



**LUND**  
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**Female Masculinity:  
A Threat or/and Tribute to Male Masculinity**

Exploring the Limitations of Denaturalization of Gender

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## *Abstract*

*This theoretical paper will explore the limitations of denaturalization of gender, or more specifically the breakage of the link between maleness and masculinity. Using different examples of female masculinities, but focused on those coupled with lesbian desire, it will be argued that exposing performativity/unnaturalness of gender does not necessarily impact the gender binary - femininity/masculinity. It will be shown that denaturalization of gender can bring more acceptance of persons whose gender identity and/or expression do not align with their sex, however, it does not have to, in any way, have an effect on changing the subordinated position of femininity/feminine attributes in the Western society.*

*Keywords: masculinity, butch, lesbian, homosociality, binary*

## 1. Introduction

Denaturalization of gender has been at the forefront of the feminist thought for decades. Foundational feminist and queer theory authors channeled a lot of their labor into proving that there is no such thing as an original (or false) gendered expression, but through their efforts they have usually conceptualized de-essentialization of gender as being subversive for gender binary and hierarchy. In my thesis I further explore this approach and interrogate its limitations, as the goal of this paper is to examine those contributions to feminist and queer theory that are often uncritically approached. My main argument is that just because denaturalization of gender may be a necessary condition for destruction of gender dichotomy, that does not mean it is a sufficient one. I will try to build argumentation through analyzing masculinities without men, i.e. female masculinity, and the tension between it representing a threat for gender dichotomy and it just being an unsubversive homage to male masculinity.

My paper will also tackle political categories and present argument that, in the Western society, political categories of men and women are increasingly becoming inadequate. Due to denaturalization efforts we came to the breakage of the link between masculinity and maleness, as well as femininity and female body, and the idea that different bodies can be/embody different genders is becoming increasingly accepted. However, I argue that this moving away from seeing gender in an essentialist manner, i.e. as something fixed, will not necessarily bring dissolution of the masculinity/femininity dichotomy. The survival of this binary is not necessarily under question if we just recognize that female bodies can perform masculinities, while male bodies can perform femininities.

Although I reason for the introduction of masculine and feminine as political categories (instead of men and women), I will also try never to equate female masculinity with male masculinity, as that would be reductionist and lazy – it would show analytical inability to comprehend peculiarity and subversive potentialities of the former. Depending on the context, I will acknowledge that in some places and/or times female masculinity can profit, but in other it is penalized.

I acknowledge that the topic of masculine females I am writing about is not new. However, I aim to build on previous debate and discuss it in a current social context, influenced by many developments both in politics and theory. I argue for the critical and sceptical approach towards all that at first seems to represent progress, i.e. I refuse what Foucault would call ‘presentist’ model of history: “...narratives of progression in which all social change contributes to the greater good and arrives at an almost utopian present in which things are always better than they have ever been” (Halberstam, 1998: 53).

Finally, the aim of this paper is to explore and uncover the limitations of denaturalization of gender as a strategy for destroying gender binary and hierarchy. I

am led by these questions, among others: How does the breakage of link between maleness and masculinity impact gender binary, if at all? Are ‘women’ and ‘men’ becoming obsolete as political categories? Is the claim of naturalness the only way to attaining hegemony?

## 2. Disposition

I will now give a preview of the sections that follow. In the Section 3, named *How: Theory and Method* I will give an overview of the most important post-structuralist postulates, as well as provide the explanation of what kind of material I will use in order to depict arguments in this theoretical paper. The following Section, *Where and Who: Context*, will situate this paper and give reasons why did I choose not to aim for universality, but contextualize my arguments so they concern the Western society. *In Denaturalization We Trust* (Section 5) gives an overview of Judith Butler’s, among others, efforts to denaturalize gender/sex and the ways in which butch/femme identities indeed have denaturalizing effect. This section also introduces my argument that masculinity’s domination does not have to be rooted in the claim to naturalness. In the section 6, *Just A Spot at the Table*, I tackle Jack Halberstam and his aim to break the connection between masculinity and maleness. With different examples I show that Western society is, on one hand becoming more accepting towards those whose gender does not follow from their sex/bodies, and on the other hand still values and rewards masculine attributes over feminine. *What We Remain To Be* (Section 7) explores the usefulness of political categories ‘man’ and ‘woman’, and proposes ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ as more suitable for the current Western context. In this section I also outline examples which depict that females can be equally successful in performing masculinity and be rewarded for that performance. In *Impenetrable* (Section 8) I argue against Butler’s and Halberstam’s interpretations of stone butches (lesbians who do not allow their partners to sexually touch them) as self-sacrificing. I do that by showing how being penetrated into is historically seen as feminine,

therefore by their impenetrability stone butches retain their masculinity. *From Other to Same* (Section 9) explores the ways in which men can perceive female masculinity. I explain how men can see it as a certain tribute to male masculinity, and further, perceive masculine females as equal competitors for sexual/romantic partners. *I Am Not Your Bro* (Section 10) aims to show the ways in which masculine females can be embraced by men into their ‘community’, often founded on treatment of women/feminine persons as sexual objects. In the *Not All, But Some* (Section 11) I argue against Halberstam’s unfounded claim that masculine females are more likely to perform masculinity without misogyny. The last section in the paper is *Conclusion*.

### 3. How: Theory and Method

Post-structuralist thought will have an immense impact on my work, as I will explore the work and use concepts of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, among others. Post-structuralism brought critique to meta-narratives, narratives that proposed the idea of a universal subject whose needs are well known, and a subject who can be liberated. It also critiques the way we acquire and use knowledge, i.e. what methods we use for describing this universal subject. As deconstruction of the universal subject represents one of the main characteristics of post-structuralism, the notion of difference is central to post-structuralist analysis: “...fragmentation and diversity become reconfigured as ‘difference’, and ‘difference’ is understood as inscribed in and through the operation of power. Thus, both ‘race’ and gender difference become objects of analysis in the attempt to explicate their processes of constitution, as does their relation to that which is simultaneously constructed as the norm” (Lewis, 2000: 16). The differences are not approached in essentialistic manner, they are not being treated as something pre-social. This aligns with Butler’s idea of denaturalization of gender (and sex).

Subjects are not viewed as stable and unitary in post-structuralism, but rather fragmentary. ‘Self’ is deemed to be constructed in relation to ‘other’ and in order for it to seem stable certain facets of it have to be denied or rejected: “This process of constitution of ‘self’ is, however, an unstable process precisely because the self contains within it sameness and difference. This leads to the second point, that maintenance of the fiction of a unitary self comprised of internal sameness in opposition to external difference is achieved through an active process of expulsion, denial, rejection or even ingestion” (Lewis, 2000: 57). The process of ingestion here seems particularly important for my thesis as it “...equates to a process of appropriation or assimilation of difference into sameness, so that which was different – ‘the other’ – is no longer so” (Lewis, 2000: 57). One of the main ideas in my paper is that female bodies that perform masculinity do not have to be perceived as something ‘other’ by male bodies who perform it – “...boundaries which differentiate ‘types’ of people” (Lewis, 2000: 202) can be renegotiated not on the basis of sex (or body), but based on gender which is performed.

I will return to discussing unstableness of the subject in the next paragraph when talking about intersectionality, however now I also want to introduce another one of the central concepts in post-structuralist thought that is very much linked to the topic I will discuss in this paper – power. Post-structuralist approach sees power as something exercised, which differs from “...traditional social theories that understand power as hierarchically sourced (from top down), materially based (economically driven), possessed (by group or individual) and primarily prohibitive (coercive)” (Whitehead, 2002: 84). Further, for poststructuralists power is something present everywhere and nowhere, deemed to be circulating through the social network rather than being located at different positions (Whitehead, 2002: 104). Even though notions like gender hierarchy imply unequal distribution of power, it is important to note that I will try to follow post-structuralist notions of power which open up possibilities that all positions and/or performances exercise or have potential to



exercise power. Therefore, none of the positions that subjects in my work occupy should be seen as totally powerless or purely oppressed as I do not want to reduce the complexity of gender relations: "...complex gendered power relations are reduced to an 'oppressor-victim' dualism, in which multiple subjectivity and self-identity processes are made invisible by the power of political categories of gender and sexuality and their ideological and material forces" (Whitehead, 2002: 99). It is, of course, possible that I will not completely succeed in this, i.e. maybe I will not always get away from dualisms like oppressor/oppressed, however I will always try to acknowledge the ways in which power and resistance come into interplay.

My approach will also be intersectional. Subjects never occupy only one position, rather its positions are multiple – and intersectionality gives us insight into that instability of the subject and the interplay of different structures of power. I will make distinctions between different masculinities based on the ways they interact with class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationhood etc. Post-structuralism and intersectionality are in this way compatible as post-structuralism is "...a set of theoretical tools... that together, and in part, provide means by which to interpret, understand and locate the subject in the social network, in the process providing insights into (non-grounded) identity, the self, power/resistance and subjectivity" (Whitehead, 2002: 103).

Position that subject takes is of essential value for post-structuralist approach, compared to approaches that focus on individuals and their 'cores'. Following this, I will try not to center my analysis around identities, but rather positions. I will approach identity as something that is performed: "...recognizing that identity is contingent, is a performance, provides the potential for rewriting the scripts of individual (and group) identity. The notion of rewriting leads to the critical question of agency" (Guterman, 1994: 222). Post-structuralism has often been critiqued for this particular reason of diminishing the role of 'self' and denying the existence of

any 'core', often slipping into being a grand-narrative itself. However, what can be observed as the main aim of post-structuralism is deconstruction, which gives us further insight and understanding of things we research. Even though deconstruction of the universal subject (or specifically speaking of 'woman') is usually linked with post-structuralism, Clare Hemmings acknowledges that deconstruction has always been at the forefront of majority of feminist theories: "...feminist poststructuralist theorists are repeatedly positioned as the first to deconstruct 'woman', and as either heroic in surpassing past mistakes, or responsible for the ills of feminism in general. I dispute this characterization of poststructuralism for the simple reason that one of the abiding concerns for the majority of feminist theorists has always been, and remains, such a deconstruction" (Hemmings, 2005: 116). My work will hopefully further contribute to the deconstruction of categories 'woman' and 'man', although at the same time it may contribute to strengthening of other categories like 'feminine' and 'masculine'.

