

# Female Masculinity in Enola Holmes Mysteries

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**Abstract**— There are many different versions of masculinity since it is a construct created by society based on the expectations placed on males. When it comes to what it means to be male or female in society, men usually define themselves as masculine, and women commonly define themselves as feminine. Masculinity in females, which is typically associated with men, can also be linked to women who, through the novel's protagonist Enola Holmes, symbolize the representation of female masculinity in *The Enola Holmes Mysteries*. The data is collected from dialogues and narration concerning female masculinity as well as the author's critical position including the author's ideology, the author's perspective on female masculinity in the novel of *Enola Holmes Mysteries*. The findings reveal that there are five concepts of female masculinity that being represented. However, the form of female masculinity tends to become unrecognizable and often considered abnormal for its existence.

**Index Terms**— Female Masculinity, Femme, Halberstam, Mysteries.

## 1. Introduction

Boys and men are expected to have masculine qualities and roles that are representative of, appropriate for, and expected of them. Based on Bem (1974) measurement of masculinity and femininity strength, bravery, independence, leadership, and assertiveness are all characteristics usually associated with men, women, vice versa. Stets and Burke (2000) stated that the degree to which a person perceived himself as masculine or feminine in context of what it meant to be a man and woman in society were referred to as their level of femininity or masculinity. Males typically consider themselves as masculine while females typically define themselves as feminine when society decides what being male or female implies (e.g., dominant or submissive, brave or emotional). However, gender is social constructs (ideas that have been created and accepted by a certain group or people in a society), a person may be identified as either a man or a woman depending on their gender. (Halberstam (1998) also has the same view regarding to this matter; men can appear to be feminine and women can appear to be masculine.

*The Enola Holmes Mysteries* is a young adult fiction series of detective novels written by an American author, Nancy Springer. During this era, Victorian women's rights and privileges were limited, and both unmarried and married women had to face hardships and disadvantages. Victorian women faced financial and sexual disadvantages, as well as inequalities in their relationships and society. During this time,

there were clear inequalities between men's and women's rights. Males were given more stability, financial standing, and control over their houses, while women were given less (Vaid, 1985).

Masculinity in females which are usually associated with men, can also be connected with women who to represent the portrayal of masculinity in *The Enola Holmes Mysteries* through the protagonist character of the novel, namely Enola using Stuart Hall's representation and Judith Halberstam's concept about female masculinity to reveal the representation of female masculinity within the novel.

It is assumed that the novel portrays several concepts of female masculinity from the female character. Though masculinity on female is considered unnatural or improper for a lady like Enola but, it seems that she thought that her behavior is a form of independence as she was taught by her mother to survive on her own.

## 2. Methods

In the academic field of gender, women's masculinity is not given enough attention. While some people believe that women's masculinity is abnormal and should not belong to them, there are several real-world situations where female can own masculinity as well. Rather than being innate, masculinity develops by experience and individual's behaviour. Based on this study, a person's level of masculinity can be determined by how they act, look, and behave in ways that are typically associated with being a man, such as walking, sitting, talking like a man, and smoking a cigar.

This research focuses on analyzing how female masculinity is represented on *The Enola Holmes Mysteries*. The previous analysis will lead to Halberstam's theory of female masculinity (1998) as the supporting theory to reveal female masculinity on the female character using Halberstam's concept of female masculinity and Hall's theory of representation (2003) as the main theory to reveal the critical position of the author.

This research is considered as qualitative research. Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight (2006: 64) state that it focuses on looking at specifics and is concerned with gathering and analyzing information in non-numeric data. The information presented here is non-numerical writings that draw words and descriptions from the dialogues and narration of *Enola Holmes mysteries*.

The primary data are collected from dialogues and narration regarding female masculinity as well as the author's critical position including the author's ideology, the author's

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perspective on female masculinity in *The Enola Holmes Mysteries* novel from the first series to sixth series. Meanwhile, the secondary data that are collected to support this research are from journals, articles, essays, interviews and relevant sources on etiquettes and manners of the Victorian era, noble ranks, Victorian occupations, female education in boarding school as well as Victorian fashion.

After the data has been obtained, an analysis and processing of the data will be done by close reading, analyzing, and categorizing the data on the novel in order to make this study easier and to answer the research questions. As the first step, the data on *The Enola Holmes Mysteries* novel will be collected by selecting, and classifying data, narratives and quotations in the novel which represent female masculinity.

In this step, masculinity on female will focus on the main character and to comprehend the concept of female masculinity through the content of the novel by comprehensive reading and identifying them by using the female masculinity concepts by Halberstam. Based on Halberstam's female masculinity theory.

