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Female Masculinities: A Review Essay

Coming from very different methodological directions, these two books show some interesting convergences. Pascoe's ethnography will be of immediate use as an accessible classroom text that vividly portrays teenaged American boys grooming a precious and precarious masculinity. Harris's book is a denser tome branching off from the Freudian tradition into a relational psychoanalysis influenced by contemporary gender theory, cognitive psychology, and philosophy to arrive at an original synthesis. Both books describe the formation of gender in their participants with significant insight. Both depend on similar psychoanalytic premises about sexuality and the construction of gender. In addition, both illustrate some limitations of the current concept of "female masculinity," which may idealize an unrealistic androgyny and support the abjection of femininity.

Pascoe's High School Stories

Pascoe's ethnography of masculinity formation in a working-class California secondary school rests on the past three decades of feminist and masculinity studies scholarship. The book's back cover includes high commendations by masculinity scholars Michael Kimmel and Michael Messner, while the text builds on the disparate theories of Pascoe's California mentors, Barrie Thorne, Judith Butler, and Nancy Chodorow. Pascoe also confirms queer theory in her central idea that male homophobia, that is, not being identified as a "fag," is fundamental to American boys' construction of masculinity, whereas, in contrast, being a lesbian may even be seen as attractive. In her analysis, masculinity can be part of the gender identity of both male and female persons. Furthermore, she confirms masculinity theorists like Raewyn Connell who find binary gender and heterosexuality integral to institutions like the U.S. high school, at

Pascoe, C. J. (2007). *Dude You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, xii + 227 pp., $55 (hardcover), $21.95 (paperback).

Harris, Adrienne. (2005). *Gender as Soft Assembly*. Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, x + 320 pp., $65 (hardcover), 2008, $34.95 (paperback).

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the same time that such power structures are always intersected by other hierarchies like those of ethnicity, racialization, and social class.

Pascoe begins with a vivid account of an annual school performance in which young men dramatize the boys they do not want to be—comically weak, unattractive nerds—and then transform themselves into mighty muscled studs who win pretty girls' company and other boys' admiration. Such public performances, Pascoe claims, illustrate the creation of masculinity through eroticized male dominance and female submission. The requirements of masculine mastery take multiple forms through which boys assert their control over their own bodies, girls' bodies, and each other. Athletic prowess shows boys' physical self-control, but emotional control is also important. Groups of boys deride other boys' expressions of love, romance, and all emotions other than anger. In one-to-one interviews with the researcher, the boys admit romantic and vulnerable feelings and claim to be different from their male peers, but they continue to conform with those peers in group settings.

Pascoe sees the boys' "compulsive heterosexuality" as having much more to do with dominance—and with bragging to other boys—than with desire or affection for girls (Pascoe, 23). Indeed, the boys delight in telling tall tales about their prowess over girls' bodies, highlighting the embarrassing things they can make the girls do, like vomiting or urinating in public. For these boys, physical touch demonstrates dominance rather than affection, and their "public sexuality was as much about securing a masculine social position as it was about expressions of desire or emotion" (Pascoe, 89). Meanwhile, verbal insults, physical aggression, and harassment permeate boys' relationships with other boys and with girls and become part of the "mechanisms through which the microprocesses of daily life actually foster inequality" (Pascoe, 10).

Pascoe's main thesis, encapsulated in her title, "Dude, You're a Fag," is that homophobia is central to achieving a masculine identity for the boys in her study, who compulsively repudiate "the specter of failed masculinity" through "homophobic epithets" for each other and through heterosexual boasting (Pascoe, 5). For Pascoe's predominantly White male teens, "fag" means incompetent, weak, or stupid, and they use the word constantly about each other and about other things they do not like—articles of clothing or school assignments, for instance. Thus, according to Pascoe, fag discourse is central to the White boys' insistent surveillance of one another, a "fluid identity that boys constantly struggled to avoid" as they sought to consolidate a confident heterosexual masculinity (Pascoe, 60). (One function of this joking homophobia might be to cement a relatively egalitarian homosocial bonding among the majority boys, assuming that their constant fag-baiting might induce a general vulnerability that fosters group identification. However, because Pascoe does not analyze hierarchies among the boys, the impression of equality may be an artifact of her ethnographic method.)