Objectivity is an unavoidable topic when discussing theoretical and methodological approaches in one's thesis. Meta-narratives, critiqued by post-structuralist texts, installed objectivity as something universal, and most of all, attainable. On the other end of the spectrum we have relativism, which Donna Harraway heartedly critiques and draws comparisons between it and objectivity: "Relativism is the perfect mirror twin of totalization in the ideologies of objectivity; both deny the stakes in location, embodiment, and partial perspective; both make it impossible to see well" (Harraway, 1988: 584). Instead of alining with objectivity or relativism, Harraway proposes a third-way that goes beyond this dichotomy. Feminist objectivity represents an objectivity that is situated: "So, not so perversely, objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility. The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision... Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object"

(Harraway, 1988: 582-583). My work will follow Harraways propositions in a way that it will always be situated, speaking from and about particular embodiment, and as previously noted by many feminists – it is not possible for anyone to stand outside of social dynamics one aims to analyze, i.e. claims to neutrality are invalid (Whitehead, 2002: 14).

I also want to note that I am not aiming to omnipotence nor I do promise covering all aspects of the problem in question/topic of this work. I do not want to deny the complexity of both external and internal reality nor deny possible biological and psychological explanations/approaches, i.e. I do not want to assert: “...sociological omnipotence; and with that there is an implicit denial of the complexity of internal reality – the script is simply internalised, without, it seems, any interpretation” (Craib, 1997: 8).

One of the arguments that Harraway introduces seems particularly relevant and fruitful for this paper. Even though valuing partial and situated visions, it is crucial never to romanticize perspectives of those deemed to be less powerful, i.e. oppressed. Even though positions of female (queer) masculine persons are seen as subjugated in homophobic and patriarchal societies, these positions should still be approached critically.

Queer people also have heterogenous social positions and it is important to recognize that not all LGBTQs have the same interests or worries – obstacles for constructing universal politics and solidarity are more than real. Not all of us have the same amount to lose or gain, even though all of us to the certain extent perpetuate gender oppression/binary and have to work on dismantling it. Jin Haritaworn says that “...loudest critics of liberal rights and protections agendas have ironically included those who are most vulnerable to homophobia and transphobia, and yet likelier to become visible as targets for state killing, than for state protection and recognition”

(Haritaworn, 2012: 74). I do not agree with how she placed the word ‘ironically’ in this sentence, as she later in the text acknowledges that being a critic of liberal rights and protections totally aligns with queer people of color’s interests, as they would be the ones who would suffer the most if those protections are to be enforced. As we know, legal system targets nonwhite and poor people disproportionately, therefore it is only logical that queer people of color do not fight for things that do not serve them – it is not ironic in any way.

My main point here is that not all queers share interests nor are on the same side. We are differentiated based on race, class, gender, nationhood, etc. Without a question, white middle class gays can in certain societies benefited from the introduction of gay marriage and/or hate crime laws. With the certain progress in the area of queer and women rights, some queers (white, rich, masculine) therefore gained very much and are in the position to even lose those things gained in case they show solidarity with the more deprivileged. This can make them fiercely loyal to the system. Not recognizing heterogeneity among queers is lazy and dangerous, and this paper does not aim to defend those homonormative/rich/cis/white queers who further perpetuate system of inequalities or be gentle to them. I aim to do the contrary – I want to show that not all people perceived as queer (or in the context of this paper – masculine females) can be trusted and seen as natural allies. In particular, female masculine persons can perpetuate gender oppression once they get accepted by male masculine persons, and together they can work on keeping all femininities subordinate.

Concerning method that I will use – this paper aims to be mostly theoretical. However, I plan to include different material – articles, movies, and certain autoethnographical content – in order to depict my arguments and explain them in a better way, rather than to support them. Material that I will include will make my analysis easier to understand.

Autoethnography seems suitable for this paper as it allows me to connect my ‘self’ and my experiences, as a masculine lesbian, to the social, which combined with my sociological and feminist academic background, puts me in a peculiar position as the author of the thesis with this topic. However, the purpose of my use of autoethnography is not to give insider’s perspective nor to explore my self, but rather to give insight into arguments that I will make and into broader social phenomenon. I am not arguing for ethnographic work that becomes pure storytelling, serving only to induce emotional response or document personal experience: “...autoethnography as a research methodology must do more than explore the self. There must be an argument and an empirical basis to research, otherwise it is perhaps more aptly termed storytelling, which is an important contribution to understanding our world, but cannot be necessarily categorized as research” (Taber, 2010: 14).

Further, when it comes to using our own life experiences in our work, Cavarero poses important questions: “Is all of this a narcissistic orgy centered on the pleasure of hearing one's story told? Is this perhaps an auto/biographical twist on typical modern individualism, in feminist clothing?” (Cavarero, 2000: 84). Even though my experiences are what inspired me to write this paper and can represent a nice entry point of my thesis, I recognize Cavarero’s scepticism and share her worries. Therefore, I will try to limit the use of my own experiences and employ them only in order to make my argumentation easier to grasp.

#### 4. Where and Who: Context

Although I am writing a theoretical paper, it is still important to have in mind my own position as an author, as well as the context and positions of those groups/phenomena I am writing about. Locating this paper and myself as its author is necessary in order for my argumentation to aim at validity: “I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the

condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people's lives. I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity" (Harraway, 1988: 589). As I am talking about gender binary, I am focusing on societies for whom system of language and/or thought are immersed in dualisms like body/mind, nature/culture, woman/man, dark/light etc. Therefore, the West, i.e. European/American culture, represents the context in which and about which I am writing.

By choosing particular context, I am avoiding to talk about the notion of a universal patriarchy, as it would represent a failure to acknowledge how gender domination functions differently in different contexts. Further, I cannot talk about masculinity in societies that do not grasp this concept in the same way: "A culture which does not treat women and men as bearers of polarized character types, at least in principle, does not have a concept of masculinity in the sense of modern European/American culture" (Connell, 2014: 68). If I assumed that gender oppression operates in the same way in every part of the World and analyzed every context through Western notions of gender and oppression, it would not only bring me criticism of failing to resist the epistemological colonization, but would also make my arguments invalid and unsupported.

Talking about the West may also seem too broad (my understanding of it can especially be contested due to its broadness, which I will come to later), however I think it is suitable for my topic for a couple of reasons. First reason concerns gender binary – masculinity/femininity, which I previously mentioned, and the Western thought being immersed in these kind of dualisms. Gender binary, as well as different strategies for its breakdown, represents the main topic of my work. All my arguments assume the existence of it in the context in which I am writing in, and relationality of this binary is one of its main characteristics. Masculinity is a relational category, it

only exists and can be explained in relation to femininity: “This relational or contextual point of view suggests that what the person “is,” and, indeed, what gender “is,” is always relative to the constructed relations in which it is determined” (Butler, 2011: 14). These relations are always culturally and historically specific, they shift over different contexts and times and their content and meaning are not constant, which further justifies the choice of a particular context.

Second reason for which the Western context is suitable for my paper concerns the state of women and queer rights in the Western society. Formal equality of women and men is a prerequisite of every argument in this paper, as all arguments only concern contexts where formal equality is already reached. Even though access to resources, opportunities etc. remains highly gendered, and practice and statistics about gender equity in all Western countries do not reflect laws, we cannot argue with the fact that women have gained equal formal rights in the Western society. Moreover, feminism without a doubt has certain political presence in the West and even though its material impact can be under question, the presence of its public voice cannot be contested. The proof of its presence is the narrative we often hear about ‘men and/or masculinity being in crisis’: “At the very least, notions of ‘men in crisis’ indicate that feminism, as a coalition of diverse but complementary political discourses, is not easily ignored. Indeed, I would argue that all men, in some form or another, have had to, or will have to, consider their relationship to the questions, criticisms and demands of feminists” (Whitehead, 2002: 64).

The processes of change in gender relations are occurring all over the Western world and narratives about masculinity that were once hegemonic (hegemonic masculinity represents an ideal masculinity at certain point in a given context) are now under attack. Because of this, men are under pressure to renegotiate their position in the world: “When conditions for the defense of patriarchy change... the bases for the dominance of a particular masculinity are eroded. New groups may challenge old

solutions and construct a new hegemony” (Connell, 2014: 77). This shift of social values also consists of change in relation to (homo)sexuality, as homosexuality is becoming increasingly politicized in postmodern politics (Weeks, 1995: 83). In recent years LGBTQ rights have become an important topic in national and international politics in the West, and (homonormative) LGBT people have gained access to rights like marriage, civil partnerships, anti-discrimination laws etc. Moreover, LGBTQ rights became one of the main boundary markers of the Western society and serve to uphold the dualisms like tradition/modernity, European/non-European, East/West etc. In the context of neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism, the West continues to represent itself as progressive and claims homosexuality as its marker (Bracke, 2012: 249), all while projecting homophobia onto the ‘barbaric’ Other: “...sexualities and intimacies were not simply metaphors but the material means to organize colonial relationships—including by asserting and remaking the boundaries between colonizer and colonized, European and non-European” (Anderson and Hughes, 2015: 139).

However, the situation concerning homosexuality was quite different in the past – during European colonialism and imperialism homosexuality was a marker of uncivilization. LGBTQ rights are now deployed as a weapon by Western nations who want to legitimize their islamophobia and treatment of immigrants, constructing a narrative in which muslims represent a threat to women and queers in the West. Gays are, on the other hand, becoming more and more assimilated and represented as “...model gentrifiers or ‘creative classers’, who embody the neoliberal cosmopolitan values of diversity and mobility” (Haritaworn, 2012: 75-76) and therefore are seen as valuable and valid part of society. Values of entrepreneurialism are coming to the front, reducing valorization of traditional positions like husband or father: “It is therefore not surprising that the homophobia so prominent in older hegemonic masculinities is reduced, even absent. It is now possible for gay men to be ‘out’ and still function as multinational managers, in a way inconceivable in big business one or two generations ago” (Connell, 2014: 256). The West reconstructs its homophobic



and sexist past, (as well as present) and presents itself as a savior of queers and women. This is especially visible when talking about granting asylum to queers who live in countries where their rights are under threat and whose “...conditional inclusion serves both to assure their loyalty and to affirm the West’s superior ability to tolerate difference” (El-Tayeb, 2012: 83).

Furthermore, queer rights also became a marker of the European Union and often serve to police candidate countries. This is where we come to discussing if my definition of the West is too freely conceptualized. I want to include Balkan countries in the West and/or Europe I am writing about. Certain examples that I will use to depict (rather than support) my argumentation will come from Serbian context, a country from which I am coming from. This can be seen as problematic, as Balkan countries’ position is often seen as ambiguous, belonging neither to West nor East. Even though geographically in Europe, the Balkans have often served as an appropriate, barbaric Other for the Western Europe. However, I argue that Serbian context, in terms of gender relations and in the light of this paper, can serve as a valid one for my arguments. Of course, throughout the paper, if needed, I will also try to acknowledge the differences between, for example, Serbian and Swedish contexts in terms of gender configurations. Serbia aims to join European Union, is geographically located in Europe, is mostly Christian and has formal gender equity – this for now should be enough for its inclusion in this paper.

