

MASCULINITY WITHOUT MEN

Rachel Adams

Female Masculinity

Judith Halberstam

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The year 1999 saw the publication of two widely publicized feminist studies of men, Susan Bordo's *Male Body* and Susan Faludi's *Stiffed*.¹ Written for a broad readership, these works emerged at the end of a decade during which academic gender studies turned the methods of feminist, gay, and lesbian inquiry to a consideration of masculinity. The scholarship on masculinity has expanded the terrain of gender and sexuality, bringing fresh insights to familiar texts and revealing the category of straight white manhood to be something like the Wizard of Oz, a tenuous, vulnerable figure hiding behind a screen of smoke and mirrors. Men across the disciplines have been interrogating their own masculinities; interpreting their relationships with their fathers, brothers, and male friends; confessing their feelings of alienation and weakness; and sometimes productively translating those personal revelations into renewed commitments to the analysis of gender and sexuality.² At its best, this work brings new vitality to feminist questions and suggests crucial points of contact between feminism and queer theory.³ Yet the sheer amount of ink spilled over this topic might give us reason to wonder why men—admittedly, now appropriately situated and theorized—have once again become the focus of analytic attention. Too often the study of masculinity seems to come at the expense of the study of women, with the unfortunate implication that questions about women have become uninteresting or are so familiar that they no longer need to be asked. Moreover, when focused on the burdens of gender and the

fragility of bonds between men, this scholarship tends to ignore the persistent links among masculinity, patriarchal power, and privilege.

Those who are uncomfortable with this turn of events will applaud Judith Halberstam's refreshing *Female Masculinity*, a work inaugurated by the bold dismissal of the beleaguered white male. "This study professes a degree of indifference to the whiteness of the male and the masculinity of the white male and the project of naming his power," she writes. "Male masculinity figures in my project as a hermeneutic, and as a counterexample to the kinds of masculinity that seem most informative about gender relations and most generative of social change" (3). Rather than assume that white male masculinity is foundational, Halberstam treats it as the least interesting or promising of many variants of the masculine. And while she acknowledges that masculinity can indeed be a burden, her satisfying rejoinder to the likes of Bordo and Faludi—frequent apologists for the men who bear its weight—is that "it is hard to be very concerned about the burden of masculinity on males . . . if only because it so often expresses itself through the desire to destroy others, often women. Indeed, this dual mechanism of a lack of care for the self and a callous disregard for the care of others seems to characterize much that we take for granted about white male masculinity" (274). One valuable lesson of Halberstam's work is that granting white men ownership of masculinity has elided more progressive versions of the masculine and has enabled the condemnation of female masculinity by both straight and lesbian feminists. *Female Masculinity* is not a perfect book. At times it is overly schematic, and there are moments when the interpretation is maddeningly truncated. But this unevenness bespeaks the challenge of breaking new ground. Halberstam forces us to look at familiar texts and problems in fresh ways and leaves room for future scholarship to expand her critical insights.

Female Masculinity makes the timely proposition that it is possible to study masculinity without men. In fact, masculinity is most complicated and transgressive when it is not tied to the male body, especially to the straight, white male body. Halberstam argues that female masculinity is not merely a perverse supplement to dominant configurations of gender; rather, masculinity itself cannot be fully understood unless female masculinity is taken into account. Female masculinity has played a crucial but unrecognized role in the emergence of contemporary formations of the masculine. Empowering models of female masculinity have been neglected or misunderstood because of a cultural intolerance of the gender ambiguity that the masculine woman represents. We live in a culture that, for several hundred years, has been unable to acknowledge gender indeterminacy as a functional mode of identification but instead has explained figures like the stone butch, the tomboy, and the androgyne in terms of pathology and deviance.

Female Masculinity is a project with explicit critical and personal goals. In addition to decoupling masculinity from men, Halberstam proposes to remedy the denigration of the masculine woman by mainstream feminists and woman-identified lesbians alike, who view her as a traitor for capitulating to butch stereotypes and engaging in a masochistic rejection of her own femininity.⁴ Not all versions of female masculinity give rise to such unease: Linda Hamilton's muscular aggression in *The Terminator II* and the tough, bald-headed characters played by Demi Moore in *G.I. Jane* and Sigourney Weaver in *Alien III* are examples of a sexy, confident female masculinity in mainstream Hollywood films. Popular culture applauds such figures of gender transgression as long as they are resolutely heterosexual. But female masculinity becomes intolerable when it is linked to the intimation of nonnormative sexuality. The hard, heterosexual female body is relatively uninteresting to Halberstam, who focuses on female bodies engaged in masculine performances connected to various forms of same-sex desire.