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These descriptions produce normative masculinity as homogeneous, monolithic, pervasive, and oppressive, a set of practices that strain most boys while subordinating girls and nonnormative boys. Pascoe demonstrates it enacted in school rituals and reinforced even by well-meaning teachers. It fills almost all the school's social spaces and inspires the reader to follow the ethnographer in seeking healthier gender norms, leading to Pascoe's final chapter of useful suggestions for making schools friendlier to gender variant and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students.

Pascoe notes two contrasting male groups to the dominant White heterosexual boys. The African American boys had some latitude not allowed to the White boys, particularly in less constant homophobic monitoring. They could wear flashy clothing, touch each other, and dance without provoking negative sanctions, and they taunted each other for acting "White" rather than for being "fags." That is, they considered being White as already weak and feminized in relation to the perceived hypermasculinity of being Black, and the school authorities apparently concurred, treating the African American boys more harshly than White ones for the same behaviors. Race thus appears in the ethnography as a complicating but marginal category in comparison to gender and sexuality, although Pascoe does convincingly demonstrate ways that the school privileged and institutionalized whiteness as well as masculinity and heterosexuality.

She also briefly mentions another alternative to the mainstream boys composed of Mormons and Evangelical Christians. Without interviewing them, she surmises that these boys were less overtly homophobic and sexist than their peers because their church's ideology supported male dominance and so precluded a need for compulsive reassurance. More information on this group might have illuminated these differences.

Pascoe's descriptions of the dominant boys' behavior and of the reinforcements they receive from school authorities are vivid and convincing. One strength of her analysis is her emphasis on the fluid nature of the boys' claims to heterosexual masculinity, such that "[t]hrough verbal jockeying, most boys ... continually moved in and out of the fag position" (Pascoe, 65). However, her analysis reinforces a masculine/feminine binary even as it endorses fluidity. Pascoe subtitles her study, "Masculinity and Sexuality in High School," so that femininity is an occluded category from the very premises of both the research design—in which the ethnographer hangs out in the spaces frequented by the mainstream boys and by the masculine girls—and her radical feminist theory of gender as a dominance/submission binary. The mainstream feminine girls are not analyzed separately but only seen reflexively through the boys' harassment, and the school's African American and White Christian girls are not described at all. Of course, the ethnographer can choose her participants to study, but gender is relational, and the choice to include some girls might imply that the

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school's full framework of gender relations could at least be sketched in. Nor is there an analysis of differences or hierarchies among the mainstream boys, nor of the positive bonds that uphold their behavior. This selectivity establishes two disparate groups of nonnormative girls, whom Pascoe calls "girls who act like guys," as the potentially progressive alternative to the mainstream boys and girls (Pascoe, 115). These nonnormative girls seem to possess a masculinity that retains some of the advantages of male dominance while apparently being purged of most oppressive qualities.

Following current feminist and queer theorists like Judith Butler and Judith Halberstam, Pascoe emphasizes gender's construction through performance. She argues for a definition of masculinity "as a set of practices associated with women as well as men"—that is, "certain clothing styles, certain sexual practices, and interactional dominance" that call "into question the easy association of masculinity with male bodies. Their gender maneuvering challenges both commonsense and academic understandings of masculinity as the sole domain of men" (Pascoe, 116). "[G]irls can be masculine," Pascoe stresses: "They dressed, talked, and carried themselves in many ways 'like guys'" without identifying as transgendered (Pascoe, 115, emphasis original). Pascoe's category of female masculinity, then, may be seen as at least in part a result of the desire for an alternative gender position bound neither by gender normativity nor by heterosexuality, although still located within the binary gender grids of boys/girls, masculine/feminine, and dominant/submissive.

