



# Exploration of Gender Identity and Equity in Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity*

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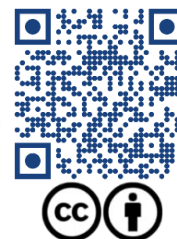
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**Abstract—** This paper focuses on Female Masculinity with reference to Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity*. The term 'Masculinity' refers to the behaviours of men i.e. manhood or manliness. Female masculinity focuses on women who behave with the qualities, which are identified with men in the society. It is called gender transgression. They expose themselves as males in both physically and mentally. Queer theory is a closer examination for gender identity. The societal viewpoint of masculinity is power and entitlement. In terms of female masculinity, their behaviour, attitude, dressing are similar to men. Many professions have no gender for instance teachers, doctors, engineers etc. and nowadays it extends to drivers, technicians, body builders, wrestlers, boxers and so on. The emotional connection towards the masculinity in feminine body is celebrated in this work. So this article explores on the theory of gender studies as well as the equality of gender in terms of law.



**Keywords—** Feminine Masculinity, Gender, LGBT, Queer theory, Sexual identity.

Queer study is a vast interdisciplinary subject, which deals with feminism, LGBT, sexuality, social studies etc. LGBT is a vast label and terms such as Transsexual, Queer, Butch, BDSM, Androgynous, cross-dressing where inter-sex bodies reveal their identity. By 1970s the queer theory involves gay movement, and by the mid-1970s and 80s, it further extends with lesbian and gay organizations. Therefore, in the 1990s it turned into the LGBT movement. This theory not only focuses on lesbian, gay it also pictures Female Masculinity. In Freudian concept, Oedipus Rex, the woman plays the role of masculine occupations i.e. lesbian. Only in recent years, queer theory gains its own significance. Earlier 'Queer' the term itself considered a negative stereotype. In Michael Warner's *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics and the Ethics of Queer life* he states about queer problems, in particular, he discusses the gay rights and their problems. Feminism and queer theory are interconnecting to each other which mainly deal with female sex, equality between men and women, and their oppression, etc.

Queer study focuses on marginalized sexual identities where the hegemonic power structure considers them as negative stereotypes. Therefore, the aim of Queer theory is to break these stereotypes and to fix gender rights and their identities. In everyday context, the terms "Femininity", "Masculinity", "Masculine", "Feminine" overlap to each other. The term 'Masculine' carries hegemonic value and it leads to power over women, i.e. patriarchy. Female Masculinity is a representation of male identity in female mind and sometimes, it further extends as physical change like growing a beard, moustache, and sometimes transforming their gender too. Todd Resser claims, "it might be the case that masculinity appears more fluid at some points rather than at others, but that fluidity is always present in some way" (Wardle, n.p).

Women asserting masculine behaviour at highness cannot hide their gestures in society. Lesbianism is considered as Female Masculinity because they play the role of men. The term 'Butch' identifies masculine power in female. It is also known as 'Butch Boy'. Halberstam

explicit the concept of women's life style in Female Masculinity. In Robert J. Stoller's *Splitting: A case of Female Masculinity*, the title itself shows a split personality of women. For example, Tomboy is a concept used by Halberstam, the girl who behaves like a boy including the way of dressing resemble masculine. The tomboys are considered being unfeminine. The representation of woman with a masculine attitude is considered as cultural discourse. The daily usage of masculine, feminine words shows the depth understanding of human nature, behaviour, cultural, social implications of direct or indirect act of meaning.

Halberstam distinguishes the female masculinity such as Butches, a category of trans-men who identifies them from female. Female Masculinity is largely ignored by society because masculinity/ies is a term related to man. Hegemonic Masculinity was first used in 1982. The progressive of women masculinity results in their dress, which lead to an adaptation of masculine form. The women fashion designers have been inspired by masculine style, which they project in their appearance. Female Masculinity challenges the men's masculinity, and this made a new role to women. This leads to a projection, where men can see their behaviour in opposite gender. In sex, female adopts masculine role because in earlier women are not allowed to express their view on sex. Now, they are allowed to speak openly. Butler states that,

"Precisely what is becoming denied by the notion of a violational 'subject' who elects at will which gender and/or sexuality to be at any given place and time" (qtd. in khoury 1).

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth the central character possesses masculine behaviour. In many of Shakespeare's plays, they show the female characters as masculinity. In Shakespeare times, Queen Elizabeth ruled the country and possessed leadership quality, which resembles masculine behaviour. Female characters such as Lady Macbeth, Tamora, and Rosalind who controlled their own lives. Halberstam describes Female masculinity is rejected in dominant group. Halberstam states, "Female masculinities are framed as the rejected scarps of the dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be a real thing" (Masculinity, 1).