The historical recuperation of a queer female masculinity requires new methods, for scholars have persistently misread diverse representations of the masculine woman by lumping them together under the category of lesbianism. Halberstam's corrective is a methodology of "perverse presentism." Too often lesbian historiography has looked to the past with an eye for evidence familiar to and resonant with contemporary paradigms. Such presentist approaches "seek only to find what they think they already know" (54), that is, instances of protolesbianism that reinforce the critic's own beliefs and values. Drawing examples from the early nineteenth century through the first decades of the twentieth, Halberstam demonstrates the unacknowledged contribution of female masculinity to modern understandings of masculinity. Moreover, she shows how previous scholarship, eager to secure the historical foundations of lesbianism, has oversimplified, misunderstood, or elided a wide range of gender-deviant behaviors. Not only have earlier approaches misconstrued the past, but they have had consequences in the present, in fostering a tendency among lesbians and feminists to reject female masculinity as self-hating and politically retrograde.

One of the most interesting examples of perverse presentism is Halberstam's reinterpretation of the life of the paradigmatically queer author Radclyffe Hall. Hall lived at a time when sexological theories of inversion provided the dominant understanding of same-sex desire. As contemporary critics have observed, these theories reduced the complexity of human eroticism to a model in which heterosexuality was the norm and deviations could be described only in terms of inversion. Attempting to counter the work of sexologists, scholars have tended to read all diagnoses of inversion as lesbianism misunderstood. But such important correctives

have ignored the wide variability “within communities of women who are attracted to women” (77), compressing a range of nonnormative genders and sexualities into the category of lesbian. “When . . . lesbian feminists came to reject inversion as an explanation for same-sex sexuality, they also rejected female masculinity as the overriding category of lesbian identification, putting in her place the woman-identified woman” (82). Halberstam concludes that, viewed through the lens of perverse presentism, the invert should not be automatically conflated with the lesbian. In many cases inversion describes the quite different situation in which women who felt at odds with their bodies “effectively change[d] sex inasmuch as they passed as men” (87) in an era before the sex change operation was possible. Halberstam’s point is that a more historically nuanced understanding of female masculinity can make visible a multiplicity of identifications and practices that have been indiscriminately grouped under the category of lesbianism.⁵

Halberstam’s reinterpretation of Hall’s book *The Well of Loneliness* demonstrates the exciting possibilities of perverse presentism. While many critics have diagnosed the protagonist, Stephen Gordon, as a melancholic, self-hating lesbian, Halberstam suggests that Gordon is more accurately understood in terms of “what we would now call transsexual aspiration or transgender subjectivity” (96).⁶ Concentrating on the role of clothing in Gordon’s experience of gender inversion, Halberstam argues cleverly that whereas a novel like *The Picture of Dorian Gray* might be effectively read in terms of an epistemology of the closet, *The Well of Loneliness* must be understood not through the closet but the wardrobe. Gordon’s experience of inversion is crucially bound up with “a dressing that is not exactly cross-dressing and that positions itself against an aesthetic of nakedness” (99). Halberstam suggests that in the past clothing and body had a more continuous relationship to one another in the fashioning of sexual subjectivity: “Stephen’s repudiation of nakedness or the biological body as the ground for sexual identity suggests a modern notion of sexual identity as not organically emanating from the flesh but as a complex act of self-creation in which the dressed body, not the undressed body, represents one’s desire” (106). Such an understanding could be productively applied to other representations of sexuality in the past, when the naked body may not have been the primary, definitive signifier that it is in contemporary paradigms that conflate genitalia with sexual identity.