The next step is to apply Stuart Hall's theory of representation alongside with the theory of female masculinity by Halberstam, by understanding the approaches and the concepts in the theory that will be used. After this step is done, some texts are going to get linked regarding female masculinity using the five concepts of Female masculinity namely Butch Realness, Femme Pretender, Male Mimicry, Fag Drag and Denaturalized Masculinity that Halberstam proposed in her book by classifying all the characteristics and requirements. The next step after collecting and analyzing the data is to answer the second research question. In order to seek the answer to the second research question, that is finding the critical position of the novel's author.

### 3. Discussion

#### A. Butch Realness

Butch realness is a biological female who can easily pass for a guy. Based on the theory of butch realness which needs the sense of being masculine in terms of appearance, it requires masculine appearance to easily pass as a male and it focuses on the concept of authenticity and is situated on the border between transgender and butch identification (Halberstam, 1998).

"And I, being blessed with a **flat chest**, had carried her example a step further." (Springer: 67)

In this case, as evidenced by her way of talking of her upper body part, Enola is quite proud of her figure, which falls into the ideal category to be a butch. If femininity is associated with women's physical appearance, Enola is likely absent on the upper body part. As Nguyen (2012) stated, in the world of butch, "wearing them well" refers to how invisible, as opposed to perky, one's breasts may be. Additionally, there are variations in how butches want to construct their body. In another word having a small-almost invisible chest is a big advantage for female to be fit in the butch category without having a hardship trying to sculpture or fabricated their body into desirable shape to be a butch especially on the upper parts of the body that is most likely to be a huge obstacle in becoming a butch

considering a butch must prioritize the appearance of a man than the behaviors.

"Correctly enough. **I was simply avoiding corsets, hairpins, tight shoes**, and the like, while making up for lost sleep. No one knew that every night, after I had heard the rest of the household go to bed, I got up and worked on my cipher book through the dark hours. I enjoyed the ciphers after all, for I loved finding things, and Mum's ciphers gave me a new way to do this, first discovering the hidden meaning" (Springer: 63)

From the dialogue above, Enola clearly rejected the idea and practices of standard femininity such as wearing girlish clothes. Enola instead enjoy chipper book. Something that is not an ordinary girl would read. Nguyen also believes that something related to "sexy femininity", in this case, it refers to something feminine, such as wearing accessories, feminine clothes and make up. To butches, wearing female attires such as accessories, footwear (heels) and female clothings are likely to be a physically disadvantage to butches. Enola is the perfect definition of a butch. Enola fits perfectly into the definition of a butch, as seen from the previous dialogues, Nancy describes Enola as a female who is somewhat not feminine girl, Enola also rejects the idea of being feminine which according to her is a weakness, something that lacks in some aspects.

#### B. Femme Pretender

Performative masculinity, or Femme Pretender, avoids having a genuinely male appearance. It has a stronger preference for masculine behavior than manly appearance. In other words, according to the femme pretender theory, women must prioritize actions over the masculine appearances.

"But walking was not necessary, as I stood directly behind our captor. My hands, which seemed to know what to do better than I did, selected a large rock from the ballast even as Squeaky cocked his leg to kick again. Before he could do so, **I hoisted my primitive weapon and brought it down with great decision upon his head.**" (Springer: 108)

In this dialogue, Enola was captured alongside the missing duke son, Lord Tewksbury, Enola seems to know better how to handle the situation and manage to escape from the captors by hitting a rock upon the captor's head. Halberstam (1998) draws an obvious distinction between this type of performance and the "femme pretender" category in the contest. In this example, in an essential theatrical vein-flexing and exhibiting muscles are out of the scope of conscious theatricality, the femme-pretender performs recognizably camp routines, typical of drag queen culture, with male and feminine elements superimposed (Navarro, 2013). In the dialogue, Enola shows a very distinctive male performance by preferring to use physicality or violence which often associated with man. By fighting, a person shows a masculine physical image that reflects courage, power, and flexibility. Enola has more masculine physique seen by from her actions in handling the captors, which exceeds men's physique in general. Compared to Lord Tewksbury, Enola shows her action is more masculine and fearsome than Lord Tewksbury. Enola who is a girl is illustrated to be masculine, on the other side, Lord Tewksbury is illustrated to be more feminine. as it was described in the novel, "Idiot, untie my

hands!” cried Lord Tewksbury” (Springer: 108).

### C. Male Mimicry

Male mimicry in the drag king shows demonstrates how women attempt to imitate a recognizable characteristic of male masculinity. The essential characteristic of male mimicry is the training women go through to be able to behave and act like males. They are taught the basics of male behavior, including how to walk, sit, communicate, and lie down.