It is also important to recognize that I, as an author of this paper, am not only situated in a certain context, coming from Serbia and studying in Sweden, but am fully immersed in the topic I am writing about. I chose this topic, as well as developed my argumentation, based on my personal existence and experiences as a masculine queer female person. Therefore, my position will not be neutral nor I am hiding that this paper is openly political and normative, as I see gender binary and oppression as something that should be fought against. However, that does not mean that I will not

carefully, one may even say objectively, assess the arguments and different positions on the topic I am exploring. The aim of this paper is to examine and understand processes and practices that obstruct the possibility of gender equity, and as such it never claims neutrality. As my approach will be openly normative, I will not shy away from delivering judgments and rating (un)subversiveness of certain performances. However, nothing is inherently subversive, as subversiveness of something deeply depends on the context, therefore I will provide judgments only for the certain context in question, all while acknowledging the ways in which contexts also undergo temporal change.

## 5. In Denaturalization We Trust

Dualisms (and their implicit political and psychic hierarchy) which lay at the core of the Western thought, represent one of the main themes in the founding text of queer theory – Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*: “The cultural associations of mind with masculinity and body with femininity are well documented within the field of philosophy and feminism” (Butler, 2011: 17). Dualisms like gentle/strong, rational/emotional etc. represent stereotypes linked to gender, and gender represents one of the most important lenses through which we perceive ourselves and others. Therefore, these dualisms deserve our attention: “...queer theory has emerged as an attempt to release individuals from the constraints of both biological determinism and the dualistic thinking that provides the very basis of (contra)identities such as black/white, woman/man, gay/straight” (Whitehead, 2002: 77). Butler aims to deconstruct these dichotomies and focuses on the question of the feminist subject. She tries to build on and critique existing second wave feminist theory and politics, founded on the idea that unity of the subject is needed for fruitful political action. As previously said, and following post-structuralist thought, her goal is to disprove this false unity and universalism of the feminist subject, as well as to denaturalize gender: “The dogged effort to “denaturalize” gender in this text emerges, I think, from a

strong desire both to counter the normative violence implied by ideal morphologies of sex and to uproot the pervasive assumptions about natural or presumptive heterosexuality that are informed by ordinary and academic discourses on sexuality” (Butler, 2011: xxi).

The most important queer theorist of our time rightfully recognizes the violence that occurs to bodies that do not conform to gender norms. Butler says that ordinary, and in the period she wrote this book in probably most-common, discourses (homophobic and misogynistic) on gender and sexuality without a doubt regard certain appearances of gender (for example female masculinity) to be mere copies or illusions of those seen as original and natural (male masculinity). These kind of discourses perpetuate the idea that natural sex and/or gender exist, and punish those bodies not aligning with this perception. Similar to Jack Halberstam and his book *Female Masculinity*, Butler acknowledges that the normative task of her work is to provide legitimacy to bodies that are seen as unreal and false. As I will show later, in this task two of them without a doubt succeed, they prove that there is no such thing as an ‘original’ when it comes to gender – however, proving that there is no such thing as illusionary appearance of gender does not have anything to do with tackling gender binary/hierarchy.

To be fair, Butler recognizes one limitation of denaturalization as a strategy – she says that denaturalization of sex has social constraints and can be severely punished, even resulting in death of those performing non-normative gender and sexuality. She talks about the movie in which transsexual prostitute named Venus is killed by her customer: “Clearly, the denaturalization of sex, in its multiple senses, does not imply a liberation from hegemonic constraint... The painfulness of her death at the end of the film suggests as well that there are cruel and fatal social constraints on denaturalization” (Butler, 2011: 133). However, I think that Butler’s use of the term

limitation here is misplaced – as social constraints represent an obstacle for denaturalization as a strategy, more than they represent its limitation.

Even though I argue that denaturalization has other limitations, I also want to point out that it is a necessary step in order for us to destroy gender binary and oppression. Naturalization of differences serves to preserve the current state affairs and to depict them as not susceptible to change, as stable: “Binary gender system operates in such a way as to prefigure the sex-gender distinction in language and culture, thus suggesting stability” (Whitehead, 2002: 191). Maintaining of power differentials depends on perpetuating these notions of gender difference as something natural. Moreover, it serves to moves us away from thinking that gender justice is possible at all: “...we naturalize history, we assume that "men" and "women" have always existed and will always exist. Not only do we naturalize history, but also consequently we naturalize the social phenomena which express our oppression, making change impossible” (Wittig, 1992: 11). Therefore, the task these authors take upon themselves is a noble one.

Butler’s attack on naturalization of gender starts with the critique of the distinction between sex and gender. This distinction showed up as a result of the second wave feminist thought. Simone de Beauvoir’s most famous sentence “...one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one” (Beauvoir, 2010: 283) from her work *The Second Sex* implies that gender is something socially constructed. On the other hand, sex (female/male) serves to represent a natural part in that dichotomy, a biological body that appropriates gender. Butler sees this distinction as problematic as it aims to construct sex and its binary frame as something prediscursive, natural and politically neutral compared to gender – and from that assumed naturalness it can draw its legitimacy and hegemonic position. However, she writes that sex is always already gender, i.e. it and its binary should also not be essentialized: “This production of sex as the prediscursive ought to be understood as the effect of the apparatus of cultural

construction designated by gender” (Butler, 2011: 10). Sex is as constructed as gender, and dichotomy sex/gender is a false one, as there is nothing that exists outside of social – society has split people in the two groups based on their genitals (may as well have done it on the basis of colors of our eyes).

Question that remains is why these binaries are produced in the first place? Butler’s answer is because of compulsory heterosexuality: “The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire” (Butler, 2011: 31). Heterosexualization of desire requires opposition between masculinity and femininity. It presumes the unity of sex, gender and sexuality, where gender follows from sex and sexuality follows from both: we desire that other gender through which we also differentiate our self. However, it is easy for me to imagine the breakage of this link sex-gender-sexuality that would not lead to destruction of femininity/masculinity binary – therefore I do not see the necessary linkage between compulsory heterosexuality and gender binary, at least when it comes to their destruction. In other words, the presence of persons who were assigned female at birth, are on the masculine spectrum and are attracted to women (one group that aligns with these characteristics and that we can use as an example are butch lesbians) is becoming increasingly accepted in Western society, but does not necessarily impact feminine/masculine hierarchy.

Monique Wittig, one of the authors whose work Butler analyses and critiques, sees homosexual practices as a recipe for disruption of the compulsory heterosexuality. However, following Foucault, Butler is more sceptical than Wittig in this matter – she critiques a presumption that sexuality uncontaminated by heterosexual constructs/power relations exists: “This utopian notion of a sexuality freed from heterosexual constructs, a sexuality beyond “sex”, failed to acknowledge the ways in

which power relations continue to construct sexuality for women even within the terms of a “liberated” heterosexuality or lesbianism” (Butler, 2011: 40-41). There is no sexuality that can transcend power relations – therefore all, even subversive possibilities, have to occur within those relations. However, Butler notes that there is a difference between pure repetition of relations of domination and the repetition that can displace those relations of power.

Prime example of this, at least for Butler, are butch and femme identities. Even though often perceived as an homage to heterosexual couples – as butch and femme are seen to be oppositional and complementary categories, Butler claims that this repetition of heterosexual constructs in homosexual context serves to prove that an original gender or sexuality do not exist: “The replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. Thus, gay is to straight not as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy” (Butler, 2011: 43). As previously said, heterosexuality claims to be original and natural, but butch and femme couple successfully reveal its constructed nature by copying heterosexual conventions. If something claims to be natural, then it would not be so easily susceptible to copying through ritualistic, repetitive acts: “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler, 2011: 45). Without a doubt, butch and femme displace asymmetrical binary masculine/feminine, however they definitely do not destroy it. By displacing this binary they disrupt the link between sex and gender, showing that one does not have to follow the other and they successfully reveal the constructedness of gender, however they do not make an impact on masculinity/femininity binary nor they necessarily threaten masculine hegemony – which is so often assumed by authors whose work I tackle in this paper. However, even though my paper will mostly be pessimistic, I also want to recognize that “...the adoption of masculinity by the butch is not done with the same ease and

comfort of men, nor does it enjoy the same naturalized connection to her sex. Being butch does not consist of an assumed access to masculinity” (Nguyen, 2008: 674). Just because I will focus on (negative) aspects, which the authors mentioned in this paper fail to discuss elaborately, that does not mean I deny different ways in which female masculinity is or can be subversive.

Concerning lesbians Wittig’s claims go further than Butler’s. She claims that lesbians are beyond sex, as by refusing to be heterosexual they lose any relation to men – making them not women: “A woman, she argues, only exists as a term that stabilizes and consolidates a binary and oppositional relation to a man; that relation, she argues, is heterosexuality. A lesbian, she claims, in refusing heterosexuality is no longer defined in terms of that oppositional relation. Indeed... a lesbian is neither a woman nor a man” (Butler, 2011: 153). However, this argument is valid only if it is presumed that those born as female cannot assume masculine subject position/cannot appropriate masculinity, which is a deeply essentializing perspective. Lesbians for Wittig maybe do not have any relation to men, at least in the sexual sphere, however their relation to women still persist – is that relation always the relation of the same with same, or it can also be oppositional (for example butch lesbian taking masculine position and femme lesbian taking feminine one)?

Wittig does not see this or does not agree with it, she perpetuates the binary gay vs straight by claiming that homosexuality is outside of the heterosexual matrix and that it is enough to become gay or lesbian in order for the heterosexual regime to be destroyed. On the other hand, Butler is more careful: “My own conviction is that the radical disjunction posited by Wittig between heterosexuality and homosexuality is simply not true, that there are structures of psychic homosexuality within heterosexual relations, and structures of psychic heterosexuality within gay and lesbian sexuality and relationships. Further, there are other power/discourse centers that construct and structure both gay and straight sexuality” (Butler, 2011: 165).

My main problem with Wittig is the implication of her arguments that masculinity cannot be assumed by female bodies, and vice versa. However, it is also important to note that assuming masculine position by a female body does not equate being a man. Butler gives an example of one femme lesbian saying how she likes her boys to be girls, i.e. she is attracted to masculinity performed by a female body: “It is precisely this dissonant juxtaposition and the sexual tension that its transgression generates that constitute the object of desire... the object [and clearly, there is not just one] of lesbian-femme desire is neither some decontextualized female body nor a discrete yet superimposed masculine identity, but the destabilization of both terms as they come into erotic interplay” (Butler, 2011: 167). This is an important argument as it reveals the complexity of these identities, and that they cannot be reduced to pure copies.