Descriptions of the two groups show them as differently situated, and only a few girls in them seem to fit the rubric of being "like guys," so that the coherence of the category seems questionable. The "Basketball Girls," the main group that Pascoe describes, includes four young women who are "athletic, loud, popular, and well liked" (Pascoe, 115). One is Latina, one Filipina, and two are White. They get into food fights in the cafeteria, oppose school authorities, and dress in comfortably baggy hip-hop clothes, though none say they dress to look like boys. Their leader is the one out lesbian, a Latina who brags about her success attracting other girls and who masculinizes references to her own body by calling her breasts "muscle" and referring to her "jock" (Pascoe, 128). Like the mainstream boys, she sometimes displays sexist attitudes and uses the word "gay" in a casually disparaging fashion. However, she wears a formal dress and makeup for a school dance, a behavior that enhances her popularity as a "liminal figure who demonstrated an ability to move between the worlds of masculinity and femininity" (Pascoe, 131). The other out lesbian that Pascoe describes is an Asian American senior who "dressed like a boy, was an athlete, and was incredibly popular—serving as both class president and homecoming queen" (Pascoe, 116). Pascoe asserts that these athletes represent masculinity in female bodies and that they both challenge and reinscribe the gender order "by engaging in many of the dominance practices that constitute adolescent masculinity,

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such as taking up space, teasing girls, and positioning themselves as sexually powerful" (Pascoe, 133). Pascoe concludes that "doing gender differently can, but doesn't always, challenge gender inequality" (Pascoe, 23).

These supposedly masculine girls have a higher status in the school than feminine boys, but Pascoe does not describe other girl athletes who may not see themselves as masculine or adopt the strategies of the basketball girls. Nor does she analyze the differing racialized genders of these girls, so that it is not clear whether they are appropriating masculinity, imitating particular groups of boys, or attempting an alternative racialized female strategy with their hip-hop identifications and rap music.

Whereas Pascoe types the majority of girls in the school as demonstrating conventional femininity and the basketball girls as displaying female masculinity, she validates the girls in the gay/straight alliance as deliberately queer or gender bending, while still including them under her rubric of female masculinity. They were not identified by other students as "like guys," and they did not dress or act like the basketball girls, though some described themselves as having masculine qualities. A few considered themselves lesbians, and they deliberately employed "gender maneuvering" as well as other kinds of youthful nonconformity, like punk-dyed hair (Pascoe, 116). These girls consciously challenged norms in the school and society: "Why be normal?" and "Normal is bad," they say (Pascoe, 141). They talk easily among themselves about a butch-femme aesthetic, their romantic relationships, and gendered oppression. Yet, they face hostility both from other students and from the school administration, which insisted they take off the "Nobody Knows I'm a Lesbian" T-shirts they wore to celebrate National Coming Out Day (Pascoe, 148). Pascoe argues that these girls' confrontations with sexist school practices demonstrate that a "politicized understanding of gender is central to challenging the gender order" (Pascoe, 151). However, it is not clear that these gender-conscious girls either see themselves or are seen by others as "girls who act like guys," and the category of "butch" is not differentiated from that of "female masculinity."

Pascoe's specific ethnographic setting may shape the applicability of her findings to other settings. She is analyzing adolescence, perhaps the most rigid and polarized period of American gender. Her observations are persuasive in corroborating that her participants and their high school often operate through a binary of masculine domination over feminine subordination: "this study examines masculinity as sexualized processes of confirmation and repudiation through which individuals demonstrate mastery over others" (Pascoe, 14). However, this binary theoretical framework may also obscure alternative formulations. For example, she briefly discusses some racial differences in gender formation among the boys but not in male–female relationships or among the girls. Nor does she mention possibilities for intellectually or sexually assertive femininities.

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Thus, she follows radical feminist theory in defining femininity simply as women's subordination to men, a formula that valorizes masculinity in contrast.