“ – and an angular personage rather lacking in feminine charm,” continued Dr. Watson. **“She has shown a preference for masculine clothing and tomboyish activities, walks with a long, masculine stride,** and altogether may be entirely lost to decent society if she is not soon found.” (Springer: 154)

In the conversation between Dr. Watson and Enola (in disguise), as it can be seen, Dr. Watson describes Enola as someone masculine despite her being a female. Enola has a preference for masculine clothing and tomboyish activities and especially walks with a long masculine stride. Walking in a long strides is considered not normal for a lady, a lady stereotypically has a slow paced walking speed but Enola shows a preference walking in long strides making it being more unladylike and even considered as masculine. . Thus, Enola become the perfect example of Male Mimicry as she was applying the fundamental of traditional male behaviors.

### D. Fag Drag

The term of "fag drag" refers to a woman who fetishizes gay male culture by mocking homosexual males who are macho. They frequently adopt the "Castro clone" look, a subgroup of urban homosexual men who are well-known for wearing leather or denim in masculine fashion. This means that Fag Drag required to imitate gay male urban culture, which is based on leather, denim, and the queer motorcycle style, as well as impersonating its outfits.

““You’re no nun,” she said in **a light tone as if teasing a girlfriend.** “Whatever are you doing in that absurd habit?” In my most aristocratic accent, so that she would know we were alike in class as well as in other ways, I responded, “Lady Cecily, one might also ask –” (Springer: 263)

The word “a light tone as If teasing a "girlfriend” can be regarded as a form of flirting, flirting can be done between opposite sex which in this section, Lady Cecile teased Enola in a light tone which can be interpreted in a feminine way of speaking. Most feminine female used light tone of voice in order to look like girlish especially in Victorian era. Using the term of “girlfriend” in exact same-sex even in the form of teasing is quite unusual therefore, with this evidence, the relationship between Enola and Cecile can be indirectly interpreted as lesbian couple.

“Lady Cecily,” I tried again, **“there is no need for alarm. I wish only to befriend you. To take you somewhere warm and safe, give you supper, and get you out of those rags.”** (Springer: 263)

Indicates the relationship between Lady Cecile and Enola as quite unusual as in normal relationship between man and women, in here Enola behaves and acts as a man who is brave

and heroic because he treats Lady Cecile as someone who must be protected .Halberstam said about butch lesbians that Among the behaviors she associates with masculinity are dressing like men, desiring women, being recognized as men, painting on moustaches, growing moustaches, engaging in traditionally male occupations, and protecting female partners, Halberstam (1998). . A fag drag is required to imitate gay male urban culture, within above dialogue, Enola might imitate the gay male urban culture which in gay male relationship, one’s must act as the man and the other one must act as the women. the writer has discovered in the butch realness section with several evidences, Enola is confirmed to be in the category of butch, a butch are indirectly considered as a lesbian which there is indication that Enola might have same-sex oriental ideology, this can be seen that Enola once said that she does not have any attractive feeling towards man and she does not want to find any man to marry. This is clearly against the image of Victorian that every female must find a man to marry, thus the writer assumed Enola might have the same-sex orient ideology.

### E. Denaturalized Masculinity

Denaturalized masculinity may be more of a flashy manliness than a butch realness. Denaturalized manliness, on the other hand, looks into elective masculinities as opposed to those exhibited through male mimics.

“My dear Sherlock,” I told him almost tenderly, although I still held my dagger at the ready to keep him from approaching me, **“the greatest harm I could possibly suffer would be to lose my liberty, to be forced into a conventional life of domestic duties and matrimony.”** (Springer: 278)

The writer wanted to conclude that in the category of denaturalizing masculinity someone must have desire to be presumably masculine just to avoid the disadvantage of being the feminine as in the example that was given by Halberstam of a movie named Babe (1995). This film tells the story of the little pig which wants to be a sheepdog partly because he realizes that pigs get eaten on the farm and dogs do not. So the writer can assume that in metaphorical way of what is meant by pigs in this film are the oppressed people and sheepdogs here symbolize people who have power over the oppressed one and have their own privileges.

“Dred, who won the 1996 Hershe Bar contest, pulling off a tribute to blaxploitation macho with a butch twist. Dred represents the fluid boundaries between the any different drag king performances. I include her in my section on denaturalized masculinity because she combines appropriation, critique, and alternative masculinity in her presentation.” (Halberstam, 1998)

Not trying to mimicking the way of “detective”, Enola instead appropriates “detective”, learn its functions and performs them. By appropriates “detective” in a context of intelligence, Enola proved to be better than her brother. Appropriates means the action of taking something for one’s own use, typically without the owner’s permission. Enola could be considered stealing her brother’s occupation, a detective. In the story Sherlock Holmes was also taking the job for missing person who is Lady Cecily but it is found that Enola did better and successfully in finding the missing person and helped Lady

Cecily one step ahead than her brother, Sherlock.