However, there is a possible issue with this argument. It is for sure a possibility that what is attractive in butches for some femme lesbians/bisexuals is the way they destabilize both female body and masculine identity, i.e. that they enjoy how ‘their girls are boys’. However, it is also a possibility that some are just attracted to masculinity and that the body of a performer is not that relevant to them. To illustrate this argument I will use an example from a Serbian reality show (the most watched and the most expensive) called ‘Zadruga’. A feminine woman named Sanja, who considered herself to be straight, was asked by other contestants would she ever be in a relationship with the other woman from the show named Jovana, who was in love with her and whose gender performance/behavior/look can be easily branded as masculine. Even though two of them were already in a relationship at that moment, but hiding that fact (ten days after this event they admitted it), Sanja replied to contestants: “If I am to ever be with a woman, that will be Jovana, because she has everything that my man should have, except ‘that thing’ (penis) - however, that is not at all an issue as we will easily find a substitute for it” (my translation) (Zadruga, 2018). This, and many other situations where she talks about Jovana, communicate



that for Sanja body parts are not that important, i.e. she is attracted to masculine characteristics that Jovana performs rather than to her body. By saying that penis can be easily replaced, she equates penis with its artificial substitutes (e.g. strap-on), and once again depicts body as irrelevant. Athena Nguyen makes an interesting point about dildo/strap-on, saying that its removal "...does not produce the same sense of de-phallicization as the removal of the penis. The lesbian phallus does not experience the threat of being severed as it is already severed... Perhaps, then, the threat of the lesbian phallus is not that the lesbian phallus might be real, but rather that the masculine phallus is a little too real" (Nguyen, 2008: 678-679). Therefore, being an artifice that is easily put on or removed, can be seen through these lenses that see it as strap-on's strength. This interpretation puts an interesting spin on the real/artificial binary.

To conclude, butch and femme undoubtedly disrupt the notion of an original identity and have denaturalizing effect – they take away its claim of naturalness from heterosexuality. Therefore, even though disagreeing with Wittig, Butler sees certain subversiveness in butch/femme relation. I see it too, and denaturalization is without a doubt an important step, however, I argue that masculinity's domination over femininity does not have to be rooted in an assumption of naturalness. Accepting that something is a mere performance does not imply that some performances do not remain more valued than others (e.g. performing masculinity either by male or female body can still bring more profit in the public sphere than performing femininity). Denying this shows a naive approach to functioning of gender oppression and the way it can accommodate over time in order to appropriate changes regarded to be progress by wider society.

Aside from butch and femme, Butler sees drag as a suitable strategy for denaturalization of gender. In the case of drag, gender that is performed is (usually) distinct from performer's sex. As drag queens imitate women they reveal gender's

constructedness and contingency – they break the linkage/perceived unity between sex, gender and desire for that matter. However, it is important to note that by saying the word ‘imitate’ it is not assumed that there is an original which is imitated: “...so gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin” (Butler, 2011: 188). Gender is therefore an imitation without an original, or in Baudrillard’s terms – a simulacrum.

When it comes to drag, bell hooks is not as optimistic as Butler when grading drag queens’ subversiveness. Through her analysis of the documentary *Paris is Burning* hooks concludes that drag queens perpetuate the notions of femininity that equal it with powerlessness: “Within white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy the experience of men dressing as women, appearing in drag, has always been regarded by the dominant heterosexist cultural gaze as a sign that one is symbolically crossing over from a realm of power into a realm of powerlessness...To choose to appear as "female" when one is "male" is always constructed in the patriarchal mindset as a loss, as a choice worthy only of ridicule” (hooks, 1992: 146). In her reply to hooks in *Bodies That Matter* Butler clarifies stance on drag and repeats that subversiveness of parodic displacement fully depends on the context and the way it is perceived in that particular setting. She again points out that drag is subversive only to the point that it exposes constructedness of gender, i.e. it denaturalizes it. Furthermore, Butler forcefully rejects feminist analysis of drag that wants to frame it as nothing more than misogyny: “Such an accusation follows the same kind of logic as those homophobic remarks that often follow upon the discovery that one is a lesbian: a lesbian is one who must have had a bad experience with men, or who has not yet found the right one. These diagnoses presume that lesbianism is acquired by virtue of some failure in the heterosexual machinery, thereby continuing to install heterosexuality as the "cause" of lesbian desire” (Butler, 2014: 127). Thus, this kind of analysis of drag, Butler claims, perpetuates heterosexual matrix, as it makes male homosexuality to be about women. Speaking more specifically about one group of lesbians, she claims that

arguments against drag could be equated with those that argue that butch lesbians appropriate male masculinity.

While hooks' kind of approach to drag may or may not be valid, what bothers me in Butler's defense of her argumentation is an analogy between drag queens and (butch) lesbians. This comparison does not work for a number of reasons that I will go through now. Firstly, I argue that female performances of masculinity and male performances of femininity cannot be put in the same basket, as male and female bodies do not act from the same position nor are their performances equally penalized/rewarded. Secondly, in terms of the continuance of their performances: once they are off stage, drag queens continue to live as gay/bi/straight and masculine/feminine men, while butch lesbians' performance of masculinity is more continuous. Moreover, drag queens earn money and recognition through their performances of femininity, while people performing femininity in everyday lives usually suffer consequences for being feminine. Even if we compared drag kings and drag queens we would have to keep differences between the two in mind: "...the stakes in each are different, the performances look different, and there is a distinct difference between the relations between masculinity and performance and femininity and performance" (Halberstam, 1998: 238), therefore Butler's analogy between lesbians and drag queens seems to be even more problematic.

## 6. Just A Spot at the Table

Now we come to Jack Halberstam and his book *Female Masculinity* whose aims are similar to those of Butler. He wants to prove that masculinity(ies) does not belong only to male bodies, i.e. he aims to break the link between maleness and masculinity. Truth be told, Halberstam's struggle with male masculinity being regarded as 'original' and 'real' comes from his personal experiences: "...this book is an attempt to make my own female masculinity plausible, credible, and real. For a large part of

my life, I have been stigmatized by a masculinity that marked me as ambiguous and illegible... I address the ways in which butches manage to affirm their masculinity despite the multiple sites in which that masculinity is challenged, denied, threatened, and violated” (Halberstam, 1998: 19). Hence, his main goal is to depict female masculinity as legitimate masculinity – he spends majority of the book arguing that female masculinity represents a constitutive element of masculinity which should be acknowledged and accepted. Did masculinity bring so many positive things that it is of essential value for our part (us as masculine females) in its construction to be reclaimed and recognized? What are we going to do once our masculinity is recognized as legitimate and will that affect gender binary at all? He seems to not have these questions in mind.

Halberstam, as Butler, has many valid points and rightfully talks about the ways in which social structures have for a long time bounded masculinity to maleness, as well as to notions of power and privilege. He also points out that female masculinity has been vilified by both heterosexist and many feminist perspectives, which is undoubtedly true: “...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 a 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” (Halberstam, 1998: 9). However, what if that power is not out of reach anymore? What if men have to acknowledge and recognize that they are not the only ones with the access to masculinity? With the progress of LGBTQ rights, Western society is becoming more and more accepting of female bodies that perform masculinity, or generally of all bodies that ‘switch sides’ and perform genders that do not follow from their sex/bodies. On the other hand, that does not mean that power differentials between masculinity and femininity changed at all nor that we should not be sceptical towards all the changes/movements: “Yet it is

depressing that male violence, men's desire for control of self and others, remains a deep signifier of masculinity. What is for sure is that notions of masculinity are increasingly multiple, rendering traditional forms of being male, if not redundant, certainly marginal. But... men adapt, though do not expect them to stop being men as they do so" (Whitehead, 2002: 9).

In the recent years the mainstream narrative on LGBTQ and women's rights in the West has promoted notions like 'Be yourself', 'Born this way' etc. that aim to put the emphasis on the self and in a way privatize political struggle. This narrative can be characterized as "The search for a more perfect self, for a truer, more natural sexuality, a more authentic "I"', which "...often represents a refusal to account for the position from which we speak, to ground ourselves materially and historically, to acknowledge and be vigilant of our own limitations and our own differences" (Bidy, 1982: 15). Put more clearly, we are constantly bombarded with messages that we should pursue ourselves, even though we should actually change ourselves and the social conditions around us. Instead of finding solutions for material inequalities and real social transformation, a lot of discussion is pushed into direction of how individuals feel about queer and women rights. Acceptance of LGBTQ and women rights is without a doubt mainstreamed and promoted by many campaigns, including those designed by the biggest corporations in the world. Recent researches in the Western countries like Germany, the US and Netherlands shows that lesbians tend to earn on average 9% more than their straight counterparts, with this gap being the highest in the US - 20% (Luxton, 2017). It is not quite clear why this is the case, as it could be due to assumptions that lesbians will not be pregnant/take parental leave, or that they are more competitive, or something third. Researches also do not inform us if there is a difference in pay between masculine and feminine lesbians, however, what they make clear is that being a straight woman puts you in an even worse position in the sphere of paid work. Even though being a woman in general still significantly lowers your chances of getting a job or earning an equal salary as your

male colleagues (Whitehead, 2002: 39) and the fact that men still rule the public sphere, certain changes are occurring under the pressure for gender equality. However, the question I am interested in is not if more women are progressing in politics or corporate ladder, but which kind of women are doing that and what values are they promoting/performing?

I argue that masculine attributes like competitiveness, independence, unemotionality, aggressiveness, directness, rationality etc. still remain the most valued in the public sphere. What changed with the influx of women in this sphere are not values, but the notion that only one sex is suitable to perform them. Particularly speaking, we are not witnessing that values considered to be feminine are moving away from the position of subordination, we are just seeing how the notion of sex is becoming less and less important. It is becoming clear that women can be equally successful (masculine) managers or presidents and those positions without a doubt are seductive because of their profitability: “Indeed... more, not fewer, women will, in the future, want to be managers in every sense of the term, and for a complex combination of ontological, identity status and material reasons. In this event, any subsequent shift away from men's numerical dominance in management may well challenge many men's assumptions about their organizational and gendered status, leading to them experiencing confusion and unease as previous 'secure' gendered boundaries become eroded” (Whitehead, 2002: 133).

In order to depict argument in the paragraph above, I will use examples of trans men and the ways their careers progressed/or they had less obstacles once they transitioned from male to female. It is important to acknowledge female masculinities as multiple, and that the position of trans men can in many ways be different from the positions of other masculine females who do not necessarily modify their bodies, identify as men or pass as men in public (this is not to say that all trans men modify their bodies or pass as men). Aligning with Halberstam, I want to note that it is easy not look like a

woman in the West, i.e. to pass as a man: “It is relatively difficult, by comparison, not to look like a man: the threats faced by men who do not gender conform are somewhat different than for women” (Halberstam, 1998: 28). However, examples that I will use are suitable as these men started getting treated differently at the workplace where it is was known that they were assigned female at birth – or put simply, it was known that they were born as females, because they worked there even before transitioning. In other words, they did not stealthily pass as men, but everyone knew they were trans and did not treat them differently than other men. Therefore, I want to show that sex assigned at birth is becoming less relevant, not only because it can be changed, but also because modification of the body is not at all crucial – majority of men featured in the articles mentioned that their behavior at work changed once they transitioned, they became more masculine and with that they started getting treated differently.