The role of Female Masculinity as women plays a major role in their carrier. Halberstam explains the Female Masculine has to compete herself in modern society. The manly woman has to undergo the consequences of alienation and ignorance from the society. The participation of female in masculine occupation creates an impact, which imposes a question on female characters and identity. The society judges them wrongly and

continuously ignoring their transformation as well as refuse to accept their identity. Refusing one's identity can be extremely traumatic for an individual because society takes gender roles and behaviour seriously. As a result, gender identities are constructed beyond social norms. Masculinity happens in woman, where woman performs or explicit the behaviourism of male. Hyper-active of masculine in femininity denotes the gender behaviour and not the change of gender.

Jack Halberstam discusses the issue between Feminism and Female Masculinity. "The conflicts between white feminist and transgender men/women and masculine women undergoes with betrayal of womanhood which was confirmed in a film *Notes on a Scandal* (2006)" (Halberstam, n.p). Alison Bechdel, in an interview with *The New York Times Magazine* in 2016, she stated, "Oh, I'm a man trapped in a female body, I would've just gone down that road. . . . . I like making this new space in the world" (Halberstam, n.p).

Halberstam mentioned a complex portrait of female Masculinity to a popular audience of cross butch. It is a story by Lisa Kron's *Ring of Keys*. The song reflects the appearance of Butch woman sung by young Alison; the butch looks manliness of her short hair, wearing boots, etc. In recent films *Dangal* (Hindi), *Irudhi Sutturu* (Tamil), they show women as Female Masculinity. Earlier in sports field only men are a dominant group in wrestling field but now many female wrestlers are there with Masculinity behaviour. For example, The First women wrestler, The Fabulous Moolah in 1983 won WWF women's championship. Chyna, a professional wrestler who is called "Ninth wonder of the world". Her physic and her gestures are merely equal to man.

Halberstam discusses "The Bathroom Problem" where Female Masculinity faces 'Wrong' bathroom issues because of their appearance. She shares her experience:

I strode purposefully into women's bathroom. No sooner had I entered the stall than someone was knocking at the door: "open up, Security here!" I understood immediately what had happened. I had, once again, been mistaken for a man or a boy, and some woman had called security. As soon as I spoke, the two guards at the bathroom stall realized their error, mumbled apologies, and took off. (Masculinity, 20)

The statement highlights the denial of basic rights and the brutality towards an individual. In contrast, Judith Halberstam's experience reflects her struggle to endure within a society that constantly forces her to explain and justify her gender to others.

Some masculine women encounter these issues in the airport where they have to prove themselves as women by raising their voice or physic (raising their breast). It is a challenging one especially the women who have less voice and breast less. If they failed to prove themselves, they have to face the 'Bathroom problem'. The Female Masculine has to prove their voice is the only way to get out from instant problems or difficulties they encounter. The problem of gender appearance emphasise the gender disparity. In general, masculinity defines as an attitude of male with ego centric where it shows a hegemonic power and dominance which symbolise it as normal.

According to Indian Constitution the law states that all are equal in the article 14 as, "The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India." (6). This highlights the right to equality irrespective of gender. On the other side, in reality the individual is cornered, forced to live in an alienated life. This happens because of brutal, unfair treatment of a gender.

The psychological problems they face when people mock at them. Halberstam too faced this issue and she focuses on the fear of women, which they encountered in bathrooms. The masculine women get beatings in the public sphere and they face physical violence. This pushes them to the margin. In Nice Rodriguez story *Every Full Moon*, the character Remedios faces physical violence and her father cautioned her to be more careful. While she was facing physical violence, she thinks, "She realized that being cautions means swaying her hips and parading her boobs when she enters any ladies room" (qtd in. Halberstam 23).

Halberstam discusses 'Minority Masculinities and the Art of Gender' Minority Masculinity focuses on Black Women. Black Masculine Women have high manliness moves and it projects them as both attractive and dangerous. Halberstam talks about Drag King shows it is a queer performance. The Drag Kings are female performer whose appearance is masculine. For example, a queer performance known as, *you're Just like My Father by Peggy Shaw* (1995). It is a single woman's performance shows her masculinity. The performer is Shaw herself. The posture in drama reveals her identity as female who have masculine behaviour. She covers her breast by using ace bandage. This shows her more masculine. However, Shaw is lesbian and her masculinity plays a major role. Shaw say,

This is my face, sharp. I look like my father.  
'You look just like your father,' my mother said.  
I look like my father when I'm in a good mood.  
Most lesbians I know really like their father, me

included. My father.... had a heart condition... I got the same condition simply 'cause I knew him so well. He had big hands, I have big hands ... My father told me that his father knocked out Joe Louis with his bare hands (YJLMF, 6:10-6:30).

From the above analysis of Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity*, Queer theory has its depth focusing on identity issues. The terms used by Halberstam shows how the female facing difficulties and gain support for their identity in the hegemonic society. Halberstam has discussed thoroughly on Feminine Masculine growth, physical change, economic status, etc. In 'Bathroom Problem', she brings out the two things. Firstly, it shows them as an odd gender and secondly, the bathrooms are only for the single-gendered which makes them to feel inferior and it affects them psychologically. The author explicit the butch women emotions by the performer Peggy Shaw. However, Female Masculinity projects themselves as men, but in public atmosphere, they are discriminated which is unacceptable in the society.

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