The payoff for such historical analysis is that it shifts away from a fixation on identities to focus on sexual practices. In their current configurations the identitarian categories “lesbian” and “gay” are quite inadequate for describing the broad array of erotic activity that cannot be characterized as “heterosexual.” Halberstam acknowledges the importance of identity-based categories to political mobilization,

while she recognizes that politics and sexual practices or erotic impulses are rarely aligned. And why should they be? She is critical of some lesbian feminists' attempts to police representations of same-sex activity in the misguided belief that doing so will encourage appropriate forms of erotic activity. As an example Halberstam cites 1980s lesbian erotica, in which the valorization of sameness and equality plays out in the description of sexual practices.⁷ Placing too much emphasis on identitarian categories has elided more explicit consideration of sex as such: "We almost seem to assume that particular practices attend particular sexual identities even as we object to the naturalization of the homosexual-heterosexual binary" (114). Producing a pointed discussion about sex is serious business to Halberstam, for "it means becoming serious about a discourse of acts rather than identities" (116). And she makes a compelling case for the potential rewards of such a changed perspective: "Finding out what people do sexually and, furthermore, what kinds of erotic narratives they apply to what they do sexually can rewrite both psychoanalytic theories of desire and scientific theories of sexuality. It can also clear up homogenizing notions of gay and lesbian desire that hold that all lesbians are attracted to all other lesbians and all gay men to [all] other gay men" (117).

Halberstam's call for renewed attention to sexual practices is not simply a theoretical exercise: *Female Masculinity* is compelling precisely because it is framed as a personal, as well as a critical and political, project. The appearance of Halberstam's more autobiographical voice in both introduction and conclusion highlights the importance of this undertaking. It is no accident that she acknowledges her own female masculinity in the direct, confessional terms of a coming-out narrative: "I was a masculine girl, and I am a masculine woman. For much of my life, my masculinity has been rendered shameful by public responses to my gender ambiguity. However, in the last ten years, I have been able to turn stigma into strength. This book is a result of a lengthy process of both self-examination and discussion with others" (xii). Her goal is both "to make my own female masculinity plausible, credible, and real" (19) and to begin a "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 pride and indeed power" (xi). This voice, more an activist's than a scholar's, is a refreshing complement to Halberstam's contention that as queer theory has been incorporated into the academy, it has lost contact with its origins in grassroots political activism.

Halberstam reanimates the personal voice to describe her ethnographic research in her chapter "Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance." Frequenting clubs and becoming acquainted with performers enabled her to understand this subculture as a scholar and an enthusiastic participant. The author's dual vantage

is captured in a portrait of her by photographer Del Grace. Unlike the subjects of other Grace photographs in this chapter, Halberstam's gaze is not trained outward to confront the viewer but appears to be turned toward a mirror just beyond the frame, where she admiringly contemplates herself as she adjusts her tie. Instead of asking for affirmation, Halberstam's body language—uplifted chin, confident posture, and compressed, somewhat enigmatic smile—projects the pride she claims in the introduction. The photograph's caption, which describes her as “Judith ‘Jack’ Halberstam,” bespeaks the masculine role performed by its subject, as well as her simultaneous proximity to and distance from the authorial Judith Halberstam. The juxtaposition of Judith and Jack is an excellent example of Halberstam's argument for the possibility of a conjunction between female and masculinity that is neither melancholic nor pathological. “Jack,” a drag identity clearly more transitory and provisional than Judith Halberstam, illustrates the author's involvement in, and critical analysis of, drag king culture. As she notes in this chapter, there is a discrepancy between her own commitment to masculinity and her perception by others in the club scene: “I always attend the club in what is received as ‘drag’ (suit and tie, for example), even though I do not wear male clothing as drag” (244). Describing these disparate modes of reception reiterates, again, the multiple forms, purposes, and effects of female masculinity. The photograph of Halberstam is also distinguished by its self-consciously artifactual quality. While other Del Grace photographs are characterized by snapshot-style realism, the portrait of Halberstam is obviously posed and bears the imprint of the photographer's intervention. Halberstam is highlighted by an unnatural, ethereal light that brings the dark folds of her suit, her eyes, and portions of her hair into negative relief, a pale luminous glow taking the place of shadows. Her body, outlined in black, appears cut out and pasted against the dark background. These devices call attention to the portrait as a representation, an artifact that captures not only the subject's image but also traces of the artist's contribution to the creative process.