For the article published in the Time magazine, Charlotte Alter spoke with dozens of trans men in order to gain insight into how their lives changed once they transitioned. She spoke with them on the topics of work, relationships and family. James Gardner, from Canada, is a newscaster for almost 30 years. However, once he transitioned at 54 he started getting significantly less calls from men who pointed out his grammatical and other errors: “I don’t get as many calls to James correcting me. I’m the same person, but the men are less critical of James” (Alter, 2016). Dana Delgado transitioned three years ago, and is a nurse practitioner. His bosses’ behavior towards him significantly changed, even though they know he is a trans man: “I have been with this company for 6 years, no one ever recommended me for management. Now I’m put into a managerial position where I could possibly be a regional director” (Alter, 2016). Chris Edwards from Boston, featured in another article on the same topic in Washington Post, comments how his new behavior, that can be interpreted as masculine, led him to the progress in his career: “I kept noticing that if guys wanted an assignment they’d just ask for it. If they wanted a raise or a promotion they’d ask

for it. This was a foreign concept to me. As a woman, I never felt that it was polite to do that or that I had the power to do that. But after seeing it happen all around me I decided that if I felt I deserved something I was going to ask for it too. By doing that, I took control of my career. It was very empowering” (Bahrapour, 2018).

What is exceptionally important to note that not all masculine females get equal treatment. They also occupy other positions in society and their experiences very much vary based on their class, race, ethnicity, nationality etc. Some are rewarded for their masculinity, some are penalized. At the beginning of his book, Halberstam writes on forms of female masculinity that were present throughout history and tells the stories of different individuals who lived masculine lives. At one point she discusses how economic status was crucial in order for certain people to enjoy privileges of their masculinity and not suffer because of it: “She does wish, at this point in the diaries, that she could access the wealth and social status necessary to ignore social slanders. Once she inherits her uncle's estate, indeed, her social position actually protects her from the kind of disapprobation that she routinely undergoes as a masculine woman without her own income. Social status obviously confers mobility and a moderate freedom from the disgrace of female masculinity” (Halberstam, 1998: 69). This shows us the impact one’s social class has on one’s life. Moreover, in the articles above mentioned we have examples of non-white trans men, who, by becoming men (non-white), got introduced to various different problems they did not face, at least not on the same level, while being non-white women: “One night somebody crashed a car into my neighbor’s house, and I called 911. I walk out to talk to the police officer, and he pulls a gun on me and says, “Stop! Stop! Get on the ground!” I turn around to see if there’s someone behind me, and he goes, “You! You! Get on the ground!” I’m in pajamas and barefoot” (Bahrapour, 2018). Therefore, being masculine does not bring the same amount of privilege to everyone equally, if it brings at all. Class and race have to be taken into consideration as analytical axes that without a doubt make an impact on what amount of patriarchal dividend one can



attain: “In such situations, the actual content of patriarchal dividend may be strongly reduced, while masculinity as a symbolic form and a dimension of social identity is exaggerated through the interplay with, for instance, blackness and working-classness” (Christensen & Jensen, 2014: 70).

In a couple of paragraphs ago, I mentioned Whitehead’s take on gendered boundaries becoming eroded (Whitehead, 2002: 133), which I do not necessarily agree with. As I previously said, gendered values that continue to be respected in the public sphere are masculine values, while feminine remain marginal (Whitehead, 2002: 133). The only thing that becomes eroded is sex boundary (I use distinction between sex and gender for clarity reasons) – the masculine subject remains privileged in the public sphere, but a possibility for female bodies to be that subject is opened up. Masculinity in crisis? No, but males in crisis? Possibly.

## 7. What We Remain to Be

This brings me to discussing the political category ‘woman’. Having in mind all the arguments I previously talked about, I wonder if the category ‘woman’ is outmoded? Both categories of woman and man are historical and subjected to change, and many authors have written about the impossibility of defining them due to differences based on class, race, ethnicity etc. within each of those categories. I suggest that using masculine and feminine as categories will be more suitable in light of changes occurring in the sphere of queer and women rights. However, the usage of categories depends on the context, and it is not my goal to claim that categories of ‘woman’ and ‘man’ should totally go out of usage, I am just suggesting how ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ categories could be more suitable for analysis in some contexts. In order to measure progress, we have to have in mind not just categories of gays, women etc. but also if those gays and/or women who profit from social transformation are possibly performing masculinity/ies.

At the beginning of his book, Halberstam offers an analysis of a James Bond movie and argues that Bond's female boss – M, is the one who most convincingly performs masculinity (Halberstam, 1998: 3-4). He mentions this example in order to prove how masculinity does not have to be linked with misogyny, however, I am sceptical about this. Bond's boss M is a prime example of a female person who succeeded in attaining power by performing masculinity and the question that comes up in my mind is do we really think it is just a coincidence that M's position is not taken up by someone feminine?

By returning to the reality show 'Zadruga', or in this case 'Zadruga 2', I want to provide further examples of Halberstam's argument that females can even more convincingly perform masculinity, i.e. that successfulness of the performance does not depend on the performer's sex. In the second season of the show majority of the contestants are the same as in previous season, therefore they include both Sanja and Jovana – now known as the first public lesbian couple in Serbian showbusiness. Throughout both seasons Jovana has had protective behavior towards her girlfriend, which often included being physically aggressive towards other contestants who came into conflict with Sanja. She also often depicted herself as a provider, talking about all the stuff she bought and will buy for Sanja, as well as about investing in Sanja's career as a singer. Because of this, as well as some other characteristics, Jovana has on multiple occasions been branded as 'the biggest man in the house' or even 'the only man in the house'. For example, Stanija, another female contestant, has in multiple situations insisted that Jovana is the only man in the house, a real protector, and that if she had to choose 'the main man' in the show she would choose Jovana (Zadruga, 2019). Some other female contestants agreed with this observation. Of course, when saying 'man', these contestants actually think of masculinity and this shows us that Jovana's performance of (traditional) masculinity is rated as more successful than performances of male contestants in the show: "...masculine bodily

performance is primarily and often violently expressed as occupation, control, objectification and subjugation (of others' bodies), competition (against others' bodies) and the willingness to expose, to risk and danger, one's own body. The masculine body is not one that is deemed to be rendered passive by its environment but one that seeks to render the environment passive to it" (Whitehead, 2002: 190).

Whitehead, on the other hand, would not agree with my judgement that women too can be masculine: "Certainly, they can take up those practices, languages and behaviours that are considered masculine, but that is not the same as being a masculine subject" (Whitehead, 2002: 210). He claims that being masculine is just a form of femininity for women and that even with masculine expressions they cannot be removed from the political category of women: "...such epistemologies are formed out of the lived experience of being a discursive feminine subject... Women (like men) are part of an 'epistemic community', grounded not in biology but in universalism; the universal experiences of being a feminine subject" (Whitehead, 2002: 210). Even though he does not talk biology, it is hard not to notice certain essentialization of categories 'man' and 'woman' on Whitehead's part. His argument would be valid only if truly all females, even masculine ones, were being treated as women, at all times, at every stage of life and in every context – therefore having universal feminine experience. However, I argue that this is often not the case. It seems to me that Whitehead takes the questions of female masculinity and male femininity as secondary to questions he regards to be more urgent and important concerning gender equity.

When talking with a friend about the Swedish music festival called Statement, which was firstly presented as women-only and then proceeded to include non-binary and transgender people (or better said trans men; trans women were already included to start with, under 'women'), she asked me what do I think of this addition. We proceeded to discuss the treatment of transgender men and all the ways their

manhood/masculinity is not taken seriously enough by many feminist theorists, just because of sex assigned at birth and assumed 'feminine experience' they share with women. On the other hand, trans women's 'masculine experience' was never problematized in this case (specifically the case of Statement festival) and right at the start they were included in the event. My friend proceeded to conclude that she has never experienced a sexual assault by a cis man (a man whose gender aligns with his sex, i.e. a biological male who identifies as a man), but by a trans one, and that the road someone took to get to masculinity is not so important once they are behaving and being treated as masculine in the society. Even though I think the road is of certain value and that early experiences we had do matter, I do not agree with Whitehead that how we began represents the most crucial and defining part of our experience. I argue that many masculine females are not, at least not always or usually, being treated or read as (feminine) women nor share experiences with them. Moreover, I argue that in the Western society most of their experiences are, or at least can be, much more similar to men's.

The author of the hit series *Transparent*, Jill Soloway came out a couple of years ago as non-binary and trans (they use both terms to describe themselves). Their appearance changed, they started to wear traditionally masculine attire and cut their hair short. It is important to note that Soloway is upper-class, lives in Los Angeles and is in Hollywood circles, often deemed to be 'progressive' – therefore their environment is tolerant towards people 'passing to the other side' and is less and less focused on genitals, which aligns with my argumentation. In a couple of interviews Soloway talked about their experience and being treated differently: "There will always be incredibly masculine people and completely feminine people, but that has nothing to do with people's bodies, whether they have a penis or vagina. And besides those two poles there's also a place in the middle, the non-binariness, the people who don't register as one or the other... I notice when people see me as non-binary, I get treated more as a human being" (Freeman, 2017). Further in the interview Soloway

acknowledges that they are trying to get rid of everything feminine, e.g. clothes, and that through that they feel and are being read more as a subject than an object.

In another interview, Soloway confirms that by avoiding femininity they stepped out of male gaze, i.e. they are not being treated or seen as a woman (Heawood, 2018). My experiences as a masculine lesbian align with this. Numerous times I have been told by my both male and female friends that normative standards of beauty (e.g. being thin) do not apply to me nor that they look at me through those lenses. After high school I thought about going to the medicine school and when talking with my mother about it she supported me, but said that she would not like for her daughters to go into medicine as it is such a hard field for women in Serbia, i.e. female doctors are disrespected and it is not easy for them to progress in that field due to stereotypes. I then told her that I am also her daughter, to which she replied: “Yes you are, but you are different”. It was then clear to me that even my mother does not perceive me as a woman, as that ‘different’ was without a doubt linked to my masculinity, and furthermore, that she does not think others would treat me as a woman either. It seems that both mine and Soloway’s environment are still treating only non-feminine people as human beings.

