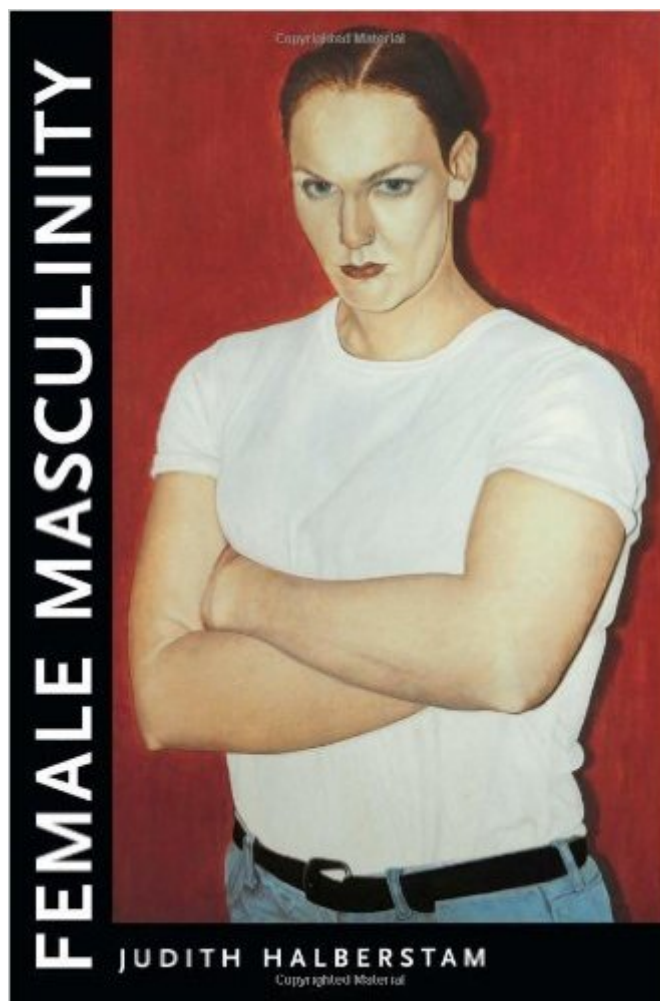


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# Female Masculinity



## Synopsis

Masculinity without men. In *Female Masculinity* Judith Halberstam takes aim at the protected status of male masculinity and shows that female masculinity has offered a distinct alternative to it for well over two hundred years. Providing the first full-length study on this subject, Halberstam catalogs the diversity of gender expressions among masculine women from nineteenth-century pre-lesbian practices to contemporary drag king performances. Through detailed textual readings as well as empirical research, Halberstam uncovers a hidden history of female masculinities while arguing for a more nuanced understanding of gender categories that would incorporate rather than pathologize them. She rereads Anne Lister's diaries and Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* as foundational assertions of female masculine identity. She considers the enigma of the stone butch and the politics surrounding butch/femme roles within lesbian communities. She also explores issues of transsexuality among "transgender dykes" "lesbians who pass as men" and female-to-male transsexuals who may find the label of "lesbian" a temporary refuge. Halberstam also tackles such topics as women and boxing, butches in Hollywood and independent cinema, and the phenomenon of male impersonators. *Female Masculinity* signals a new understanding of masculine behaviors and identities, and a new direction in interdisciplinary queer scholarship. Illustrated with nearly forty photographs, including portraits, film stills, and drag king performance shots, this book provides an extensive record of the wide range of female masculinities. And as Halberstam clearly demonstrates, female masculinity is not some bad imitation of virility, but a lively and dramatic staging of hybrid and minority genders.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I know this book takes a lot of flak, but I adore it. Halberstam rips through transhistorical definitions of lesbianism to reveal a multitude of queer 'masculinities,' from female husbands, FTMs, butches...She's been accused of fetishizing masculinity and not critiquing it at all, but I find this to be untrue. I think that, in separating so-called masculinity from maleness, she reclaims what can be striking and powerful about the genders we've labelled "masculine" and in doing so critiques the ways domination has been embedded in traditional male masculinity. This book is truly breakthrough, and I urge you to buy it, and read it, and mull it over. Amazing.

Halberstam's ideas around being a masculine female have helped me gain acceptance of my own masculinity. For this reason, the book was groundbreaking for me. However, it's a difficult book to find pleasure in reading because of the hyper academic language and its emotional distance from anything personal or of human interest. The books that are close to my heart about gender and that have been pleasureable to read are Persistent Desire and Stone Butch Blues because they tell a story about the human side of being a masculine female. I'm glad someone's picking apart gender in 1950's film, but it doesn't do to much for me.

When picking up a book that does not purport to be anything other than academic, one must be prepared for the contents to be just that - academic. Halberstam writes well, her ideas are important, and she adds complexity and insight into several areas of scholarly research and debate. I would strongly recommend this to anyone interested in feminism, gender, difference and social justice.

Despite my huge frustration that Judith "Jack" Halberstam utterly dismisses the masculinity of heterosexual women (and so should be called Lesbian Female Masculinity if it were being honest), there's a lot of good research and history here, including an interesting look at Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and interesting commentary on the boundary lines between butches and FTMs.

A highly readable and stunning history of female masculinity in Britain and the USA, considering court cases, literature, film, pop culture and drag king performances. I learned that the most interesting masculinities are not male, and that the history of the occlusion of butchness is a crucial foundation for understanding gender construction of all kinds.

The fact that this book was not written by a person of color in no way reduces the racial-inclusion in the book. Halberstam dedicates the book to Gayatri; perhaps having a lover of color influences her racially-diverse perspective. Then again, maybe it's the influence of the ethnic studies professors at her college, UCSD. Whatever it was, it's great. Halberstam makes a point of saying how butches of color face different issues from white butches. She states from the start that works on masculinity as it affects men of color and working-class men were much more informative to her research than books on hegemonic masculinity. Halberstam even criticizes white lesbian academics like Faderman when they fail to confront racism in their academic subjects. I only have one big problem with this book: Halberstam's discussion of the Latina character Vasquez in "Aliens" is all wrong. Halberstam implies that Vasquez is lesbian and she goes on to state that Vasquez dies first, dies tragically, and was in general not dynamic. In the film, they show Vasquez panicked over the death of a man, impliedly her lover. They very consciously render her straight. She was one of the last characters to die, not the first. Further, she died valiently (and heterosexually in the arms of a white man) by killing herself in order to kill more aliens. In such a strong book, I don't understand why Halberstam felt the need to fudge the facts.

A great read, Jack is a spectacular and seminal queer theorist. However, I really wish that Jack had made more space for female masculinity in a heterosexual space in this book. Obviously, there is something inherently queer about "female masculinity" but as a gender theorist and a self identified masculine female who is very much sexually attracted to men, I find myself continually frustrated by the equation of female masculinity with attraction to women. Of course there's also the fact that Jack's writing is informed by personal experience in queer communities. But really, such a frustrating elision.

this book will not hold your hand as you discover your masculinity. it will, however, inform you about the breadth and depth of female masculinity from a variety of perspectives. it is thorough in it's look at the affects of class and race and also contains a very interesting and important chapter on the tensions between butch, transgender, and FTM. this book is an important read for any student of women's or queer studies.

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