What makes the portrait memorable is its bold categorical indeterminacy. In addition to its obvious refusal of gender polarities, it walks a fuzzy line between impressionism and realism; its subject is at once ethnographer and informant, author and text, engaged in transitory drag performance and in a more enduring embodiment of female masculinity. But this refusal to categorize runs counter to the logic that structures much of *Female Masculinity*, particularly the last two chapters, which provide a catalog of masculine types in film and drag subculture. “Specificity is all,” Halberstam insists (173), highlighting the importance of naming, describing, and organizing taxonomies of female masculinity. This pronouncement is part of the argument that overarching categories like “homosexual,”

“lesbian,” and even “queer” have failed to account for the diverse, protean arrangements of gender and sexuality, a failure that has contributed to the degradation and erasure of female masculinity. But, to put it reductively, Halberstam’s solution to the problem of categorical thinking is to come up with still more categories. Borrowing Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s notion of “nonce taxonomies,” Halberstam attempts to make visible “categories that we use daily to make sense of our worlds but that work so well that we actually fail to recognize them” (8). Sedgwick’s point is that nonce taxonomies, deployed in “the making and unmaking and remaking and redissolution of hundreds of old and new categorical imaginings concerning all the kinds it may take to make up a world,” are not easily systematized in the way that Halberstam’s organizational logic suggests.⁸ The last two chapters of *Female Masculinity* suffer from an excessively schematic taxonomy, in contrast to the more complex approach Halberstam adopts earlier in the book to analyze sexual practices of the past. The tension that troubles her work, between a capaciously flexible model of sexuality and one that is fractured endlessly in an attempt to account for every possible variant of experience, is characteristic of gay and lesbian identity politics (and perhaps of all identity politics) in general. A broadly inclusive banner like queer is, for some, so expansive that it has become meaningless, whereas the movement toward ever greater categorical specificity threatens to make coalition an impossibility.

Halberstam wants to have it both ways, to criticize existent categories for not doing justice to the diversity of sexual experience and identification but then to produce ever more exacting taxonomies as a corrective. The pitfalls of excessive categorization are evident when she concludes her insightful reading of Hall by remarking that the persistent misunderstandings of the author’s life might be resolved with “a far more finely calibrated system of sexual identity” (93). But I am not convinced, particularly in light of Halberstam’s overarching argument *against* the conflation of sexual practices and identities, a predictable gesture that needs to be replaced with an understanding of sexuality as diverse and unsystematic. Surveying the rich evidence provided in *Female Masculinity*, it seems more accurate to conclude that the odd alignments of sex and gender are most powerful when they refuse the logic of categorization altogether.

The drive to categorize sometimes leads Halberstam into unsteady speculation. For example, she writes of the nineteenth century, “I am certain that other court cases from the same period and other letters and diaries, *if discovered*, would provide a rich record of cross-identifying women . . . ; indeed, each category of cross-identification, from passing women to cross-dressing sailors and soldiers, deserves its own particular consideration” (52; my italics). Here Halberstam is

guilty of precisely the inaccuracy with which she brands other lesbian historiographers. Wishing to find evidence of what she believes would be there to strengthen her case for the viability of an empowered female masculinity in the present, Halberstam speculates on as yet undiscovered private papers. I understand the motivation behind this fantasy of documents that would give voice to previously silent sexual minorities, but it is difficult to defend such leaps of faith in the context of an argument against historical imprecision.

Despite my quarrel with Halberstam's at times excessively categorical thinking, her historical readings are compelling, and her criticism of existing lesbian scholarship is trenchant and incisive. This is less true of her chapter "Looking Butch: A Rough Guide to Butches on Film," which might go farther to tease out the dynamics of spectatorship that it promises to reveal in its opening paragraphs. "Looking Butch" is a fitting title for Halberstam's approach to film, which she describes as "a reconsideration of what it means to 'look' butch, to look at butches, and even to engage a 'butch' gaze" (175). The chapter begins by describing the relationship between stereotypical images and the vagaries of spectatorship, which, in a certain sense, is always already queer, because the viewer inevitably crosses genders as he or she identifies with multiple characters and scenarios during the course of any given film narrative. But the analysis of individual films is devoted primarily to questions of content, rather than to a more sustained discussion of spectatorship either as it is structured into the films themselves or in terms of audience reception. In keeping with Halberstam's penchant for categories, most of the chapter is divided into subsections corresponding to the following figures of female masculinity: the tomboy, the predatory butch, the fantasy butch, the transvestite butch, barely butch, and postmodern butch.