Another point that is interesting here is how Soloway approaches non-binarism as non-feminine, i.e. it seems that by saying non-binary they actually think of masculine. What can be considered to be neutral and universal is still masculine to start with (even when we shop clothes labeled ‘unisex’ those clothes could easily just stay in the men department). Having in mind that their attire and looks can be interpreted as traditionally masculine, Soloway’s non binarism represents a pure running away from femininity and is hard to see how it is transgressive to gender binary in any way, except when it comes to sex. “...the words man and woman, male and female, they describe who we used to be. You know, there are a lot of trans men who menstruate and there are a lot of trans women who get offended if the feminist movement is

about vagina hats. [The binary] is not going to stand in the future” (Freeman, 2017) As Soloway says, man and woman, as well as male and female, maybe are obsolete. However, ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are what we remain to be – that binary remains alive and well.

## 8. Impenetrable

One of the main differences between men and lesbian butches is in the way they have sex, at least that is what both Butler and Halberstam claim. Specifically, they both give an example of stone butch, a lesbian that does not want to be touched by her femme partner and solely focuses on femme’s pleasure. Butches in general are not a homogenous group, and even though ‘butch’ came to represent all female masculinities among lesbians, there is a great variety of them – stone butch represents one extreme on the spectrum of penetrability: “Although there is no simple and easy definition of butch, much like masculinity, it is nonetheless still easily recognized. Hence, throughout any discussion of butch its multiple and shifting variations need to be kept in mind” (Nguyen, 2008: 670). I will also take the case of stone butch as it is suitable for the analysis of sexual relations.

Sex represents an interesting area to analyze as the relations between it and politics are very much complicated, especially when that sex cannot be described by reciprocity and equality. How we have sex, and what we think while having sex is a fruitful area for exploration. Because of our marginalized position in the society, us queers often uncritically approached the way we have sex – it is easy to present our own desires to dominate or be dominated as subversive: “It has frequently been suggested in recent years that such things as the gay-macho style, the butch-fem lesbian couple, and gay and lesbian sadomasochism, far from expressing unqualified and uncontrollable complicities with a brutal and misogynous ideal of masculinity, or with the heterosexual couple permanently locked into a power structure of male

sexual and social mastery over female sexual and social passivity, or, finally, with fascism, are in fact subversive parodies of the very formations and behaviors they appear to ape” (Bersani, 2010: 12).

When discussing stone butches, Butler writes that, ironically, the butch takes the position of a woman because of her self-sacrifice: “And yet, this "providing" butch who seems at first to replicate a certain husband-like role, can find herself caught in the logic of inversion whereby that "providingness" turns into a self-sacrifice, which implicates her in the most ancient trap of feminine self-abnegation” (Butler, 1991: 25). However, Halberstam does not agree with this and he says that self-abnegation involves a woman self-sacrificing for a man, not for a woman, as in the case of a stone butch (Halberstam, 1998: 127). I disagree with both of their perspectives and see them as problematic for a couple of reasons. Firstly, both perspectives imply that stone butch’s real desire is not to pleasure her lover, i.e. that butch lesbian wants to be touched but neglects that need. Secondly, both naively see this sexual behavior as a self-sacrifice on the butch side and in a way romanticize that position. They assume that satisfaction and power cannot be drawn from being on the giving end or just from dominating/controlling the situation. As Sheila Jeffreys says in her book *Anticlimax*, in our society “...inequality and specifically the inequality of women is sexy” (Jeffreys, 1990: 6), therefore we cannot so easily brand these sexual practices as unproblematic.

As focusing solely on femme partner’s pleasure is seen as crucial in the distinction between men and stone butches, I want to mention Michael Kimmel’s research that gives us insight into men’s perspectives on oral sex: “When men describe their experiences with oral sex, it is nearly always from the position of power. Whether fellatio – “I feel so powerful when I see her kneeling in front of me” – or cunnilingus – “being able to get her off with my tongue makes me feel so powerful” – men experience the giving and receiving of oral sex as an expression of their power”

(Kimmel, 2013: 389). This tells us that the position of a giver is not necessarily powerless position, nor it has to be seen that way by all the parties involved in sex: “One central tenet of many men's sense of their masculinity is a desire to control both self and others... Being 'in control' (or temporarily renouncing control so as to achieve an erotic state) can be a highly sexual experience for many men” (Whitehead, 2002: 165). I, of course, do not want to totally equate position of stone butches with those of men’s nor to assume they necessarily approach their partners in this way, however I want to point out the variables missed by both Halberstam and Butler in their analysis. Just because they are focused on someone else’s pleasure does not mean that stone butches are actually in the position of a woman/feminine.

Julia Penelope, a lesbian feminist, and her perspective on butch-femme roles is mentioned by Halberstam. Penelope remembered how her untouchability served for her to retain control and her autonomy, as she saw being touched by a femme as a femme having sexual power over her (Halberstam, 1998: 130). This implies that being on the receptive end in sex, i.e. being fucked, means losing control – aligning with long-held notions that being passive in sex means being in an inferior and feminine position: “Michel Foucault has amply documented the acceptance (even glorification) and profound suspicion of homosexuality in ancient Greece. A general ethical polarity in Greek thought of self-domination and a helpless indulgence of appetites has, as one of its results, a structuring of sexual behavior in terms of activity and passivity, with a correlative rejection of the so-called passive role in sex” (Bersani, 2010: 18). Therefore, being ‘active’ in sex meant being in a position of authority, while being penetrated into meant to abdicate one’s power – it meant being subordinate, meant being a woman (which shows us that roots of homophobia are to be found in misogyny). In *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* Judith Butler writes on Plato’s *Timaeus*, in which he talks about the penetration as a mean of differentiating between ‘he’ and ‘she’. The positions of ‘he’ and ‘she’ are considered to be mutually exclusive, as ‘he’ is impenetrable penetrator, while ‘she’ is only to be



penetrated. The prohibition – his impenetrability, serves to stabilize notions of masculine and feminine and represents a panic over not becoming effeminized (Butler, 2014: 51). In line with this, the Greeks only treated half of men who engaged in homosexual activity as politically disgraced, while the other half profited from it and through it showed their social superiority (Bersani, 2010: 39).

However, these kind of attitudes are not left in the Ancient times, they very much penetrate contemporary society: “Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity, the items ranging from fastidious taste in home decoration to receptive anal sex. Hence, from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity” (Connell, 2014: 78). The examples from the movie *Moonlight*, which won an Oscar for the Best Picture in 2016, can further illustrate this argument. The movie follows the story of Chiron, a black gay man, and introduces us to various different (black) masculinities. When in teenage years, Chiron is suffering violence and abuse by other boys from school. He is often equated with women because of his effeminacy: “...privileged versions of masculinity feed off contrasts both with alternative masculinities and with an oppositional, feminized “other” (Hutchings, 2008: 389). At one point, Chiron’s main bully, Terrel, says to him: “I ain’t with that gay shit, but if you fuck with me, I’ll give your ass more than you can handle”. His sentence is supported by other bullies from his group, who give him high-fives, i.e. Terrel is rewarded for his homophobia: “Conformity to the demands of hegemonic masculinity, pushes heterosexual men to homophobia and rewards them for it, in the form of social support and reduced anxiety about their own manliness” (Donaldson, 1993: 648).

However, what is interesting here is that Terrel insinuates that he would rape Chiron, which implies that what is problematic about gay sex is being on the receptive end of anal penetration. Being penetrated into means losing bodily integrity and autonomy,

and therefore that is the most humiliating part of homosexual relation (Thomas, 2002: 73). Body represents a system and its margins are precarious, even though maybe seemingly stable: “Douglas suggests that all social systems are vulnerable at their margins, and that all margins are accordingly considered dangerous. If the body is synecdochal for the social system per se or a site in which open systems converge, then any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment” (Butler, 2011: 180). Bodily boundaries represent a material boundary between ‘I’ and ‘Other’, between internal and external - boundary of the subject, and with penetration that boundary is broken down, which can be perceived as a definite attack on one’s autonomy. Why is so hard for us to imagine that stone butches approach the penetration, sex and their own integrity in similar way, just because they are female? Do not we all live in the same society, in the same sexist, racist, classist conditions that leave traces on our psyche?

Throughout his book Halberstam claims that there are no essential links between masculinity and misogyny, which may be true, however, he also, without any evidences, makes an assumption that masculine women cannot access male privilege and therefore they are less likely to be misogynistic (Halberstam, 1998: 255). This may be true in a context where performing gender that does not seem to follow someone’s sex is penalized more than being/performing feminine/femininity. In the context where performing femininity is penalized more than transgressing sex binary, masculine women can very much profit and perpetuate misogyny (or better said hate of femininity/ies). Where I agree with Halberstam is when he says that his aim is to challenge the way we demand accountability when it comes to sexual behavior, i.e. why we demand it more from some positions than from others (Halberstam, 1998: 112) – for example, ‘stoneness’, or impenetrability of straight men or top (active only) gay/bisexual men is rarely discussed. This is, without a doubt, a valid point, however, I think it is a priority to hold accountable those of us who are uncritically deemed to be natural allies in the fight against misogyny and often seen as the most

subversive. To put it differently, maybe I do not expect as much of men as I do from lesbians.

Continuing with the topic of sex, Halberstam takes upon himself to respond to critiques of butch-femme coupling by claiming that lesbians, by going towards sex characterized as more equal and reciprocatory, “...paid a high price for this kind of adjustment and for the more general adjustment from a working-class butch-femme role-playing community to a politicized middle-class woman-loving-woman community” (Halberstam, 1998: 137). For him, sex imagined and depicted in various lesbian feminist publication is sterile and unappealing. Without wanting to sound puritanistic, I want to ask when did fun and pleasure became of utmost importance, more important than equality? Why do we think that liberation will come so cheaply – without us having to give up on anything? Why do we not question our desires, having in mind that they were formed in a sexist, racist, classist etc. circumstances? In line with this, Zizek says: “If there is a great lesson of the 20th-century history, it’s the lesson of psychoanalysis: The lesson of totalitarian subordination is not “renounce, suffer,” but this subordination offers you a kind of perverted excess of enjoyment and pleasure. To get rid of that enjoyment is painful. Liberation hurts” (Rasmussen, 2004).

Lastly, I want to add different dimensions to this discussion of non-reciprocating sex dynamic. Halberstam talks about Audre Lorde and her experiences of stoneness and says that Lorde voiced her dissatisfaction with it because she felt that she was servicing a white woman, her lover that seemed to be incapable of reciprocation. Masculinities are multiple, and we all also occupy many different positions at the same time – therefore, it is not the same discussing a relation between a black masculine lesbian and a white woman, and a relation between two white women: “Stoneness, in particular, when forced on a black woman in relation to a white lover, could signify more than simply choosing to embody a particular form of

masculinity; it could also signify the sacrificing of the black butch's desire to the white woman's pleasure" (Halberstam, 1998: 133). The situation becomes even more complicated when we add the class dimension and it is important to say that my arguments aim at a certain level of abstraction and are not applicable in every given situation.