Harris and the "Tomboy Stories"

For one approach to the interiority of gender that is largely missing from Pascoe's ethnographic account, I turn now to Adrienne Harris's original and demanding psychoanalytic text, Gender as Soft Assembly. A practicing relational psychoanalyst, Harris is refreshingly flexible about gender and free from the essentialist assumptions of some orthodox Freudians and Lacanians. She has a comprehensive, flexible conception of gender that uses analogies from current scientific theories, including cognitive and developmental psychology and chaos theory. Her ideas may be of considerable use to masculinity researchers, even though she largely omits considerations of class, racial, and other social hierarchies and institutions. She reviews a wide range of contemporary psychoanalytic theories, and she appends to her study a moving but tangential case history of the mourning of a 9/11 widow.

Harris's descriptions of gender development are individualized and complex, and the multiplicity of gender formations is one of her main points. In contrast with older psychoanalytic views about boys' identifications with their fathers and girls with their mothers, Harris sees gender as formed interactively in varying contexts. She acknowledges the general stability of individuals' gender identities but also sees life-long opportunities for change and reorganization. To help her describe the variability of gender, she relies on two models drawn from outside psychoanalysis. One is the analogy between gender formation and language development. She explains that "meaning making is an interactional, coconstructed experience," and that gender participates in such meaning making (Harris, 3). "The great paradox in regard to both gender development and language development," she says, "is that in both domains growth leads to freedom, to powerful structures of fantasy and imagination, and at the same time to social management" (Harris, 218). This, then, is a developmental model of gender construction in each individual, though there is little discussion of such positive outcomes as "freedom" in her case studies. The other analogy is with scientific "chaos theory," in which common beginnings and varied contexts produce "unsettled," "unpredictable," and nonlinear results (Harris, 5).

According to Harris, gender identity develops from the child's experience of others and the world, more complex internal structures being built from simpler ones. The apparent stability of an individual's sense of gender is attributable to this interactive experience, not to any innate hardwiring. Although she sees similar processes as operative for all children, she says that girls and boys inhabit "different problem spaces" (Harris, 84). These "problem spaces" are

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constructed by the child's family and culture, where gender can be understood as a kind of "interpellation" or hailing into position by society. Each child's individual "construction of gender" may differently emphasize gender "as a body-based identity, as a category of experience, and as an intersubjectively organized self-state," while the "gendered self emerges from an interaction in which the child is always already interpreted, experienced, and understood" (Harris, 84, 178). Like Pascoe, Harris sees gender as always "a work in progress," and she also follows Judith Butler in emphasizing the performative, continuously re-enacted characteristics of gender as a way of displacing the reified view that it is a static core component of the self (Harris, 173). At times, however, this approach appears to valorize all "process" or "performance" as intrinsically progressive.

In current U.S. society, Harris claims, gender functions like "a magnet, a strange attractor to manage, express, and organize relational transactions, meanings, trauma, and defense against trauma" (Harris, 35). Each child's gender is a complex "compromise formation" that is influenced by parental fantasies and unconsciously transmitted intergenerational traumas as well as by the child's interactions with the environment (Harris, 200). This means that gender is overdetermined and layered, serving multiple functions that may change as the individual ages or alters social contexts. Gender may be noxious or idealized and may feel authentic or false to the individual. That gender attracts meanings from a variety of social fields, fantasies, and interpersonal reactions is an important point in trying to understand the persistence and salience of gender in both individuals and institutions. This approach may well be useful to masculinity theorists.

Like other poststructuralist theorists, Harris sees the self and gender as inherently fragmented and multiple, yet she also attempts to explain the perception of a fixed gender in each individual that anchors a recognizable self, based on "the deep human need to feel coherent" as well as a "need to be known as personally unique" (Harris, 157). Because of people's needs for social intelligibility, gender can vary only within a limited range of possibilities. However, as social contexts change, the possibilities for gender and for sexuality can also change. She believes that sexualities and genders have no necessary correlation, a view she sees as a liberating: "If the interrelationship of desire and identification is not predetermined, and if gender is lived in multiple registers (symbolic, metaphoric, iconic, embodied, fantastical, and concrete), and if sexuality serves intrapsychic but also interpersonal functions, then many possibilities for variation are opened up" (Harris, 206).