Whereas other chapters concern representations produced in Great Britain and the United States, "Looking Butch" also mentions Japanese and Brazilian films. "My aim here," Halberstam writes, "is not to gloss over the historical differences between each cinematic genre and its specific history but to show that butch images are used for a complex range of purposes within the history of cinema" (187). However, her analyses of Shushuke Kaneko's *Summer Vacation 1999* (1988) and Sergio Toledo's *Vera* (1987) do gesture toward historical and national differences when she comments of *Vera*: "It is significant that this film is Brazilian and that it references a different and highly gendered code of sexual variance" (216). My point is not that Halberstam should stay within the boundaries of national cinemas, particularly not in the context of a global market for the distribution and screening of films, which are inevitably viewed by audiences far removed from the circumstances in which the films were produced. Rather, Halberstam's selections

seem haphazard, and the rapid movement from one to another (she compares *Vera* to the 1953 American musical *Calamity Jane*) threatens to reduce her analysis to a comparative character study. Because she is much more careful about locating her literary readings *within* a national and historical framework, her discussion of film is less useful to a reader with more than a passing interest in cinema.

Too often Halberstam's observations simply trail off, leaving the impression that there is much more to say. Describing the death of Vasquez, the butch Latina in *Aliens*, for instance, she says only that "neither pull-ups nor a moment of butch bonding with a male marine can pull her from the jaws of death, and this butch meets a gory and untimely end" (205). Surely, the representation (and gruesome elimination) of a butch in a film literally oozing with anxiety about female sexuality needs a more extensive interpretation. In this chapter I am repeatedly left with the impression that further analysis has been withheld, that a reading has been truncated precisely at the moment when a provocative hypothesis is advanced.

The reading of Vasquez raises another set of questions about Halberstam's general treatment of racial and ethnic identity. *Female Masculinity* is a book about sexuality and gender that is sensitive to the way that issues of race and class matter, but the analysis of the latter terms is underdeveloped. The book as a whole suggests that while gender and sexuality are mutable, fluctuating facets of identity, race and class remain fairly static. Of the racial dimensions of Vasquez's character Halberstam writes: "The particular valence of Latina masculinity is underscored by the fact that a Jewish actress, Jeanette Goldstein, is used to play this role. Although Goldstein makes a convincing Latina, it is worth asking why the butch could not have been Jewish or white in this film or why a Latina could not have been cast in the role" (181). Granted, there is a lengthy tradition in Hollywood of casting white actors to play nonwhite characters. But what is the precise motivation for this question, and what answer does the author anticipate? Here again I am provoked but frustrated by the foreclosure of critical analysis. The questions that Halberstam wants to ask seem to assume that an actor's ethnic identity should correspond to the roles that he or she plays. This impulse is understandable in the context of an industry that has historically excluded people of color from significant roles. But it is an odd assumption in a book that is all about the productive tension caused by a discontinuity between sex and gender. If female masculinity can create the most powerful and transgressive versions of masculinity, might not the same be true of racial crossing? Eric Lott's *Love and Theft*, for example, demonstrates that whiteness is brought into striking relief precisely as it crosses with the parodic performance of blackness.⁹ Moreover, linking Jewish and white in opposition to Latina, Halberstam neglects more subtle differences between Jewish

and white. Indeed, while Jewish and white are often functionally interchangeable, Jewish women have traditionally been coded as nonwhite partly through stereotypical associations with masculine aggression and financial acquisitiveness. In approaching questions of racial and ethnic difference, Halberstam sometimes goes for easy answers rather than undertake the careful analysis she applies to questions of gender, sexuality, and eroticism. Likewise, she tends to gloss over the misogyny and homophobia of some nonwhite communities in her search for empowering, positive, and queer representations of female masculinity. Doing so leads to certain contradictions: although she seeks authenticity in her reading of Vasquez, Halberstam excuses Queen Latifah's potentially homophobic remarks concerning her role in *Set It Off* ("I'm not a dyke. . . . That's what Cleo is" [228]) by emphasizing the difference between filmic representations and the actress's own sexual identity.¹⁰