## 9. From Other to Same

Female masculinities have been discussed often, what has not often, or at least not elaborately, been mentioned is the reaction they induce in male spectators. The question of gaze is of essential value, as gaze has a disciplining function on all of us, i.e. we adjust our behaviors having in mind that authoritative gaze is present: "...itself is not neutral but invested with powers, in so much as it comes with a set of moral, social and cultural codes or assumptions; an 'economy of looks' that places values on the body and different values on different bodies" (Whitehead, 2002: 195). How we are perceived and read as is therefore also important, not only how we feel or who we think we are.

The movie *Ballad of Little Jo* perfectly depicts this. The main character in the movie, Josephine, is disowned by her upper-class family, and after realizing that travelling alone as a woman is not safe, she is pushed into masquerading as a man in order to avoid sexual violence and disadvantaged economical situation. In order to successfully pass as a man, she cuts her hair and buys masculine clothing. While cutting her hair, Josephine starts to cry – which communicates to us that she finds it difficult to get read of a symbol of femininity, a long hair. For some time, Jo is successful in her performance of masculinity, even though we are often shown that it is not something she is comfortable with – many scenes in the movie aim to show us that her 'nature' is actually feminine. However, Tinman, a Chinese worker who starts working for and living with Jo, at one point realizes that Jo is actually a woman.

Instantly, his behavior towards her significantly changes. During the times he thought Jo is a man, Tinman listened and did everything Jo asked him to do. After realizing her 'true' sex, and after the two of them start a sexual relationship, Jo completely loses authority over Tinman – who starts questioning her choices and/or orders. This represent a good example of how our position in the society or our treatment by others depends on how we are being perceived, rather than who we think we are 'deep down'. It also shows us that successful performances of masculinity can grant females certain rights and privileges.

Leo Bersani tackles gay macho style, which has risen in the 1970s, and discusses the ways in which heterosexual men grasp it. He critically interrogates attitudes that perceive this style as subversive, just because put in homosexual context, and problematizes the ways certain authors take non-subversive intentions and interpret them as having subversive effects: "It is difficult to know how "much mischief" can be done by a style that straight men see—if indeed they see it at all—from a car window as they drive down Folsom Street. Their security as males with power may very well not be threatened at all by that scarcely traumatic sight, because nothing forces them to see any relation between the gay-macho style and their image of their own masculinity (indeed, the very exaggerations of that style make such denials seem plausible)" (Bersani, 2010: 13). Bersani masterfully points out that straight men do not have to feel threatened by gay-macho style. Moreover, Bersani does not stop there and he introduces us with a possibility that straight men not only do not feel threatened by it, but feel it represents a certain homage to them: "...the secret satisfaction of knowing that the leather queen, for all his despicable blasphemy, at least intends to pay worshipful tribute to the style and behavior he defiles" (Bersani, 2010: 13).

I argue that this could be also said about the ways men perceive female masculinity. In the societies where sex/gender is on its way to be denaturalized, female masculinity

can still be seen as 'Other', but not ignite hatred or violence. Even though they can see it as something different from themselves, men can perceive female masculinity as a form of flattery, as a tribute to them. Moreover, men can go one step further and not even observe female masculinity as an homage, but totally acknowledge it as a valid and autonomous masculinity, although probably subordinate in Connell's terms. They do not have to feel threatened by it, at least not in any different way than they are threatened by other men's masculinities, and can embrace female masculine persons into their own 'masculine community'. Even when the performativity of gender is recognized, that does not imply that everyone performs masculinity in the same way or equally close to hegemonic masculinity: "...not many men meet the normative standards... Yet the majority of men gain from its hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women" (Connell, 2014: 79).

If one's sex stops being so relevant, i.e. it is denaturalized, why cannot we imagine a situation in which all persons performing masculinity/ies, no matter their sex, start gaining a dividend from subordination of all who perform femininity/ies? Nguyen says that "...butch is not an unaltered imitation of masculinity, where imitation is the highest form of flattery, but rather butch masculinity sits in an uncomfortable and antagonistic relation to hegemonic masculinity and, therefore, challenges the privilege of masculinity as being accorded to men" (Nguyen, 2008: 674), however, what happens once the privilege of masculinity is not reserved for men anymore? Does female masculinity challenge anything except that or its subversive potential ends there?

There are a couple of examples that can further depict argument about men recognizing female masculinity as a valid masculinity, threatening in the same way other men's masculinities are. Jovana, a previously mentioned contestant of Zadruga, Serbian most watched reality show and television content in general, at one point

talked with other contestants about her ex-girlfriends and gave an interesting content for analysis. While mentioning that all of her previous girlfriends were ‘straight’ (even though technically they are bisexual if they were with her), Jovana said that one of them had a boyfriend at the same time when she was dating her. Jovana’s girlfriend’s boyfriend was living outside of Serbia and he was fine with her dating Jovana, another woman – so it was a fairly open relationship. However, once he met Jovana, he changed his opinion. Other contestant then interrupts Jovana and says: “Because he saw that you are like a man” (my translation) (Zadruga, 2019), while Jovana agrees. This example is followed by many similar stories that I have heard in my environment. Various ‘open’ relationships between men and bisexual women that I know of are in fact not that open. More precisely speaking, women in those relationships are only ‘allowed’ to hook up with other women. However, saying ‘women’ is too broad, as not all kinds of women can come into consideration for hooking up. Once, my friend asked her boyfriend if he would mind her going out with a butch lesbian and he replied that it would bother him, that he would be jealous and worried, while he does not feel like that about feminine women.

This implies that many men see masculine women as equal contenders for sexual/romantic partners and put them in the same group as men, i.e. they feel threatened by their masculinity in the way they feel threatened by the presence of other men who are their competitors. Even though Nguyen claims that butch is “...resented for the space she takes away from them and for the amount of space that she takes up... The butch also elicits in the surrounding men a sense of possessive ownership over masculinity” (Nguyen, 2008: 675), I do not think she has to be resented differently from other men. Moreover, examples mentioned in paragraphs also show that sexuality of feminine women is not taken seriously nor as threatening – men assume that a feminine person cannot take their spot. Feminine women are observed as sexual objects, while masculine people represent the competition. However, what is important to note here is that this ‘threat’ that female masculine

people pose to men implies that men already recognize female masculinity as a valid performance of masculinity. In order to be afraid of something or perceive something as competition, you first have to recognize its existence.

#### 10. I Am Not Your Bro

Relationships between men are not based only on competition for sexual and romantic partners. Therefore, I argue that relationships between female masculine people and men do not stop there either. Both of these are to be approached as complex relations, not purely competitive or lacking emotions, quite the contrary, those relationships can be very intimate and serve to draw boundaries and retain resources within one group (men or masculine persons). Homosociality is usually defined as “...the seeking, enjoyment, and/or preference for the company of the same sex” (Lipman-Blumen, 1976: 16), however I argue that masculine females can also be included in these bonding practices.

Thomas Thurnell-Read’s article *What Happens on Tour: The Premarital Stag Tour, Homosocial Bonding, and Male Friendship* gives us insight into stag tours – British bachelor trips that involve going to a foreign city. Friendships between groom and his male friends are the focus of this article, as are the ways in which masculinity is constructed among groups of friends: “Through homosocial bonding, acceptable masculinity is established while alternatives to it are forcibly rejected. Male friendships, and the homosocial behavior and ideals they support and sustain, greatly impact upon men’s relationships with each other and with women” (Thurnell-Read, 2012: 251).

In each of the group involved in the research, flirting with women represented an important part of bonding between men. However, the accent was never on the effects of flirting, nor the goal is to hook up with women – moreover, one example showed



that if someone is actually to leave his friends in order to have sex, it is seen as a disloyal act. The flirting, talking about women, and general objectification of women, is therefore seen as means of bonding: “As a pair of women walked past the tables occupied by the group, one of the men commented that he was “like a dog on heat” and mimed walking after the women with his tongue lolling out of his mouth. Again, although the focus of his attention was the passing women, the audience for his enactment of heterosexual desire was evidently his peers whose laughter acted to condone his actions” (Thurnell-Read, 2012: 259). Therefore, women are only seen as object to play with and through whom men communicate with other men, and reaffirm their masculinity.

Relations between men are of course not singular, as masculinities are multiple and differentiate based on race, class, sexuality etc. However, it seems that they share certain similarities and solidarities between each other, especially when it comes to treatment of women. The movie *Intouchables* is a story about rich, disabled and white Frenchman named Philippe and a black, poor, young man named Driss who becomes his caretaker. It is a fruitful piece for analyzing different masculinities and their embodiments. Both Philippe’s and Driss’ masculinities cannot be described as hegemonic in the French society, Philippe’s because he is not able-bodied, and Driss’ because he is both black and poor. However, throughout the movie we are shown that even though their circumstances are totally different, Philippe is amused by Driss’ treatment of women.

Driss is constantly sexually harassing Philippe’s assistant with propositions of sex. To every Driss’ comment, instead of protecting his female worker, Philippe is smiling and showing solidarity with Driss and his heterosexuality. Driss, on the other hand, is obviously comfortable and does not fear repercussions by Philippe, i.e. he knows that his comments will be positively perceived by his boss. At the end of the movie, Driss meets assistant’s partner, who happens to be a woman, however a woman with short

hair and in masculine attire. Right away, Driss starts behaving with respect and stops making sexual insinuations, which shows us that feminine woman's nos were never enough nor taken seriously, however, once her more masculine partner comes into the picture, Driss takes her disinterest in him seriously. This is a prime example of many situations women are in, when they have to even invent having a partner in order to reject advances: "Male privilege is "I have a boyfriend" being the only thing that can actually stop someone from hitting on you because they respect another male-bodied person more than they respect your rejection/lack of interest" (Dockterman, 2014).

When discussing Levi-Strauss, Butler gives us an overview of his argument about women being objects of exchange between men that serve to consolidate internal bonds between them: "Exchange—and consequently the rule of exogamy—is not simply that of goods exchanged. Exchange—and consequently the rule of exogamy that expresses it—has in itself a social value. It provides the means of binding men together" (Butler, 2011: 55). However, I claim that this kind of bonding does not happen only between men, but also between masculine lesbians/bisexuals, as well as between these two groups. Women, or better said feminine persons, are often being treated as objects to be used and exchanged, as well as objects through which is communicated with other masculine persons – i.e. objects through which one's masculinity is performed and confirmed. Even those deemed to be subversive in some way, as Herculine, the hermaphrodite from Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, do not shy away from treating women as property/objects: "From that moment on, Sara belonged to me . . .!!!" (Foucault, 1990: 51).