Unlike Pascoe, Harris often discusses gender without differentiating masculine from feminine gendering processes. However, like Pascoe, she does focus on masculinity in women, specifically in adult clients whose cases she labels as "Tomboys' Stories" (Harris, 131). These case studies vary widely. Some of the

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women are lesbians; some are not. One client rejected her mother; another sought to protect hers; to Harris, another's tomboy self stood in for an absent father, while a tomboy identification served others to deny their own vulnerability or fantasize themselves as eternally youthful. For example, Jeri has a "disidentification" with her ailing mother and lives an "adult sexual and emotional life" with women in which her "wish to be the tomboy lover" coexists with a "deeply buried wish for care herself"; Sarah, a depressed woman, has a lifelong fantasy of being a boy who "might have thrived" in her unsupportive family; and Jamie's tomboy fantasies reveal "not a desire to please a woman but to be formed and initiated into pleasure and self-knowledge by a woman" (Harris, 136, 137, 141).

What the "Tomboys' Stories" have in common is "an experience of 'masculinity' in girls or women," Harris says, but she emphasizes the very different meanings of these stories for different individuals (Harris, 131). The claim of a tomboy girlhood allows these adult women to reorganize their childhood memories in the light of their later development, and she interprets these tomboy identifications as her clients' nostalgic desire for freedom. "A tomboy's masculinity may contain her fascination with men, her fascinated rivalry, or her disavowal and avoidance of men," Harris claims (Harris, 141). The tomboy identity might serve as a lost self, the rescuer or rejecter of a mother, or many other roles. Thus, Harris sees the tomboy formation in her patients as illustrating multiple forms of both gender and sexual practices. Her key point is that an apparently common identification as tomboys or as masculine women fulfilled diverse psychological functions for various clients.

Despite this variety, masculinity is consistently affirmed as attractive, active, and valuable: "The tomboy's identity may be mimetically established in relation to the most vital, alive, or free and loving aspects of her primary figures"—and build on the "masculinity" of either the mother or the father (Harris, 142). Harris admits that all the activities and identifications she describes might be "happily (or unhappily) ungendered or ego-syntonically feminine" in some women, but she does not give any examples. Instead, she connects all her clients' tomboy identities with a rejection of femininity (Harris, 147). Such rejection is not surprising, because she claims that femininity for these women—and implicitly, for all American women—implies a pervasive shame and sense of constraint that is transmitted from mothers to daughters. She cites feminist psychoanalytic theorists who claim that feminine gender typically develops through mutual recognitions between mother and daughter, but she does not describe any potentially positive outcomes of these interactions, related, for example, to nurturance or sexual desirability.

Although female masculinity can serve multiple psychological functions, in Harris's view, the attribution of masculinity is always valued over a debased and rejected femininity. She describes the "feminine" as "a construction softly

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assembled to carry feelings and states of mind deemed intolerable, the unconscious of the other" (Harris, 203). Like Pascoe, Harris cites Nancy Chodorow on men's repudiation of femininity, an attitude she also finds common among women. In these two books on gender construction, sexuality, and masculinity, neither Harris nor Pascoe chooses to specify the content of femininity for either their male or female participants.

Furthermore, Harris describes both masculine and feminine gender as wounded, and melancholic, and she also portrays the contemporary self as typically, perhaps inevitably, wounded and partial: she writes, "The 'postmodern' subject is, above all, a traumatized subject, someone whose consciousness and subjectivity has been fractured and rendered incoherent through the embedding of that subject amid economic, political, and ecological discord and contradiction" (Harris, 15, sic). Although coherent meaning structures are necessary for individual stability and selfhood, the implication is that these systems have broken down in the wake of today's catastrophic social breakdowns. Such historical judgments may provoke skepticism about the unique trauma of postmillennial existence in the West. Moreover, such vague generalizations about traumatized selves and genders obscure very significant differences based on racialized, gendered, disabled, and other social categories, as well as on people's highly variable experiences of prosperity or poverty, war, and other forms of violence.