Yet the book's shortcomings, largely attributable to the difficulty of mapping unmarked territory, are overshadowed by the fact that Halberstam accomplishes her goal of bringing affirmative visibility to forms of sexual and gendered being that have been neglected or criticized by feminist, gay, and lesbian communities alike. She has taken on a vast project and is clearly committed to sketching the contours of many possible approaches to female masculinity rather than dwelling on one or two. The chapter on film alone suggests numerous possibilities for future research, and its at times superficial treatment of individual films in fact makes it useful as a preliminary catalog of cinematic representations of female masculinity that may have much the same function as Vito Russo's classic *The Celluloid Closet*, treasured for its extensive survey of gay, lesbian, and bisexual representations in Hollywood films.¹¹ My assessment of the importance of Halberstam's contribution is not idle speculation. Teaching a lecture course on masculinity in the fall of 1999, I enthusiastically referred students eager to research female masculinity to her book. Not only did I feel confident that these students, coming to their research with a range of motives and interpretive abilities, would find Halberstam's work both accessible and enlightening, but I believed that they would encounter there something of great intellectual and personal value.

Notes

1. Susan Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999); Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (New York: Morrow, 1999).
2. For examples of the confessional impulse in writings about masculinity see Paul

Smith, ed., *Boys: Masculinities in Contemporary Culture* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1996); and Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson, eds., *Constructing Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 1996). One of the best illustrations of personal commitments translated into rigorous, groundbreaking scholarship is Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). See, more recently, Tobin Siebers, *Among Men* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998).

3. Indeed, a turn to the analysis of masculinity marks the inaugural moment of queer theory, with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's landmark study *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
4. As examples of this position Halberstam cites Sheila Jeffreys, "Butch and Femme: Now and Then," in *Not a Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History, 1840–1985*, ed. Lesbian History Group (London: Women's, 1989), 158–87; and Julia Penelope, "Whose Past Are We Reclaiming?" *Common Lives, Lesbian Lives* 9 (1983): 18. In both *The Male Body* and *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), Susan Bordo offers a feminist critique of female hardness, which she sees as a capitulation to dominant standards of male masculinity. The valorization of hardness for men and women alike contributes, Bordo argues, to the denigration of the more conventionally soft female body.
5. Jay Prosser, making a similar argument about Hall, claims that reading inversion in terms of homosexuality erases the fact that the sexologists were attempting to think about transsexuality before medicalization made the sex change operation possible. Prosser's book on transsexuality is a fascinating counterpart to Halberstam's, for together they constitute the outer frontier of sex and gender studies. Whereas Halberstam seeks to affirm the ambiguous figure of the masculine woman, Prosser argues that queer theory's reverence for gender ambiguity threatens to reduce the transsexual to a trope. His project reasserts the materiality of the transsexual body: "If, for queer theory, transition is to be explored in terms of its deconstructive effects on the body and identity (transition as a symptom of the constructedness of the sex/gender system and a figure for the impossibility of this system's achievement of identity), I read transsexual narratives to consider how transition may be the very route to identity and bodily integrity. In transsexual accounts transition does not shift the subject away from the embodiment of sexual difference but more fully into it" (*Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1998], 6). [Prosser's book is reviewed elsewhere in this issue.—Ed.]
6. Esther Newton's reading of Gordon is the paradigmatic text for this analytic approach ("The Mythic Mannish Lesbian," *Signs* 9 [1984]: 557–75). Again, Prosser and Halberstam make similar observations about Gordon but arrive at strikingly different conclusions. Proposing, like Halberstam, that Gordon may be productively understood as a premedicalized transsexual, Prosser claims that Gordon decisively identifies with heterosexual men and the male body while disavowing her identification with women.

7. Halberstam herself may be guilty of the charge of policing erotic representation when she writes that a 1983 story from the lesbian journal *Common Lives, Lesbian Lives* is “asexual . . . because it de-eroticizes sex and assumes a sameness in desires” (137). This opinionated claim seems to clash with her larger point about the difficulty of predicting what will turn us on and the inappropriateness of condemning another’s representation of desire.
8. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 23.
9. Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
10. For a sensitive reading of homophobia among African Americans see Phillip Brian Harper, “Eloquence and Epitaph: Black Nationalism and the Homophobic Impulse in Responses to the Death of Max Robinson,” in *Are We Not Men? Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African-American Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3–38.
11. Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981).