Jovana, from Zadruga, is behaving towards her girlfriend Sanja in the same way. She perpetuates narrative that Sanja belongs to her and often forbids Sanja to talk – she fights instead of her with other people, saying that those who talk badly about Sanja talk also badly about her. Therefore, she reduces Sanja to an object and constrains her autonomy: "In interactions with other women, particularly with "femmes," butches

are seen as colluding with the patriarchy through treating women as men do, such as by objectifying women, by wanting to be the physically stronger or dominant partner, or by pursuing women as sexual “conquests.” (Nguyen, 2008: 668).

One situation was particularly interesting and is linked to previous paragraphs. At the beginning of their relationship, while it was still not publicly acknowledged by Sanja and held in secret, one male contestant flirted with Sanja at the party. She told that to Jovana and after a week, Jovana approached him and confronted him about it. She told him that she is hurt, as she thought they are friends (she used the masculine form of the colloquial term for friends in Serbian), and that she would never flirt with his ‘chick’. She further told him her ‘male ego’ is bruised, and that there is a codex of behavior between friends – they should not hook up with each other’s girlfriends. In his defense, he told her that he was not sure if Sanja and her are really together, that he was mostly joking, and inflated Jovana’s ego by telling her that she is ten times better in hooking up with hot girls than him. This for sure was pleasant for Jovana: “...a fundamental element of the masculine subject's desire for being (a man) is to have this identity validated by the gaze and reception of others” (Whitehead, 2002: 218). The male contestant then repeated he will never again do anything with Sanja, and then proceeded to talk about his sexual escapades with other female contestants: “You know what I did with others, I induced the state when they went crazy over me, running after me... Sanja was supposed to be the next one on my list, but you are the only reason she will not be” (my translation) (Zadruga, 2017), therefore confirming his loyalty to Jovana and continuing to treat, together with Jovana, Sanja as her property.

Therefore, I do not agree with Halberstam when he says that “...when and where female masculinity conjoins with possibly queer identities, it is far less likely to meet with approval. Because female masculinity seems to be at its most threatening when coupled with lesbian desire, in this book I concentrate on queer female masculinity

almost to the exclusion of heterosexual female masculinity. I have no doubt that heterosexual female masculinity menaces gender conformity in its own way but all too often it represents an acceptable degree of female masculinity as compared to the excessive masculinity of the dyke” (Halberstam, 1998: 28). I claim that female masculinity, when coupled with lesbian desire, is more easily approved and understood than heterosexual female masculinity (of course in certain contexts). I argue that desiring women represents an important point of convergence between men and masculine females. Therefore, my reason for focusing on queer female masculinity is opposite of Halberstam’s.

I have been present in many situations where men treated women as objects in order to strike a bond with me. Most of the situations were based on sexual objectification – they would be interested in what is my type, which girls present in our company do I find hot, how would I rate certain famous women, like singers etc. and their body parts. Overall, they saw my attraction to women and masculinity as something that makes us similar, and were extremely interested in my opinion on various topics. None of the feminine women were included in those conversations nor anyone asked them to express their opinion, even though they were often present. When feminine women talked, most did not listen nor have a dialogue with them. However, I was treated as one of the boys, they often called me ‘brother’ and hugged and kissed me in the same way they did with other guys, i.e. communication between us can be depicted as homosociality. Moreover, in certain situations, conversations, or better said questions (because I refuse to engage in discussions I feel are problematic, therefore they remain to be just questions) they posed, were secretive – for example men would ask me something in a way that women in our company are not able to hear it, as something that should stay only between us. They felt free with me, thinking I will be complicit. In extreme situations, those comments or stories or questions were not only about women’s looks, but were derogatory or more problematic in other ways.

For example, while in Malmö I met a DJ, originally from Serbia, who has been living in Sweden for over a decade. After the party we met at, we went to his apartment with some other friends (both women). We talked on various topics, he presented himself as being progressive in terms of LGBTQ rights, even saying that his previous girlfriend was a trans woman. I am often cautious about this kind of presentations as I know that "...sometimes one of the most effective ways of being hegemonic, or being a 'man', may be to demonstrate one's distance from hegemonic masculinity. Perhaps what is most hegemonic is to be nonhegemonic! – an independent man who knows his own mind and who can 'see through' social expectations" (Wetherell & Edley, 1999: 351). This cautiousness proved to be right in this particular situation.

After some time, two other women showed up at the flat, and when him and me were left alone in the room (all four women were in the hallway talking), he whispered to me that he had sexual relations with both of the newly arrived women. He continued to tell me that neither of them are aware of it, even though they are best friends. While talking, he was laughing, was proud about himself and asked me how do I find them/do I like them. However, I asked him why is he telling me this and that I find it highly problematic that he thinks I will find that kind of treatment of women amusing. He was completely shocked by my reaction. Right away he got serious and asked me what is wrong, further, he told me that he talks that way all the time with his lesbian friend from Serbia. I finished the conversation with saying that he can maybe do it with her, but with me he definitely cannot.

## 11. Not All, But Some

Halberstam aims to make a breakage between maleness and masculinity, claiming that there are no essential links between misogyny and masculinity, and furthermore, that masculine women are more likely to perform masculinity without misogyny

(Halberstam, 1998: 255). However, even examples that he provides us with in his book say that this claim is too rushed. When describing various examples of female masculinity throughout the history, Halberstam touches upon John Radclyffe Hall, a lesbian author. By talking about Radclyffe Hall's anti-Semitism and fascism: "She was, for example, not much of a feminist, and quite anti-Semitic, and at the outbreak of World War II, she was all too sympathetic to the fascist cause" (Halberstam, 1998: 93), Halberstam shows that suffering sexual intolerance does not make one sensible to other political injustices. Moreover, Hall had sentiments against socialism and communism (because of her social class), which by Halberstam's interpretation made Hall align with fascism – therefore confirming the importance of intersectionality in one's analysis of female masculinities. Colonel Barker, another one of his examples, was also a sympathizer fascism, thinking it will further her quality of life while living like a man. I will now return to the most frequently used example in this paper, reality show Zadruga. During a really aggressive and serious fight with Sanja, Jovana told her how she used to be physically violent towards all of her exes, while she would never beat up Sanja (Zadruga, 2019). She was saying this as a way to prove that she loves Sanja, as she would never hurt her like she did hurt others.

Jovana's acknowledged violent behavior depicts to us that female, like almost every masculinity is very much so connected with toxicity (even though I would not claim that connectedness to be inherent), and that Halberstam's claim on female masculine persons being less likely to act in misogynistic manner is at least unfounded, if not incorrect. Nguyen also has an unfounded tendency to defend butches: "It is unfortunate that particular behaviors by some butches, such as going to strip clubs, watching pornography, telling sexist jokes, and pursuing women as sexual "conquests,"... have come to stand out as "typical" and have fuelled critiques of sexism and maintaining women's sexual subordination. However, not all butches act in such ways and that not only butches behave in these ways" (Nguyen, 2008: 680). This quote sounds a little bit too familiar with the phrase 'Not All Men' ('Not all

men', n.d.), intended to divert from significant conversations about toxic masculinity by pointing out that not all men are acting in toxic ways. Of course that not all members of one group are behaving in the same manner, however when talking masculinity we have to have a critical or at least sceptical attitude to all those performing it, even to those who are members of a group that is deprivileged in many contexts.

As with many Halberstam's observations, I also do not agree with him when he says that "...there are a variety of gender-deviant bodies under the sign of non-normative masculinities and femininities, and the task at hand is not to decide which represents the place of most resistance but to begin the work of documenting their distinctive features" (Halberstam, 1998: 148). Our task is or should be to decide which forms of masculinities are the places of least or most resistance, as then we can decide which performances of masculinities should be unacceptable and, on the other hand, who we should aim to be. Even though Halberstam acknowledges that alternative masculinities are subversive for gender hierarchies only if they are at the same time feminist, antiracist and queer (Halberstam, 1998: 173), he fails to commit more of his words to this – he fails to elaborate on how this should be done. Instead, he desperately focuses on proving that female masculinity is not a less worthy form of masculinity, but a masculinity that should be accepted, recognized and even celebrated. Without a doubt, I am on his page when it comes to validity of female masculinity, but at the same time its validity is exactly what worries me. What will happen after female masculinity is acknowledged as an equal to male masculinity? How, and if at all, that impacts gender binary and hierarchy? Is there space for any optimism when we know that we live in a system which can co-opt all changes that at first seem to be progressive?

## 12. Conclusion

In this paper I tried to uncover the limitations of denaturalization of gender, which represented one of the main goals of the most prominent queer and feminist theorists. Using the examples of female masculinities I argued that denaturalization does not necessarily impact gender binary and oppression, i.e. that binary femininity/masculinity can still continue to exist even when the performativity or ‘unnaturalness’ of gender is exposed.

Further, I tried to pinpoint the ways in which ‘women’ and ‘men’ can easily become obsolete as political categories in the West. I showed that sly strategies of cooptation (men can embrace masculine females into their ‘masculine communities’) can be used in order to keep the inequality intact and make it even harder to detect.

The 1995 movie *Babe*, also used by Halberstam in his book, is a fun example through which I can sum up my main arguments and depict the limits of denaturalization. In the movie we are introduced to the little pig named Babe who lives on the farm where all pigs get eaten. However, Babe has a wish to become a sheepdog – as dogs do not get eaten, as well as because his primary connections and identifications are with dogs (Halberstam, 1998: 255). Throughout the movie, Babe shows that he can successfully perform functions of sheepdogs, even better than them. This implies that there is nothing natural about dogness – the functions of these dogs on the farm are pure performances that can be successfully appropriated, even by a little pig. However, contrary to sheepdogs, that assume their superiority over sheep, Babe “...refuses to construct a new hierarchy or to preserve natural hierarchies; instead, he proves his willingness and ability to herd and shows proper respect for the sheep and above all takes pleasure in his dogness” (Halberstam, 1998: 255). This seems to be enough for Halberstam. I, on the other hand, find that this shows us how denaturalization of dogness did not bring equality between dogs and sheep, quite the contrary. Babe still



instructs sheep what to do, and it is not relevant if those instructions are done in a respectful manner. In order for Babe to identify as a dog, sheep still have to continue to be sheep – just as masculinity requires femininity as oppositional category. Therefore, the binary and hierarchy sheep/dog remains very much alive.

Finally, I want to acknowledge why I am critical and sceptical towards those who are usually deemed to be very subversive and already under attack from many different sides. Times change, and now when the power is maybe not so out of reach as it used to be, we have to be careful more than ever. My goal is to remind all of us who are performing masculinity that we are getting a share of the patriarchal dividend, no matter how do our bodies look like. Even though that dividend might be hard to resist and the need to assimilate is ever present – we have to remind ourselves of the importance of justice. It is only with the refusal to be complicit in the oppression of femininities that we can achieve it.

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