

Artifact Description

I propose an artifact usually reserved to the dimension of human gender: butch masculinity. I want to continue a project I began last semester, carving along the contours that butchness makes in subjectivity. I hope that writing about butchness for "Rhetoric and the Animal" will let me begin to draw out rich connections between butchness as a revision of masculinity and other revisions of what it means to be human. By conceptualizing butchness as revisionary, I associate it with other kinds of masculinities and genders, ones that butchness must repeat in order to revise.

It's imperative that my discussion of gender refuse to elide the gendered body that writes and speaks it, and is written and spoken by it. Since my own gendered body will continue to appear in the academic text I produce—one every bit as citational as the other—it makes sense to me to make use of my own butchness to show the ways that gender also marks the body of prose.

Butchness for me is also a deconstruction of the gendered binary between masculine/feminine: it is a bodily contradiction between historically aligned (and re-aligned, and mis-aligned) categories of sex, gender, and sexuality. The contradiction provides many occasions for breaking up commonplaces about masculine gender and the female body. Butchness tends to be hypervisible in public, drawing attention, remarks, and responses even from total strangers. Butchness gets challenged by men who view it as an unauthorized embodiment of a male privilege (namely masculinity) and who will contest others' access to the territory of masculinity; and it gets challenged by women who view it as a failure of femininity (especially, in my experience, in public restrooms); it gets challenged by other butches who don't think your masculinity is tough and seamless enough; it gets challenged by other queers who wonder why you haven't just shed your gender altogether like a snakeskin, as if it were possible to simply make a radical break with so ancient and powerful a citational chain as gender, and masculinity.

Butch masculinity caught up with the question of "the animal" in several significant ways, foremost among them this: that to be butch and to be animal has historically been to be insufficiently human. Some questions this artifact might lead me to explore in my response papers include: Where masculinity inhabits the definition of the human, how are non-humans feminized? **What does a butch resistance to being feminized offer in response?** If butchness is a subversive route into masculinity as a privilege reserved for males, what kinds of access does it open (or close off) to the benefits of that privilege for other people, and animals? What do (stone) butch emotional styles bespeak for animals about the evident absence of feeling? How is gender used to fortify the division between human and animal, and what relation does deconstructing masculinity/femininity bear to deconstructing human/animal?

Finally, I want to begin to try to think butchness as part of a rhetoric of humility, a performative practice of gender that has the potential to take out of masculinity some of what is toxic in it, that is, to make masculinity vulnerable to revision, and to re-invest the habits of masculinity (from chivalry to swagger) with a set of revisionist values in hopes of making (my) masculinity an ethical practice of responsibility.

Annotated Bibliography

I may want to draw on some of these during the semester, perhaps to help locate and limit my one-pagers. I know I've listed more here than can possibly get used in the papers, but I wanted to map out a few options.

Coyote, Ivan E. and Zena Sharman, eds. *Persistence: All Ways Butch and Femme*. Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2011. Print.

A sort of follow-up/tribute to *The Persistent Desire* anthology, *Persistence* represents a wide range of viewpoints on butch and femme genders.

Feinberg, Leslie. *Stone Butch Blues*. 1993. New York, NY: Alyson Books, 2003. Print.

Feinberg's novel is a staple in butch/femme communities. It follows the main character, Jess, across decades, communities, and embodiments, including the 50s butch/femme bar culture, 60s labor union movements, and 70s women's liberation.

Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998. Print.

Probably the most impactful book-length work on butch subjectivity, *Female Masculinity* is a queer theory benchmark that has branched into Halberstam's work on queer temporalities (and pop culture) as well as emergent work on stupidity.

Martin, Biddy. "Sexualities Without Genders and Other Queer Utopias." *Diacritics* 24.2-3 (1994): 104-121. Print.

J. Halberstam in "Between Butches" repudiates Martin's charge that butchness is privileged over queer femininity (i.e., Martin claims femininity can be radical, too, but that privilege has accrued to queer masculinity instead).

Munt, Sally R., ed. *butch/femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*. Washington, DC: Cassell, 1998. Print.

J. Halberstam's article "Between Butches" re-narrates butch subjectivity as a site of shared identification and culture, beyond the icon of a melancholic masculinity based in shame and rejection. Ann Cvetkovich's "Untouchability and Vulnerability: Stone Butchness as Emotional Style" argues that butch feelings may appear as no feeling but actually is a stylized excess of feeling.

Nestle, Joan, ed. *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader*. Boston, MA: Alyson Publications, 1992. Print.

The Persistent Desire collected nearly 500 pages of essays, stories, and poems in an explicitly recuperative project claiming butch and femme gender identities.

Errata:

<<http://butchesholdinganimals.tumblr.com/>>.

My butch spirit animal: a gay Lisa Frank jaguar.