#### F. *The Critical Position of the Author*

In an interview with Suffolk Libraries (2022), Springer stated in the interview, that she always been writing strong female characters in her works because she had not been very strong as a youngster. She therefore makes most of the female characters in her works have specific traits such as a strong and independent characters. As Springer (2022) stated, "I didn't write it in 2006. It was published then. I figure I started to write it, and the other Enola Holmes books, around the turn of the century. (Doesn't that make me sound ancient?) By then I'd been writing strong female characters for years, as therapy; I hadn't been very strong as a youngster. The world they appeared in seemed to enjoy them." In her words, she writes strong characters in her works as a therapy which indicates two reasons that are either something might have happened to Springer in the past such as bullying or she might be trying to convey what she was not able to accomplish when she was younger which was that she was not a strong girl. She may have wanted to be strong like males, but she was unable to do so. As a result, she conveys her thoughts and introduces the female characters in her books with strong and independent traits that make them powerful which lead them to female masculinity. Female masculinity was portrayed in *The Enola Holmes Mysteries*. Female masculinity characteristics can be found and observed on Enola, on how Enola acts, behave and traits. The actual situation in the Victorian era, when Springer created a female character that was intended to have no features that inclined to be more masculine in nature and even more male than male, seems to be severely misrepresented in Enola Holmes novel. According to the author's research findings, Springer wants to encourage women to have strong and masculine qualities to be independent and not always depend on men.

Quoted from an interview with First Post (2020), Springer has a view concerning female masculinity that is related to feminism in different aspects. Springer has no thoughts to challenge nor to preach the ideology, so it can be concluded that Springer is making up stories that are contrary to the contextual background, which was in the Victorian era, in which Victorians are still adopting the ideology of traditional men and traditional women. As Springer stated, "I did not have to worry about striking any balance; I myself am out of balance with society and always have been. Novelists are uncommon. I guess in my own way I am a strong feminist character. I just wrote from the heart. I never mean to challenge or preach; I just am." As a strong feminist, it can be assumed that Springer tried introducing female masculinity through her works to encourage readers that masculinity is not only owned and achieved by men but women can also own masculinity. In some cases women can also be masculine and can even be more masculine than men in some aspects

#### 4. Conclusion

In *The Enola Holmes mysteries*, Enola is a main character in the novel who represents female masculinity. Some of Enola actions, behavior, ideology and her experiences are the perfect

epitome of female masculinity. Through the writer's brief analysis, the research concluded that the representation of female masculinity can be seen through the actions, behaviors, and Enola's ideology in the novel and was dominated not only by the appearances, but mostly are her actions.

Enola represents female masculinity in five different forms of female masculinity. The first form of female masculinity is Butch Realness. In Butch Realness someone must prioritize masculine appearance over the actions and also have an ideology of refusing feminine clothes. The second form is Femme Pretender, someone must prioritize to act masculine over masculine appearance. In this case Enola sets the example of Femme Pretender by her actions such as preferring using violence rather than parley. In addition, comparing to the male character namely Lord Tewksbury, Enola is considered more masculine than the actual male. The third form is Male Mimicry. In this type of female masculinity, someone must imitate recognizable characteristics of male masculinity such as how to sit, talk, behave, acts like male in general. In the novel Enola shows and imitate the recognizable characteristics of male masculinity by preferring walking in long-masculine stride, puffing cigar and taking masculine job as a cab driver. In Fag Drag as the fourth category, someone must adopt the gay male culture ideology by imitating the gay couples. In the novel, Enola is assumed representing and imitating the gay male culture indirectly by protecting female partners. The last form is Denaturalized Masculinity. Denaturalized masculinity required a combination of appropriation, critique and alternative masculinity. In the novel, Enola combines appropriation, critique and also alternative masculinity by appropriating detective, making it her own job and even doing the job far better than the actual detective.

Nancy Springer trying to convey her goals through her work in *The Enola Holmes Mysteries*. As a strong feminist, Nancy trying to encourage women that masculinity in female is normal and not only owned by men, in some cases it is possible masculinity can be owned by female without trying to preach or challenge the ideology. The topic of female masculinity has received less attention and even fairly unrecognizable academically. As the writer of this thesis, my purpose in writing this thesis is to raise this topic academically. Thus, my hope for the future researches to raise this topic into the surface and find gaps of this thesis as there are many different opinions and point of views regarding the topic of female masculinity.

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