Convergences, Questions, and Female Masculinity

The two books under review have complementary approaches and some convergences in their conclusions. Although neither theorist considers any social or psychological space that might be neutrally gendered or ungendered, both argue persuasively for the multiplicity of gender formations, and both give specific examples of this multiplicity. Pascoe's ethnography is especially rich in descriptions of the homophobic relationships among high school boys and of their dominating behavior to high school girls. Harris constructs original psychoanalytic paradigms from interdisciplinary sources. Pascoe's "girls who act like guys" might be described as tomboys, a classification that Harris finds useful for understanding the psyches of some adult clients. Both theorists hint at, but do not elaborate, a developmental approach to gender that might trace individuals' changing investments in masculinity and femininity over the life course and in historically changing social contexts.

One of the strongest points of convergence between the two studies is their attention to reworking the complex interrelationships between the concepts of gender and sexuality. Harris urges more consideration of bisexual, transgender, and intersex experience, leading to the conclusion that "we think of gender in

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relation to sexuality in an irreducibly paradoxical way" (Harris, 210). Both scholars describe gender as complexly intersubjective, individual, and institutional in operation and as potentially fluid and changeable. The psychoanalytic book calls for more attention to social context, and the sociological one for more attention to subjects' interiority. Both agree on what Harris calls the "traumatic consequences of normal masculinity" (Harris, 172), and both use psychoanalytic theories like Nancy Chodorow's to describe the asymmetries of gender. Both describe gender as a result of processes and discourses. Harris claims that all persons face the "impossibility of fully inhabiting a gender position," and Pascoe chronicles the difficulties that rigid gender norms pose for high school students (Harris, 210). However, those theorists who argue that feminists should explicitly seek to degender society might critique both these scholars for continuing to use exactly those categories that should be deconstructed and questioned, that is, "masculinity," "femininity," and "gender," thus reinforcing these terms as adequate and relatively coherent entities.

For both theorists, female masculinity is an important category, one that I think deserves more scrutiny and skepticism. Both Harris and Pascoe describe very disparate formations of "female masculinity" while bundling them into a single category that seems to belong more to the researchers than to their participants. Attributes of female masculinity in the two books include provoking food fights, referring to one's breasts as "muscle," wanting to protect one's mother, sporting baggy pants, wearing a T-shirt that says "Nobody knows I'm a Lesbian," and desiring to be cared for. Sometimes the attributions of masculinity appear to be the researched participants' own, sometimes the researchers'. Neither author labels any of her female participants' gender formations as variant femininities. Both discuss female masculinity as a minority position, yet one that makes sense, given the destructive attributes that the scholars associate with both hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. Although both Harris and Pascoe see "female masculinity" solving some problems for the women and the girls involved, it is not proposed as a strategy for improving women's condition more generally. The very category of "female masculinity," then, may reinforce the tendency even for feminist analysis to remain only within the gender binary and to valorize masculinity over femininity.

In contrast, in some cultural feminist theories, femininity often has a substantive content including reciprocity and egalitarian rather than competitive relationships. This perspective, based in psychoanalytic object-relations theory, ascribes femininity to mothers' and daughters' identification with each other's nurturance and empathy, while masculinity is seen primarily as a defensive formation against the childhood mother. This positive approach to femininity may be seen as a rejoinder to the view reflected in Pascoe and Harris that femininity in women has no independent content but is solely the effect of subordination or the phantom projection of male anxieties. However, this cultural feminist

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viewpoint, too, continues to polarize masculinity and femininity as each other's opposites and sometimes to essentialize traditional gender. Furthermore, neither of the two theorists acknowledges the femininity of femme lesbians or discusses butch identity but instead tends to conflate the category of female masculinity with that of lesbianism.

