

Annotated Bibliography

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Halberstam, Jack. (1998). *Female Masculinity*. Duke University Press.

This book is a foundational text in making the case that female masculinity is not an attempt to emulate maleness, but instead its own separate concept of what masculinity means and can mean. This text is especially well known in transgender and butch spaces. Halberstam explores identities throughout history and discusses that the existence of female masculinity has been present for well over two centuries.

This book is an accessible, entry-level read as it discusses a lot of basic, essential sexuality and gender theory. However, I also found that it managed to delve deeper into subversive identities that vary from one another but still share a core commonality in the presentation of masculinity of those assigned female. From 19th-century cross-dressing and lesbian figures to more contemporary drag kings and transmasculine presenting individuals. This book helped me with engaging in a spectrum of queer and masculine-aligned identities, which is a main theme in my work since I am interested in gender performance and butch/femme subculture. It also helped me examine feminism, which I also focus on in my work and research, through a nuanced, critical lens, since some feminist theories have historically clashed with queer movements.

Manion, Jen. (2020). *Female Husbands, A Trans History*. Cambridge University Press

Manion's book explores the lives of the titled '*Female Husbands*' and their spouses while analysing identities and discussing what pushed them to live their lives presenting as Husbands, and whether they may have been transgender, cross-dressers, or living as men to love and to marry members of the same sex. The author, however, does not define anyone as any particular identity, as these people did not have the same tools as we do today to describe sexuality and the inner workings of gender. This read is a fascinating yet disheartening one, leading one to wonder how these people would live today and whether, in Western society, we have changed as much as we some think we have.

Some criticisms of *Female Husbands* are that it describes itself as a trans history while mostly recognising the Husbands as lesbians rather than whether they may have been transgender men. I find this sentiment quite reductive as it suggests that lesbianism and transness are mutually exclusive to one another, which I believe is false, and while they can exist individually without each other, both identities are deeply intertwined and related. However, I did agree with the critique that to those who may be unfamiliar with gender theory in relation to sexuality, it could be viewed as a less accessible read. I found it to be densely packed with information and useful for my dissertation, but it did lack the accounts from the Husbands themselves, which I had hoped it would include, and focused more on information from people who were close to these individuals.

Butler, Judith. (2024). *Who's Afraid of Gender?* Penguin Books Ltd.

Who's Afraid of Gender? Is currently Butler's most recent addition to their queer/feminist theory library. It discusses the topic of 'political phantasm' regarding anti-trans discourse, and argues that because sex and gender are constructed in different ways socially and throughout time and location,

sex and gender are therefore inconstant. This is Butler's first book, which focuses more on the style of palatability to general audiences rather than academia, which I appreciate as I am typically pro accessibility, especially on subjects similar to those discussed in this text. However, this comes to be a common criticism of Butler's recent book.

Since gender is a topic which could never entirely be covered in a single book, especially with every different political and philosophical angle, I believe Butler successfully covered the rudimentary information and discussions on this grand and expansive topic. However, I found that most of this book was less about the philosophies of gender and more of a collection of opinions held by different groups, including TERFs and gender abolitionists, which proved to be less useful than I expected it to be, especially since most of the book focuses on American politics (which I knew before engaging with it). However, I do not regret the read, and I still managed to find use in it since there was a section on the UK (England) for my topic; I believe this read would benefit most those who have less knowledge of queer gender theories.

Medhurst, Eleanor. (2024) *Unsuitable: A History of Lesbian Fashion*. C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd.

In *Unsuitable*, Medhurst delves into lesbian fashion history. It documents the significance of lesbians and clothing, including lesbians' relationship with cross-dressing and subverting gender expectations. From figures like Anne Lister to 1950's butch/femme bar culture, this book was an incredibly useful and unexpected find. While still an introductory read, Medhurst concisely directs the reader through these histories and equally focuses on masculinity and subversive femininity, which alienates itself from the patriarchy.

I found that it was a well-formatted and academic, yet easy-to-understand read. Some ideas that were mentioned are significant points that I had yet to discover much in texts before, including those on

non-patriarchal feminine expression and femininity that is worn by lesbians *for* lesbians. Medhurst also discusses the power of “ugliness”, which is something I think about a lot in my art and research; avoiding what is desirable to men. Ugliness in butches and femmes may manifest differently, especially since butches are typically more ostracised and therefore visually recognised and labelled as “Ugly women” than (cisgendered) femme individuals. I look a lot at masculinity and how it presents in those who are queer or assigned female, especially in butch-identifying people, as well as my own identity in femmeness and how it can subvert the male gaze and what I do to achieve that and present in a way that is entirely lesbian.

Feinberg, Leslie. (1993). *Stone Butch Blues*. Firebrand Books.

Stone Butch Blues may be one of the most well known and ‘sacred’ texts associated with lesbianism and queer masculinity. If you are a lesbian and have spent any time in lesbian spaces, you will have likely been told to read *Stone Butch Blues*. It is a fictional book which reads as almost an autobiography, about a lesbian named ‘Jess’ who navigates butch and trans identity as well as violence against the queer community. The key reason most are told to read *Stone Butch Blues* is because, despite being entirely fictional, it is treated as a literary piece for self discovery. Those who may be questioning their gender identity and sexuality then can discover themselves through the character of Jess.

I believe that this book is not for everyone. Not even every queer/lesbian person. Feinberg is a respected and beloved author/activist and hir positive legacy to the trans lesbian community should not go unrecognised. However, *Stone Butch Blues* can be a difficult and depressing read though, as it is filled with homophobic and sexual violence which is not suited to all readers. Those who wish to discover parts of their identity may find better luck in something which involves less distressing scenes. *Stone Butch Blues* has been useful to my research in past essays and in my current thesis as it is such a significant piece of work to the discussion of butch and transmasculine lesbians.

