attempts to remake ourselves through naming and remaking the world with a new order that cannot be affected by the individuals works through things as basic as language, and forces non-members into memberships they cannot fulfill.

Halberstam's book refuses the futility long associated with the tomboy narrative and instead seizes on the opportunity to recognize and ratify differently gendered bodies and subjectivities. Studying from the nineteenth century to the present and examining diaries, court cases, novels, letters, films, performances, events, critical essays, videos, news items, and testimonies, her book argues for the production of new taxonomies, what Eve K. Sedgwick humorously called “nonce taxonomies” in *Epistemology of the Closet*, classifications of desire, physicality, and subjectivity that attempt to intervene in hegemonic processes of naming and defining. Nonce taxonomies are categories that we use daily to make sense of our worlds, but they work so well that we fail to recognize them. Halberstam attempts to bring some of the nonce taxonomies of female masculinity into view and detail the histories of the suppression of these categories. She also uses the topic of female masculinity to explore a queer subject position that can successfully challenge hegemonic models of gender conformity.

Female masculinity is a particularly fruitful site of investigation because it has been vilified by heterosexist and feminist/womanist programs alike; unlike male femininity, which fulfills a kind of ritual function in male homosocial cultures, female masculinity is generally received by hetero and homo-normative cultures as a pathological sign of misidentification and maladjustment, as a longing to be and to have power that is always just out of reach. Within a lesbian context, female masculinity has been situated as the place where patriarchy goes to work on the female psyche and reproduces misogyny within femaleness. There have been, to date, remarkably few studies or theories about the inevitable effects of a fully articulated female masculinity on a seemingly fortified male masculinity. Sometimes, female masculinity coincides with the excesses of male supremacy, and sometimes, it codifies a unique form of social rebellion. Often, female masculinity is a sign of sexual alterity, but occasionally, it marks heterosexual variation. Sometimes, female masculinity marks the place of pathology, and every now and then, it represents the healthful alternative to what are considered the histrionics of conventional femininity.

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Halberstam wants to carefully produce a model of female masculinity that remarks on its multiple forms but also calls for new and self-conscious affirmations of different gender taxonomies. Such affirmations begin not by subverting masculine power or taking up a position against masculine power but by turning a blind eye to conventional masculinities and refusing to engage. She suggests in her book that we follow the futile path of what Foucault calls "saying no to power," but she asserts that power may inhere within different forms of refusal.

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