Both Pascoe and Harris portray masculinities in men as defensive, reactive, and socially harmful, so that their analyses underplay the attractions of masculinity for men and thus are less useful than they might be for projects of gender reformulation. Harris defines gender as a compromise formation, persistently haunted by choices not taken and goals not fulfilled, and she describes it as always a "melancholic structure," a partial or mutilated result of the "charred remains" of infantile and other psychological, often unconscious, conflicts (Harris, 87). Pascoe and Harris agree on the psychoanalytic paradigm in which masculine and feminine genders are both created through negation and repudiation, by tragic disavowals and identifications with lost and abandoning parents. Underlying such views may be an unexpressed utopian fantasy of what gender should be—ideal and undivided—a sort of Platonic version of Freud, as though all people are originally some androgynous, bisexual, or polysexual conglomerate, full of all great human capacities, but are whittled down by "gender sculpting" to a narrow, presumably constricted, and arbitrary gender and sexuality (Harris, 164).

Thus, the views of female masculinity I have surveyed here may seem to imply a kind of androgyny that continues to privilege the masculine, as female participants can appropriate to themselves—in dress, behavior, fantasy, or sexual choice—some masculine prerogatives while still retaining female identity. Harris suggests that gender is not a problem so much as a solution for the child's psychologically sustaining an abandoning or collapsed parent, becoming and thus always having the internalized lost parent. In contrast, however, I note that developmental psychology does not assume that children need to disavow idyllic infantile fusion or mourn lost objects to speak, walk, or play with others. Instead, positive reinforcements are assumed as likely to increase children's skills and capacities as are compensatory reactions to loss. Some gender formations might indeed serve psychologically to sustain an inadequate parent, I suggest, whereas all gender may set strategies and behaviors for the self that imitate some aspects of both parents and of social influences and ideals. That is, all genders may indeed be "compromise formations" in the sense of depending on choices that preclude other choices, but not in the sense that "compromise" means inevitably settling for inferior, or even tragic, solutions to developmental problems.

Thus, I am not claiming that binary gender is good or necessary, but I am questioning the negative characterization of both masculine and feminine gender formations that these two books sometimes support. To restructure gender

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and reduce its salience in allocating social resources, I believe, we need to understand what makes many aspects of both traditional masculinity and femininity pleasant, attractive, and ego supportive to many people as well as what makes traditional genders restrictive, self-destructive, and socially harmful. There is an old joke about a child who does not say a word until he is 8 years old. Then, one morning he suddenly complains at breakfast, "The oatmeal is burned." "You can talk," say his delighted parents. "Why didn't you speak before?" "Up to now, everything was okay," says the boy. The joke is funny precisely because we do not believe that trauma and loss—even the trivial loss of a properly cooked breakfast—are necessary for the process of learning to speak. Rather, the desire to please and imitate others and the pleasures of competence are considered strong spurs to individual development of various capacities. Why, then, should we retain an exclusively compromised, mutilated, or traumatic perspective on the acquisition of gender?

In summary, I claim that these two excellent books of feminist scholarship limit their otherwise useful analyses by adopting the somewhat baggy concept of female masculinity, a category that loosely associates a wide range of disparate characteristics, at least some of which might otherwise be characterized as aspects of alternative femininities or of new, less gender-saturated categories. Furthermore, the category of female masculinity as used in these books conflates female homosexuality with rejections of conventional femininity and with masculinity, while valorizing the latter. It thus may continue a cultural disparagement of femininity while disregarding any gender categories other than the binary of masculinity and femininity, in whatever bodies they occur. In these discussions, female masculinity moves from being depathologized to being celebrated, sometimes with the implication that we women would be better men than men are, and it seeks to endorse positive aspects of masculinity without giving up the cachet of a minority and persecuted status. Female masculinity thus appears as an implicit gender ideal that survives the purportedly melancholy origins of gender or "gender sculpting" that constrain conventional gender acquisition. Although the validation of female masculinity encourages social tolerance toward nonnormative gender formations, it does not necessarily advance the goal of "undoing gender" put forward by current feminist theory and profeminist masculinity studies, and it retains the language of binary gender. Furthermore, we may consider how these ambiguities within the category of "female masculinity" reflect similar ambiguities within the more familiar categories of "hegemonic masculinity" or even of "masculinity" itself.

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